

## The Sacrificial System and Atonement in the Pentateuch

Mako A. Nagasawa

Last modified: June 12, 2015

### Atonement Theories and the Old Testament Sacrificial System: My Methodology

A lynchpin – perhaps *the* lynchpin – of the doctrine of penal substitution is the view that the Old Testament sacrificial system symbolizes a penal substitutionary sacrifice. In this view, God knows that He will be angry with Israel's sins, not to mention the sins of all human beings, despite having made a covenant relationship with Israel for the stated purpose of blessing the world (Gen.12:1 – 3). God's wrath upon Israel is seen as something of a microcosm, therefore, of His wrath towards the entire world for breaking His moral law and violating His holy nature. God was able to maintain His covenant faithfulness to Israel – through which the Gentiles also benefit – by satisfying His holy justice and wrath through the sacrifice of His own Son on the cross, who took the penalty for human sin instead of us in his crucifixion and death. In other words, Jesus absorbed the wrath of God, either by suffering in some way not visible to the human eye in his final hours, or in his descent to hell after his death, which was also not visible to the human eye, or both. This wrath would ordinarily have been directed at sinful human beings. Thus, Jesus was and is the penal substitute for humanity. Penal substitution states that Jesus' death is the only way to reconcile God's justice and holy wrath (demanding that sin be punished) and His mercy and love (demanding that sinners be forgiven).

How do penal substitution advocates interpret the sacrificial system? They see it as a symbolic pointer to Jesus' self-sacrifice. We are told that in the interim period between Moses' leadership and Jesus' coming, God instructed Israel in the logic of penal substitution, and gave to Israel a symbolic way for them to remain in the covenant. The animals sacrificed at the Tabernacle, and later, the Temple, represented Jesus. Although the deaths of lamb, bulls, and goats did not actually take the Israelite's guilt nor the wrath of God that was directed at the human being presenting the offering, these deaths nevertheless foreshadowed the ultimate sacrifice wherein God Himself became – through the person of His Son – the sacrificial victim to satisfy His own justice and wrath, so that God can declare human beings to be forgiven.

The recent material I have read from the penal substitution camp exploring the sacrificial system that began in the Old Testament is thoughtful in some ways. I am speaking specifically of John Stott in his 1986 book *The Cross of Christ*; Emile Nicole in his 2004 essay 'Atonement in the Pentateuch' in *The Glory of the Atonement*; Thomas Schreiner in his contribution, 'Penal Substitution View,' in the 2006 book *The Nature of the Atonement* comparing four views on the subject; Steve Jeffery, Michael Ovey, and Andrew Sach in 2007 in *Pierced for Our Transgressions: Rediscovering the Glory of Penal Substitution*; J.I. Packer and Mark Dever in their 2007 book *In My Place Condemned He Stood.*; and William Barrick in his 2009 article 'Penal Substitution in the Old Testament' in *The Master's Seminary Journal*. For example, Emile Nicole, in arguing against the views of Jacob Milgrom, C.H. Dodd, and others, insists that the sacrifices did in fact relate to the wrath of God, and I agree with this. Thomas Schreiner reaches further into the Old Testament than does Greg Boyd and other collaborators in the four views of the atonement presented. But I believe that the methodology of most interpreters shares a fundamental weakness.

Interpreters who advocate penal substitution do not locate the broad meaning of the sacrificial system in relation to any of these major themes running through the Pentateuch, and indeed the entire biblical canon. For example, Nicole treats the word 'blood' in Leviticus 17:11, for example, as if it were *not* already part of a broad literary theme and literary tapestry with which the Pentateuch was already unfolding. He fails to *integrate* the themes of covering, cleansing, and forgiveness, and instead keeps them apart and elevates forgiveness above the others for no solid exegetical reason. He locates the meaning of these texts by looking ahead to the death of Jesus – a bit too quickly, in my opinion, for their methodology implies that Genesis 1 – 4 plays little to no role in understanding not only the institution of the Tabernacle and its sacrifices, but also Jesus himself. He overlooks literary themes in the Pentateuch to which blood is connected and must be interpreted: not only God but also land, sons, cities, and even circumcision. These representatives leap to assumptions and questions of *systematic theology* – by positioning the sacrifices against their (pre-existing?) understanding of the character of God – without first treating the questions of *biblical studies and biblical theology* – by positioning the sacrifices within the full context of the biblical story. Because these representative interpreters consider a limited data set, their conclusions regarding the sacrificial system are limited as well, and this affects their systematic theology. I believe their interpretations verge on tautology because they interpret the sacrifices by their interpretation of Jesus' death, and vice versa. I will carefully examine this circular reasoning.

Regardless, I would like to make clear what my exegetical and literary methodology is. John H. Sailhamer, among other scholars, argues that we must read the Pentateuch as a narrative wherein the development of the

sacrifices and the laws serves the narrative, and not the other way around.<sup>1</sup> Many readers, by contrast, treat the Pentateuch in the opposite manner; they treat the narrative as serving the sacrifices and the laws. In this view, the narrative simply provides color and flair to an otherwise boring body of ordinances. Thankfully, the trend of increasing sensitivity to the narration of the Pentateuch has been developing for quite some time. It was begun in principle by the father of biblical theology, Geerhardus Vos, a Dutch Reformed theologian who taught at Princeton Seminary and defended the unity of the Pentateuch against scholars who saw the final text as a political compromise between competing factions in Israel. Vos argued against this view – called the Documentary Hypothesis in its search for composite documents supposedly lying behind the final text – and said that unity of the text can be seen if we take the narrative of the Pentateuch seriously. For example, Documentary Hypothesis advocates argued that there was a contradiction between the simple stone altars starting from Noah (Gen.8:20 – 21) and Abraham (Gen.12:4 – 9) all the way up to the law of the simple stone altar given with the Ten Commandments (Ex.20:24 – 26), as compared with the centralized animals sacrifices at the Tabernacle sanctuary altar (Ex.35 – 40; Lev.1 – 17), and that the text of the Pentateuch reflects a political compromise in the formation of the biblical canon between supporters of both sides. Vos, however, argued that we can dispense with the search for supposed communities and texts in conflict representing these Israelite camps, simply accept the story as a *story*, and view the process of centralizing the animal sacrifices at the sanctuary as a divinely initiated *process*. My impression is that Vos laid a key foundation for questioning the doctrine of penal substitution; some of the scholarship in biblical theology and biblical studies has been drawn into attempts at doing that very thing. I would interpret my own efforts here as integrating much that has already been said in the field of biblical theology, and drawing them to their appropriate conclusion. I am not aware of how Vos himself held together his conclusions in biblical theology with his confessional stance rooted in Dutch Reformed systematic theology.

I believe the sacrifices which began in Genesis 1 – 4 and Israel's sanctuary at which they were later centralized under Moses and Aaron must be interpreted as part of the overall literary structure and strategy of the Pentateuch. I believe that Genesis 1 – 4 exerts a towering influence over all the subsequent material of Scripture, not least because the nature of the fall is the fundamental problem that God has been aiming to undo throughout all of salvation history, and this needs to be examined very carefully. Perhaps no one would disagree with that statement in principle. But because I insist that the sacrificial system cannot be understood without *all the literary themes* that begin in the narration of Eden and the fall from Eden, I believe we can only properly interpret the sacrifices by treating all of the major literary themes as they begin in Genesis 1 – 4, as they continue through the Pentateuch in general and the sacrificial system in particular, and then reintegrating them. *Verse by verse exegesis is simply not adequate for accomplishing this task.* Literary analysis must also be used. For the purpose of developing my explanation, I will give a high level overview of my essay.

First, I will examine the corruption of human nature from Genesis 1 – 11 as the central problem God was working to undo. As I show in the second theme, a spiritual 'circumcision of the heart' becomes an expression of something that Moses expected God to do (Dt.30:6). I will glance at the explicit diagnoses of the 'heart' by David, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel; implicit expectations of God to cleanse Israel of sin in other biblical writings; and at the biblical narratives that foresee Israel's failure and exile in agreement with the ending section of the Pentateuch. What exactly went wrong internally to human nature that something needed to be 'cut off' from it? I find that Irenaeus', Athanasius', and the Eastern Orthodox understanding of creation and fall – the internalizing of corruption and its impact on our genetic inheritance ('ancestral sin') – are much more exegetically sound than the Augustinian and Western notions of inherited guilt ('original sin'). I will explore the nature of the tree of knowledge of good and evil as representing God's moral and spiritual authority outside the human being, which served a good and necessary purpose in itself as such. For Adam and Eve to attempt to internalize God's moral and spiritual authority to define what good and evil are – that is what caused the corruption of human nature.

Second, I will trace the theme of circumcision as physical, sacramental marker of entering the covenant people. Circumcision was the rite of blood by which any male person converted into Judaism and began to regularly enact the sacrifices at Israel's sanctuary. I will explore circumcision in Abraham's story as reflecting the *content* of Abraham's faith, not just the fact that Abraham did have faith. Namely, circumcision appears to mark a transition in Abraham's life where certain sinful attitudes towards God, Sarah, Hagar, and Ishmael were *cut off* and Abraham himself was *cleansed* of them. I will explore the connection between circumcision and the death and resurrection of the men – both the father and the son. Circumcision was also connected to the Passover in Exodus 4, which I will treat more fully in my section on the Passover. Circumcision also welcomed an infant boy into the world, and was accompanied by a reduction of impurity for the infant boy in comparison with infant girls (Lev.12); hence both sacrificial offerings and circumcision were connected to human impurity and mutually interpret each other. Therefore I believe it is vital to connect the sacrificial system to circumcision literarily and theologically. For

---

<sup>1</sup> John H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), p.33 – 59

Moses, at the end of his life, circumcision also became a representation of God's future cutting away of the corruption of human nature from the person in the messianic age of the Spirit to resolve the fundamental problem begun by the fall. The foundation from which he is drawing that image – the act of physical circumcision – must therefore be thoroughly understood, and I find in the practice both the cutting off of something unclean, and the corresponding cleansing of the man in question.

Penal substitution advocates tend to interpret Israel's sacrificial system by referring rather quickly to the New Testament letter to the Hebrews, rather than first understanding how the Pentateuch itself evaluates it. The connection to Hebrews is vital, but I believe that Hebrews is only dealing with a certain aspect of the entirety of the Pentateuch's presentation of the sacrifices on local altars beginning from Genesis 2 – 4 and the later centralization of sacrifices in Israel's Tabernacle. For example, the writer to the Hebrews cites Jeremiah 31:31 – 34, Jeremiah's vision of God writing His law on the human heart, a very important passage for understanding Christ and the new covenant (Heb.10:15 – 17). However, many miss Jeremiah's own connection of 'circumcision of the heart' (Jer.4:4) to this 'writing on the heart' (Jer.31:31 – 34), and its implications for how we understand the Temple, the sacrifices, and the work of Jesus. Jeremiah himself read the Pentateuch and linked the Temple sacrifices to circumcision of the heart. Simply drawing a line of connection from Hebrews backward to the Pentateuch tends to make an interpreter miss a few of these connections. However, if we draw lines of connection from within the Pentateuch, through Jeremiah and other biblical writers, and through Hebrews and other places, then we find a fuller picture of what atonement meant to the biblical writers themselves.

Third, I will explore the meaning of Israel's Passover festivals. The Pentateuchal narrative invites us to juxtapose Passover and circumcision. Circumcision and Passover are mirror images of each other. Allowing God to shed one's own blood and cut away something impure from one's self is a parallel to entering into new life through a doorway marked by the innocent lifeblood of another. There is a little explored connection between the blood of circumcision, the blood of the firstborn son, and the blood of the Passover lamb. When Abraham was circumcised, he left behind male prerogatives given to him by his culture that violated God's original creation vision for marriage (Gen.15 – 17), and entered into the new life of the covenant through his own blood; so in parallel, Israel left behind a certain cultural idolatry of first born sons, and entered into the life of the new garden land through the blood of the Passover lamb. The Passover deliverance from Egypt is linked to the circumcision of Moses' son by Zipporah (Ex.4:24 – 26), which made Moses eligible to bear the covenant as expressed in the Passover event. Circumcision and Passover are linked again as only a circumcised man may celebrate the Passover (Ex.12:43 – 48). And the circumcision rite for baby boys mirrors Passover itself (Lev.12:1 – 8). Furthermore, I argue that the three Passover feasts (Unleavened Bread, Passover, Firstfruits) must be interpreted together as being God's invitation to Israel to participate in His cleansing of them, entering through and into the innocent life of another, and new life. Hence, the cleansing from yeast, the sacrifice of the lamb and the marking of the doorposts with blood, and the symbol of resurrection found in firstfruits all belong together as a foreshadowing of union with Christ. I also argue that the three Jerusalem feasts (Passover, Weeks/Pentecost, Booths/Tabernacles in Dt.15:19 – 16:17) must be interpreted together as anticipating what would happen to God's people in union with God in the true Temple, Jesus Christ (cleansing by death and resurrection, bestowal of the Spirit, God's accompaniment in mission). I will explore how Paul integrates all three motifs in connection to Jesus in 1 Corinthians 5 and 15. I will argue that the best reading of Paul is one where the church as corporate body of Christ is to be cleansed as the personal, physical body of Christ was *cleansed* by his active obedience as the dying and rising Passover lamb, thus demonstrating the union of those three motifs. I will also examine the theme of Jesus as the paschal lamb and the theme of cleansing in John's Gospel, where it features prominently. Interestingly enough, John, more than Matthew, Mark, and Luke, emphasizes Jesus' active role in his own incarnation, life and ministry, death, resurrection, and giving of the Spirit, precisely *because* his role as the Lamb of God called for an *active*, not *passive*, obedience. I will fully integrate the feasts with the larger theme of sonship, sacrifice, and circumcision provided by the Pentateuch. I will argue that Israel needs to be interpreted christologically, and also like Abraham, in the feasts: Israel was symbolically being cleansed of sin through the motif of unleavened bread, symbolically offered an extension of itself in the paschal lamb akin to the rite of circumcision, and experienced a prefiguration of resurrection in firstfruits.

Fourth, because of its connection with both Passover and John's Gospel, I will examine the incident of Moses holding up the bronze serpent (Num.21:4 – 9) as a typological foreshadowing of the atonement that occurred outside the sanctuary's sacrificial system and without respect to it. This incident does not seem to have drawn the interest of penal substitution advocates, probably because there is no clear substitutionary device at work. Yet Sailhamer again makes a very intriguing and apt literary observation that the Passover and the bronze serpent are to be compared and linked.<sup>2</sup> This literary placement is surely not accidental. Sailhamer does not go further with what his observation entails. But I believe that the Passover-Exodus deliverance of the first generation of Israelites from

---

<sup>2</sup> John H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), p.41 – 44

Egypt is to be compared with the cleansing of the second generation of Israelites in the wilderness. The short episode of the bronze serpent looks backward and forward, Janus-like, in the narrative. The narrative looks backward to the Passover. After all, a serpent was on Pharaoh's royal headdress, and Moses' first miraculous sign involving a serpent was surely meant to be a figurative expression of victory and a commentary on God's power over Pharaoh concerning the fate of Israel (Ex.4:1 – 5; 7:8 – 11). This lends even more weight to my earlier argument that the Passover was a cleansing of Israel through a judgment on the nation, not a forgiveness of Israel by drawing God's judgment onto the lamb, thereby creating a legal fiction of sorts. And the narrative looks backward even further to the 'poison' of a more ancient serpent (Gen.3:1 – 8). The repetition of the literary motif of the serpent all the way back to the fall of Adam and Eve cannot be overlooked, for this reveals to us something about the nature of sin, the corruption in human nature, and the ontological healing and cleansing – not merely a legal-penal forgiveness – that God would need to bring about on behalf of humanity. Correspondingly, the bronze serpent lifted up in the wilderness represented a poison or venom that had infected the Israelites. The mechanics of healing, cleansing, forgiveness, and salvation in this brief episode are therefore very significant. The fact that this episode in Numbers comes right before Balaam's oracles of Israel's Messianic king (Num.22 – 24) is also very important, as is the fact that it straddles the period when the first generation of Israelites die in the wilderness, and the second generation of Israelites ready themselves by faith in God to march into the land. Israel, in effect, is being cleansed, renewed, and forgiven. Their hope and faith are being clarified. The episode helps the Pentateuch look forward to the day when a final deliverer will somehow give cleansing and forgiveness to Israel. Once again, the elements of atonement are not to be separated, which penal substitution advocates inexplicably do in treating the Passover narrative and the Day of Atonement. Jesus' own appropriation of this episode in John 3:14 – 15 is extremely significant, of course, and I will treat that as well. Whereas penal substitution theorists must pick and choose arbitrarily which data should be emphasized, I will show how the ontological substitution atonement theory fits all this data quite elegantly.

Fifth, I will examine the role of 'priesthood' and 'mediation,' inseparable from Israel's sanctuary and its sacrifices. I will do this by tracing a high level chiasmic structure running throughout the entirety of the Pentateuch. Although my conclusions can stand independently of the chiasmic structure – Geerhardus Vos noted the same things, and Sailhamer argues for the same conclusions without perceiving the chiasm<sup>3</sup> – my conclusions will reinforce Sailhamer's basic argument that the Tabernacle sanctuary was God's 'plan B,' an adjustment to God's initial plan after Israel failed to come up to meet him on Mount Sinai. This affects how we approach the addition of sin offerings, eaten by the newly instated priests, to the burnt offerings and peace offerings that had long been offered before the sanctuary was built. This theme of priesthood must be interpreted with the next one.

Sixth, I will explore the theme of 'eating,' especially eating in God's presence, which reaches even farther back, to the Garden of Eden itself, and continued through the sacrificial system. The motif of internalizing something began in the Genesis creation and continued onward into key moments in the biblical story, for example in covenant ratification. The Tabernacle, and later the Temple, was supposed to be Israel's local representation of Eden, albeit an Eden that was closed to all but the representative high priest who alone went behind the veil. Eating the sacrifices in God's presence therefore was connected literarily and theologically to eating in the original Garden. The question of who eats which sacrifices, then, is vital to consider. What matters in the sacrifices is not simply that the animal dies, but who eats it, and why. I will argue that the sacrifices should be interpreted in the same paradigm of circumcision: the burnt offering eaten by God, and later the sin offering eaten by the priests at the sanctuary, represent something that needs to be cut away from the human being to be consumed in the wrath of God, so that the love of God can restore the person into communion and symbolically nourish the person through the peace offering eaten by the worshiper. Hence, the wrath of God is directed at the corruption in human nature, but not the human person. I believe penal substitution advocates make a fundamental mistake by seeing the sacrifice as a representation of the *personhood of the worshiper*, instead of a representation of the *sinful corruption within the personhood of the worshiper*. This will clarify why the priests alone ate the sin offerings; as mediators of the Sinai covenant which Israel as a nation broke, the priests internalized the uncleanness (i.e. sin as corruption of human nature) of the people, to prefigure Jesus as ultimate priest internalizing to himself our human nature, and along with it, our corruption, so that he could rid himself of it by his active obedience.

Seventh, I will examine the theme of 'sacrifice' and 'blood' and the other literary motifs that are linked to them, which go at least as far back as the original fall and God's response to Adam and Eve's sin. Of course, that theme intersects with the sacrificial system. But I will argue that blood is also connected to the reconciliation between God, people, and land, and not just between people and God. Animal blood was uncorrupted life, and God gave it back to Israel as a gift. For human blood was corrupted, and needed the mediation of uncorrupted blood in order to continue existing in human persons on God's good land. Hence, God was acting *like a dialysis machine*

---

<sup>3</sup> John H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), p.33 – 59

through the animal sacrifices with regards to blood. He drew to Himself the corrupted blood of Israel, and gave back uncorrupted blood in return.

Eighth, I will also argue, further, that the three Day of Atonement feasts (Trumpets, Day of Atonement, Booths) must be interpreted together as being God's accommodation to Israel's sinful choice to not meet Him face to face on Mount Sinai. This will reinforce my conclusion that the Day of Atonement was specifically connected to the physical sanctuary on a piece of land, which was a temporary 'plan B,' a provisional accommodation by God to Israel's sinful choice. The use of fruitful land by the Tabernacle and the priests required the shedding of blood, in keeping with the typology begun after the fall. The theological significance of the Passover lamb is weightier, then, than the two goats of the Day of Atonement, although the latter reinforces the former. Both need interpretation, of course, and integration with the person and work of Christ as presented by the New Testament writers.

I will examine at great length the Day of Atonement rite in Leviticus 16. I believe that Jeffery, Ovey, and Sach, defenders of penal substitution, misunderstand the Day of Atonement in Leviticus 16 as pertaining only to *people*, whereas it is rather plain in the text that it also pertains to the sanctuary's *physical land space* and its ongoing use by Israel's priests.<sup>4</sup> I will also argue that these authors' selection of *forgiveness* as opposed to *cleansing* for the definition of the Hebrew verb *kippur* is arbitrary and inappropriate, and leads to fatal logical and textual problems. I argue that forgiveness and cleansing – the objective and subjective dimensions of atonement – were meant to be held together in the motif of circumcision: the cutting away of something offensive so that the *person* might be cleansed and forgiven. That these authors say the forgiveness motif is meant to be held above the cleansing motif is, in my view, tantamount to saying that the goat slain in the Holy of Holies is somehow more important than the goat sent into the wilderness bearing away Israel's uncleanness. Readers familiar with this debate will immediately detect that I believe the question of whether the Greek word *hilasterion* (found in Romans 3:25 and 1 John 4:10) should be translated *propitiation* or *expiation* is a false opposition, for both are necessary and complementary parts of the atonement, and both are found happily jumbled together in the Pentateuch, not least with the sacrificial system.<sup>5</sup> The sacrificial system, by dealing not only with legal categories like guilt and forgiveness, but with ontological-relational categories like human uncleanness before God and divine-human reconciliation (in fact, a three way reconciliation between God, humanity, and the land), laid down the foundational framework by which to understand the person and work of Christ, and our participation *in* him by the Spirit to inherit the new heavens and the new earth.

Ninth, I will examine the double meaning of the word 'atonement' which is translated 'pitch' and therefore forms a literary connection between the ark of Noah, the ark of Moses, and the ark of the Sinai covenant. What is the nature of these arks and how exactly do they signify Jesus? 'Atonement' translated 'pitch' preserved Noah and Moses as mediators of the covenant. I believe they are connected to a human being – or in the case of the ark of the Sinai covenant, an object symbolizing the priestly human being – who serves as the mediator on behalf of others. The imagery in John's Gospel of Jesus as a new tabernacle includes the two angels in the empty tomb who stand in the same configuration as the two cherubim on the lid of the ark. Jesus, then, is the 'ark', the mediator, in whom human nature is atoned for in principle. Just as Noah and Moses as persons mediated the blessings of God to others, and just as the ark of the covenant served the same role for Israel, so Jesus the God-man mediates God's blessings and atonement towards humanity. In other words, the work of atonement cannot be separated off from the personhood of the mediator, as T.F. Torrance has stressed. The work of atonement *is* the person of the mediator, that is, the perfecting of the union of divine nature and human nature in Jesus. The person of Jesus is not simply the staging ground or preliminary step for his work of atonement. Thus, God has saved human nature in principle in Jesus. That can only mean, based on all the material above, that the sinful flesh in him has been 'cut off.' Hence, John's portrayal of Jesus in the work of atonement corresponds with Paul's statements about Christ being circumcised in Colossians 2:9 – 14. This informs the debates about whether the Greek word *hilasterion* should be translated *propitiation*, *expiation*, or *mercy seat*, or in what sense that debate matters.

As should be plain from the start, my interpretation of the sacrificial system insists on integrating far more biblical data rather than less. To anticipate my conclusions, I believe the Eastern Orthodox interpretation of the sacrificial system as symbolic of cleansing rather than penal substitution is the correct emphasis, broadly speaking.

---

<sup>4</sup> J.E. Hartley, 'Atonement, Day of,' edited by T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker, *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), p.54 – 61: 'The key rituals performed on this day achieved three spiritual goals. (1) The purification (or sin) offerings and the whole offerings expiated the sins of the priests and of the entire congregation and (2) cleansed the sanctuary from the pollution of those sins. (3) The release of the goat to Azazel removed from the community all liability for those transgressions.' (p.55)

<sup>5</sup> R.E. Averbeck, 'Sacrifices and Offerings,' edited by T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker, *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), p.717 – 20 agrees with my assessment: 'In other words, through the sin offering's blood-manipulation ritual the violator of the law could gain forgiveness before God, while the unclean person could be brought back into the condition of being ritually clean as opposed to unclean.' My basic argument is that the two are interwoven because they are ultimately synonymous.

Explanations from Eastern Orthodox expositors, however, have often not been as thorough in the exegesis and literary analysis required to sustain their view in the face of criticism. For example, how the forgiveness and judgment theme from the Old Testament needs to be integrated with the cleansing theme. So I offer interpretations that should be broadly appealing to this tradition.

### **The Active and Passive Obedience of Jesus**

In the interest of full disclosure, let me also glance ahead to my conclusions in the realm of systematic theology, although I fully acknowledge that a study largely limited to the Pentateuch alone is not enough to completely establish these conclusions. I admire the central pastoral aspects of the penal substitution theory of the atonement: the stress on the holiness and wrath of God, the emphasis on personal human responsibility, our need for forgiveness, and the suffering which Jesus took as our substitute in order to bring us salvation. In fact, I hope to offer stronger foundations from the fields of biblical theology and systematic theology for those very topics. However, at the same time, I have fairly significant reservations about the way penal substitution treats these components. My own position, what I am calling ‘ontological substitution’ or ‘medical substitution,’ which I will flesh out here, might be called ‘total substitution’ or ‘real exchange’ in the Reformed ‘evangelical Calvinist’ (as opposed to high federal Calvinist) tradition of Karl Barth and T.F. Torrance, or called the ‘physical’ theory of atonement’ or ‘therapeutic substitution’ in the Eastern Orthodox tradition and the patristic writers before them. The theory is called the ‘physical’ theory because Jesus had to physically redeem one instance of humanity – his own – in order to offer redemption to all humanity. There may be slight nuances of difference here and there, but generally I would gladly wear those labels as representative of my position.

Specifically, I will explain why the wrath of God is directed not at our *personhood* in a legal-penal-judicial way (as in penal substitution), but at *the corruption in our human nature* in a medical-surgical-ontological way (as in ontological substitution). I argue that this is manifested by the Pentateuch’s institution of male circumcision as a cutting away of a part of the life-giving organ. Hence, for me and for the traditions and theologians I have cited above, the wrath of God has a different *object* than the love of God, which *is* directed at our personhood. And since the wrath of God is directed at removing the offending and resistant corruption of human nature within us, the wrath of God is therefore *servng* the love of God, which seeks to draw the human being as a person into full relationship. Thus, within God, the wrath of God is not co-equal with the love of God as an independent ‘attribute’ of God but is derived from it and shaped by it. And like Irenaeus, Athanasius, Augustine, and other early Christian writers, I believe the atonement can be phrased as follows, ‘Jesus shared in our diseased human nature so that we might share in his healed human nature.’

Typically, interpreters of penal substitution read episodes from the Old Testament about God judging human evil by taking human life as ultimate and not penultimate, as if God was simply consigning people to hell from the flood, the Egyptian Passover, the conquest of Canaan, etc. The assumption here is that there is a neat line of continuity between God meting judgment out onto human persons in the Old Testament, and what God’s judgment in and through Christ ultimately means. But if God did not consign them to hell, but rather held their souls in ‘hades’ until Jesus could appear to them to preach to them, and they had a choice as to receive him or not, as Peter says (1 Pet.3:19; 4:6), then we must view the Old Testament as not giving the full picture of the meaning of God’s judgments. In other words, God’s judgments in the Old Testament were penultimate and not ultimate; they mostly involved the halting of human evil and violence against the chosen people, and some incidents within the chosen people. The impression that God eternally metes out His wrath against their physical bodies and their personhood therefore needs to be checked. It would appear that God’s honoring of time and history, since Jesus’ incarnation and atonement occurred at a distinct point in time, means that the final judgment has not yet occurred. Whether people will surrender to Jesus or not the corruption in their human nature for the judgment of God has yet to be unveiled to our eyes.

I thoroughly affirm personal human responsibility as framed by the growth which God intended for us from creation, like the Eastern Orthodox do, rather than the idea that humans were placed in a probationary test from creation, as evangelical biblical scholar Meredith Kline understood it, in the typical theological descent in the West from Augustine. The sacrificial system clarified what personal responsibility consisted of. Namely, God made it clear that He would be the one to cleanse human nature. But each person, in the final analysis, had to bring themselves before God and allow Him to do that. That is what each person is ultimately responsible for. By contrast, I find that penal substitution, because it depends on Calvin’s doctrine of limited atonement and, often, the later Augustine’s leaning toward defining God’s will as mutually exclusive with human will (*monergism*), calls into question the meaning of human responsibility for non-Christians.

I define our need for forgiveness and the divine solution to it as being not in the legal-penal-judicial category but (in Torrance’s terms) an ontological-relational one. In other words, forgiveness and reconciliation and justification are first found in Jesus being the resurrected, justified one, the one who has cleansed his humanity of the

offending 'flesh' or corruption in human nature and thereby reconciled human nature fully to the divine nature in his own person. Because the fundamental problem of sin's corruption was ontological, and logically goes further back than the problem of human guilt which stops in the legal-penal-judicial category, God in Christ found an ontological solution: the union of divinity and humanity, overcoming the corruption of sin in the person of Jesus. In other words, the relational problem of sin's corruption demanded a relational answer, the relation of union between divinity and humanity in the person of Jesus. Like Barth and Torrance, the Eastern Orthodox, and the patristic theologians, I affirm that the work of Christ *is* the person of Christ. Therefore, our forgiveness and reconciliation and justification hang on our participation in Christ's death and his new, cleansed, and resurrected humanity by his Spirit, making the propitiation of God's wrath towards us depend precisely on the expiation of the corruption within our human nature by our dying and rising with Christ.

With fear and trembling, I depart from T.F. Torrance and all of the mentors from whom I have benefited by defining the suffering, substitutionary, and atoning work of Jesus at his crucifixion to be his *active obedience alone*, rather than some mysterious and indeterminate 'passive obedience' of Jesus. The notion of 'passive obedience' articulated this way requires Jesus to absorb something meted out upon him from elsewhere within the Triune God. I argue that this is nowhere described in the text of Scripture and immediately forces legal-penal-judicial categories of atonement to come to the fore, which would further lead us into the debate of whether Jesus' atonement was limited or unlimited, and unfortunately so. Surely an opponent of my view will say that since the animals were passively killed as sacrifices, that Jesus must be understood in the category of 'passive obedience.' I argue below that the interpretation needs to go the other way around. I believe the Israelite needs to be viewed as actively obedient by sending his or her corruption into God via the animal sacrifice. Simultaneously, and without contradiction, we must speak of God actively drawing the corruption of sin from the human into Himself.

In the New Testament, I find no hint of a 'passive obedience' of Christ, except *perhaps* to speak of Jesus' infancy, reception of the mark of circumcision, exposure to the megalomaniacal Herod the Great as part of Israel's exilic captivity to Gentile powers, and early childhood in challenging circumstances. *Perhaps* Jesus' 'passive obedience' can be understood as his experience of entering into Israel's exilic captivity with them, to shoulder the burdens of police brutality and economic hardship and so on. Although even there I am reserved, as the choice of the eternal Son of God to become incarnate as a baby and as a Jew and under Roman occupation was made *actively*, prior to his incarnation. Jesus grew in stature (Lk.2:52) and presumably, since he had a human mind, grew in his awareness of his own body and his vocation and his relation to the Father by the Spirit, so that perhaps the incident at the temple when Jesus was twelve years old (Lk.2:41 – 52) realistically marks the end of any period of Jesus' life where we could reasonably point to his 'passive obedience,' if at all.

In relation to Jesus' crucifixion and death as a fully mature adult, however, I question whether 'passive obedience' is the language that we should use to faithfully describe what he did. Jesus said he actively gave up his life (Jn.10:17 – 18), and he actively released his Spirit to the Father and breathed no more (Lk.23:46). He could have released his Spirit and life to the Father at any time. The cross, therefore, was the particular place and time chosen by Jesus to perform his dying act in public, in plain view, within reach of Roman executioners who could confirm his death by their spear thrust. Jesus chose to die on a wooden cross to invoke the text of Deuteronomy 21:22 – 23 so that human nature itself could be identified as cursed. Jesus used the Jewish image of being hung on the accursed tree so that human nature – as represented by his own body and presented in his own body – could be identified as truly 'sinful flesh' and a source of sinful venom (Jn.1:14; 3:6, 14 – 15). A sensitive Jewish observer could associate the Deuteronomic diagnosis of being accursed and being under God's judgment with Jesus' dead body hanging on the cross. The conclusion she would reach is that God had judged something lethal and venomous through Jesus' voluntary and freely chosen death. Since she knew Jesus to be innocent in word, deed, and thought, the conclusion she would reach is that God had judged the sinfulness within Jesus' own humanity.

If there was a 'passive obedience' of Jesus in relation to his death, then according to the Trinitarian dictum of Athanasius and endorsed by T.F. Torrance – that all persons of the Trinity share in what one does, from creation to redemption to consummation<sup>6</sup> – the Father and the Spirit were also somehow *passively obedient* in the passive obedience of the Son. But does that make sense? One cannot really assert that the Son was passively receiving wrath from the Father while the Father was passive also. Either the Son was active and the Father was active, or the Son was passive and the Father was passive, or we must dispense with Athanasius' conviction that the whole Trinity

---

<sup>6</sup> T.F. Torrance, *Divine Meaning: Studies in Patristic Hermeneutics* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), p.199 – 228 where Torrance says, 'From Athanasius' point of view, however, diversity in activity could only call in question the unity of Being in God, while the unity of activity would be evidence for the unity of being only if there were no separation between them – that is, if the activity inhered in the very Being of God as *enousios energeia*' (p.199). Compare with T.F. Torrance, *Incarnation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), p.80 – 81 where Torrance says, 'By passive obedience is meant the submission of Jesus Christ to the judgement of the Father upon the sin which he assumed in our humanity in order to bear it in our name and on our behalf. This is the passion he endured in the expiation of our sins, but it is also his willing acceptance of the divine verdict upon our humanity... that is to his passive submission to the penalty for our sin inflicted upon him in his death.'

shares in the activity of any one of its divine persons. But if Athanasius was correct about the Trinity's activity in unity, then *penal substitution cannot be true*, and hence we must revisit Torrance as to what purpose the passive obedience of the Son truly serves in an atonement theology. I think it is more consistent to state that Jesus, with the Father and the Spirit fully involved in his *active obedience*, was condemning and crucifying the flesh in himself (Jn.1:14) throughout his whole life and most visibly at his death (Rom.8:3), where he identified with the guilty, actively resisting every other avenue for the corruption of sin in his humanity to escape and live on. Jesus could have called more than twelve legions of angels to escape (Mt.26:53), and he actively resisted that temptation. The Father and the Spirit were active in strengthening the Son, which is what Gethsemane shows us. According to my conviction stated earlier – that the wrath of God is directed at the corruption in our human nature and the love of God is directed at our personhood – there is no logical place for a 'passive obedience' of Jesus at the cross.

My response, therefore, to feminist theologians and other advocates of a non-violent atonement with the concern that violence cannot be an *intrinsic* part of Jesus' work, is that the 'violence' – if we are going to use that word at all with reference to the doctrine of atonement – happened *within* the person of Jesus, not *upon* him. It must be understood as the personal, holy struggle of Jesus to conquer sin, as an expression of the wrath of God against the corruption of sin in himself, not as Jesus taking on a discrete amount of the wrath of God against his own person per se. Jesus was wrathful against the sinfulness within himself, without reservation or ambiguity. He was never, at any time, unwilling to cleanse his humanity of that sinfulness. Jesus' own personal commitment was backed up, as it were, by the Father and the Spirit. So the wrath of God was not poured out *upon* the Son, but *by* the Son and *within* the Son.

Correspondingly, I agree with many other critics of penal substitution theory that the problem is not with substitution per se, but with the presence of Anselm's satisfaction theory lurking in the background. For over a thousand years, the dominant atonement theory in the church in both East and West was the Christus Victor theory. Irenaeus, the first writing theologian outside of the New Testament said that the Son of God took humanity to himself in order to share in our condition and destroy sin within his humanity, to become a new Adam.<sup>7</sup> Athanasius said that the Son of God became human to destroy the corruption in his humanity,<sup>8</sup> as did Augustine.<sup>9</sup> In this understanding, Jesus was not the victim, but the victor over sin, death, and the devil. This aligns rather well with my theory that there is no 'passive obedience' of Jesus. But Anselm of Canterbury positioned Jesus' death against the honor due to God by man as His creature. In this theory, Jesus lived and died to satisfy the debt due to God's honor – a debt which required a human being to honor God with his whole life. Since Jesus did so, he can be said to have satisfied God's honor. Anselm and subsequent Roman Catholic theology argued that Jesus built up a 'treasury of merit' from which men and women could draw and benefit. This located the atonement in a transaction between Jesus and the Father, as opposed to locating the atonement in Jesus, as the Father, the Spirit, and the Son were united together against the sinful corruption of human nature located in the humanity of Jesus. Anselm's satisfaction theory was a short step from Calvin's penal substitution theory, which repositioned Jesus' death against not the honor of God, but the supposed retributive justice of God, which, we are told, demanded satisfaction for His offended holiness, which was offended by sinful human actions that broke the law of God. To be precise, I am wholeheartedly for a substitution theory of the atonement, but not penal substitution, because penal substitution really is a *penal satisfaction* theory. It misconstrues God's justice by reducing Him to a retributive Latin lawgiver, and fails to take adequate account of the restorative justice paradigm of God returning human beings to His original creation order, and paying a disproportionate cost to do so. Penal satisfaction misconstrues the Old Testament sacrifices, along with all the Pentateuch's themes surrounding the atonement, as enacting retributive symbolism. I will show in this analysis that it is not symbolizing retributive justice at all, but a differentiation and separation between personhood and the corruption in the person.

### **Theme #1: The Corruption in Human Nature and Multiple Levels of Alienation**

To say something meaningful about the atonement, defining what problem the atonement solves is important. Shortly before the flood, God makes a diagnosis of the human condition: 'Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.'

---

<sup>7</sup> Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3.18.7; see also 2.12.4; 3.18.1; 5.1.3

<sup>8</sup> Athanasius, *On the Incarnation* 1:5; 2:8 – 9; 4:22

<sup>9</sup> Augustine, *On the Trinity* book 13, chapters 11 – 16; *Sermon 185*: 'Never would you have been freed from sinful flesh, had he not taken on himself the likeness of sinful flesh'; *De Agone Christiano* 12; *Enchiridion* 41; *Sermon 192.1*; *Sermon 27.6*; *Tractate on John's Gospel* 38.8; *Psalm 58 (sermon 1)*.<sup>7</sup> My quotes from Augustine are cited in Stanley P. Rosenberg, 'Interpreting Atonement in Augustine's Preaching', edited by Charles E. Hill and Frank A. James, *The Glory of the Atonement* (Downers' Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), p.233 – 238. It is notable that the editors of this book wanted to honor Dr. Roger Nicole, an American evangelical theologian, who upheld the penal substitution view. Rosenberg, however, recognizes that Augustine held the ontological substitution theory, and cannot be pressed into this editorial purpose.

The LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart.’ (Gen.6:5 – 6) Shortly after the flood, God repeats His diagnosis to underscore that the flood did not solve the real problem: ‘The intent of man’s heart is evil from his youth’ (Gen.8:21). It takes the entirety of the Pentateuch for any human being to agree with God. Then, only one person does. Moses, after firsthand experience with his own sin and the sin of the nation Israel, foresees with prophetic insight – but also common sense – the future of Israel. He sees that Israel still has the same problem that all the other Gentile people of the world have: an internal problem. Moses knows that the experience of the Exodus, the reception of the Sinaitic Law, and the encampment of God in the Tabernacle has not done enough to change the hearts of the Israelites. So one day, God will exile them for their sin. When that day comes, they will not be able to blame their circumstances, as if they needed better circumstances than the Promised Land. Neither will they be able to blame their laws, as if they needed a higher law than the Sinaitic Law which they would fail anyway. They will not be able to blame any external factors. The only explanation Israel will have left for why they sin is because something is internally wrong with them, and they chose to give into that influence. This is, perhaps, why Jeremiah and Ezekiel, the prophets who lived at the beginning of the exile, give the most remarkable and insightful comments about the heart; this I will examine later. Israel will have to viscerally understand that their human nature is just as fallen as that of the Gentiles. So on the other side of exile, God will resolve the problem He diagnosed in the first place. Moses sees it: ‘Moreover the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, so that you may live’ (Dt.30:6). From where he stands, Moses is apparently alone in that insight. It will take the rest of the history of Israel for others to come around to agree with Moses, and with God. If the problem is corruption of heart, the solution must be circumcision of heart.

This simple account, tracing one particular theme in the Pentateuch, immediately suggests that the definition of atonement must encompass the cleansing of the human heart, a term idiomatic of the whole human being. Atonement is proverbially defined as at-one-ment. It is the act of making one, of God restoring people who are alienated against Him back into oneness with Himself. The language of ‘evil’ existing now within the ‘heart’ of human beings, which now require ‘circumcision,’ must be understood to mean at the very least that there exists something in us that is now deficient, rebellious, and resistant to God. God needs to solve that problem. Whatever else we believe He must do to address some conflict of attributes within Himself, the answer cannot stop short of ‘circumcising’ the human heart. Perhaps, in the idiom of Moses, God must cut something off, or remove something sinful, from the human heart. That is atonement.

Or at least part of it. Actually, I believe atonement has multiple levels because the fall involved multiple levels of alienation: from God, from one’s true self, from one another, and even from the land. Israel understood that humanity was to be in direct relationship with both God and the land as shown by Genesis 1 – 4, because Adam was made up of both the earth and the breath of God. As the Eastern Orthodox tradition has articulated quite well, humanity is a microcosm of heaven and earth, a unique juncture in all creation; God intended human beings to be mediators between heaven and earth. Therefore, a theory of atonement must be broad enough to encompass and explain the corruption of human nature such that God would need to perform a surgery-like action on the human heart (Dt.30:6) and the relationship between humanity and ‘the land,’ as Moses also understood (Dt.32:43).

The creation account, Genesis 1:1 – 2:3, makes clear that what humanity lost in the fall relates to the image and likeness of God (Gen.1:27). On whether the words ‘image’ and ‘likeness’ are two separate things, as the patristic and Eastern Orthodox commentators believed (the ‘image’ being ontological and the ‘likeness’ being ethical), or one idea expressed with two words, I need not take a firm position for the purpose of my argument. I find the distinction helpful and useful, but I do not think that the distinction can be determined by exegesis alone; it seems to be, rather, the result of theological reflection that reads in those meanings afterwards. What is clear to me is that the first creation account describes the original vision for humanity to bear the image of God and rule over the land as part of God’s intended order in His good creation. Biblical scholar Rikk Watts compares the Genesis creation account to other Ancient Near Eastern creation stories in which a king conquers a foe and then erects a temple and places his image in it.<sup>10</sup> Given that the original audience of Genesis 1:1 – 2:3 was ancient Israel, it makes very good sense for the author of this material to pattern the biblical creation hymn to be culturally familiar and strategically different from its contemporaries. God has no rivals, and creates ex nihilo. But he structures the earth as a temple or palace, and then places his image in it: the first human couple who would be his living image-bearers. Days one, two, and three describe the creation of three realms: the realms of light and darkness (1:3 – 5); the realms of sky and sea (1:6 – 8); the realm of land (1:9 – 13). Days four, five, and six describe the rulers of those realms: the sun, moon, and stars (1:14 – 19) for the realms of day and night<sup>11</sup>; no ruler over the realms of sky and sea (1:20 –

---

<sup>10</sup> Rikk Watts, ‘Making Sense of Genesis 1’, *Stimulus*, vol.12, no.4, November 2004, p.1 – 12

<sup>11</sup> Since Hebrew does not include the past perfect tense, there is no way that the author of Genesis could write, ‘God *had made* the two great lights...’ in 1:16. Nevertheless I believe that is how 1:16 should be translated. I suspect that day four is when God stabilized the atmosphere of

23); and human beings to rule the land (1:24 – 31). The emphasis on land as the third and final realm underscores its importance. Its importance is complemented by the creation of its ruler, humankind, on the corresponding third day, the sixth, and God's double approval on days three and six as opposed to only a singular evaluation on the other days (1:10, 12, 25, 31). There is a clear message being sent from this creation account that God has made humankind to fill and rule over the land. In fact, the land is the primary means God uses to bless the man and woman in creation, since the land abundantly supplies seed and food to all animalkind and humankind. Over this arrangement is imposed the Sabbath rest of the seventh day (2:1 – 3), when God rested as would a ruler reposing on his throne. This account of creation in seven days parallels the seven sections in which the Tabernacle was to be built (Ex.25:1; 30:11, 17, 22, 34; 31:1, 12), and the seven days in which it was actually built (Lev.8:33 – 35).<sup>12</sup> Clearly the sanctuary where God's special presence would rest is being cast by the author of the Pentateuch as a new type of Eden, an Eden in microcosm.

Since God invests all life with the ability to produce more life 'after its kind,' there is a sense in which God's character as a life-giver is mirrored in every living thing. In a sense, every living thing bears some resemblance to the God who called it into being. So humanity's reproductive ability is not, by itself, the definition of what it means to bear the image and likeness of God. What further clues does our Genesis text give us on that?

The second literary unit in Genesis, the genealogy found in Genesis 2:4 – 4:26, tells us more. This section describes humanity's origin from two sources: the land and the breath of God. Human beings have a relationship with, and service due to, the land. The land existed before humanity and Adam was made from it, a detail suitable for a genealogy. Conversely, humanity's fall entailed frustration with, and living in exile from, the land. Similar points can be made about Adam's composition from the breath of God. Humans had a relationship with, and service due to, God. There, too, humanity's fall entailed an exile from God. That these implications are present in the material are clear not only from the text itself, but the structural form of the text: the genealogy. The genealogy should really be treated from 2:4 all the way to 4:26, beginning with, 'This is the account of the heavens and the earth' and ending just before the next genealogy in Genesis 5:1, 'This is the book of the generations of Adam.'<sup>13</sup> The river flowing out of Eden and diverging into four other rivers (2:10 – 14) is a physical representation of the literary form of the genealogy and of the theological implications of Adam and Eve: actions done at the source have consequences downstream. This section narrates that bearing the image of God is connected to having the breath of God within our being. On this basis, the Eastern Orthodox tradition says that a human being is a microcosm of earth and heaven. We alone, out of all creation, have a 'rational soul' meant to commune with God; we were meant to be mediators between God and the land.

For what purpose? The only way to reconcile the two creation responsibilities given to human beings – on the one hand, to spread out and fill the earth (Gen.1:28), and on the other hand, to tend a garden (Gen.2:17) – is to conclude that Adam, Eve, and their descendants were to spread the special conditions of the garden throughout the whole earth. This is not surprising given what we see God promise Israel: When they were humble before Him and faithful to Him, He would cause the land to be a fruitful garden for them. Likewise, God also promised that when the whole earth is filled with the knowledge of Him, the conditions of life Israel experienced in the promised land would extend throughout the whole creation (Isa.11:6 – 9; 54:2 – 3; 65:17 – 25; Rom.4:13; Rev.21 – 22). Therefore we can reasonably conclude that the original human responsibility was to spread the special conditions of the garden throughout the whole creation. We were to be co-gardeners with God, intermediaries through whom God brought forth even more life, order, and beauty in creation. This surely involved the human faculty of speech and naming, already seen in Adam's naming of some animals (Gen.2:19 – 20), which would draw a tighter parallel between the God who speaks life into being, and the human being who bears God's image who speaks their names to describe their various natures. It probably also involved the speaking of God's blessings upon the created world, to specially empower and enrich. Hence, there must have been a spiritual power that Adam and Eve had before the fall because they enjoyed a communion with God. They probably enjoyed some angelic protection and service similar to what the Psalmist described (Ps.91:10 – 14).

How then did Adam and Eve damage their natures? By internalizing into themselves the ability to define good and evil, which should have remained outside of them within God alone; they therefore violated the nature of God's creation order itself. My statement requires an explanation of the two Trees. What was the role of the two

---

the earth such that the sun, moon, and stars (the light sources created on 'day one') could regularly be seen and therefore reliably shine their light upon the earth. This removes the logical and scientific problem of how light could have preceded the sun, moon, and stars. Genesis 1:1 – 2:3 is about God's preparation of the earth for habitation by humanity, and its perspective is from the earth.

<sup>12</sup> R.E. Averbeck, 'Sacrifices and Offerings,' edited by T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker, *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), p.708 and 724

<sup>13</sup> For a discussion on why the phrase 'This is the record of...' begins a section rather than ends it, see Garrett, *Rethinking Genesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1991), p.93 – 102.

Trees? Trees generally were physically older, larger, stronger, and more firmly rooted than human beings. They would have appeared to Adam and Eve as fruit-bearing trees that were, perhaps, ancient. These two Trees had special properties. Adam and Eve would not have understood the properties of these Trees right away, but only with the passage of time and their growth in the direction God had intended. In fact, the very words ‘life’ and ‘good and evil’ needed to be interpreted and defined in an experiential way for Adam and Eve, and the Trees would have served to do that.

As suggested by Genesis 3:22 – 24, the Tree of Life would have made Adam and Eve, and any of their descendants, live forever. However, it appears that the Tree of Life would have sealed humanity in whatever state they were in. After the fall, human beings were in a corrupted state, the nature of which I will consider below. This is why God expelled human beings from the garden. God did not deny humanity something good. He wanted to protect them from something worse. He wanted to prevent human beings from becoming dying beings, corrupted *forever*. Notice that in 3:22, God did not even complete His thought. He choked on His own thought, the thought that humanity would be forever corrupted. The earliest writing theologian outside the New Testament, Irenaeus, bishop of Lyon, said this:

‘Wherefore also He drove him out of Paradise, and removed him far from the tree of life, not because He envied him the tree of life, as some venture to assert, but because He pitied him, [and did not desire] that he should continue a sinner for ever, nor that the sin which surrounded him should be immortal, and evil interminable and irremediable. But He set a bound to his [state of] sin, by interposing death, and thus causing sin to cease, putting an end to it by the dissolution of the flesh, which should take place in the earth, so that man, ceasing at length to live to sin, and dying to it, might begin to live to God.’<sup>14</sup>

Hence, the Tree of Life was God’s way of inviting human beings to live with God eternally, to be drawn into the life of God. This was not ‘never-ending ordinary life’ as something apart from God, with an optional *relationship* with God thrown in, if we wanted God. The Tree of Life seems to have been the eternal life from *within God Himself*, offered to humanity based on relationship and meant to be received by relationship. It is an ‘indwelling’ of God in the physical creation in such a way that human beings could eat – internalize – the fruit and participate in the very life of God. Hence, Meredith Kline, biblical scholar and professor at Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary, calls this the sacramental tree. Kline asserts that the Tree of Life was in fact the Logos-Son of God.<sup>15</sup> God seems to have already placed Himself into His creation to be partaken of by human beings in the Tree of Life. Human beings were dependent on the *ruach-pneuma-breath* of God for our initial life, and called to further internalize the *dabar-logos-word* of God for a deeper experience of God’s life. God always desired a personal union with each human being through His *logos-word*. This answers the question of how the Word of God did not have to become incarnate as Jesus of Nazareth in order to inherit all things from God the Father. The incarnation of the Word into corrupted human flesh was necessary because of the fall.

This brings us to the Tree of Knowledge of good and evil. What was this Tree and why was it there? *To actually teach humanity about good and evil*. For instance, human beings should have hung Satan the serpent on the Tree of Knowledge, suggested when Moses hung a serpent on a pole in Numbers 21:4 – 7.<sup>16</sup> What is hung on trees is meant to be remembered. This tempter and his temptation should have been remembered forever in his defeat. In Scripture, trees seem to also symbolize time and memory. Things hung on trees are meant to be *remembered*. They are *memorials*. In other places in Scripture, we see the negative side of this. People hung on trees include: a particularly heinous criminal, by law (Dt.21:22 – 23); the bodies of five Canaanite kings who opposed Joshua (Josh.10:22 – 26); Absalom, the rebellious son of King David, who incited a civil war (2 Sam.18:9 – 10); Haman, the arch villain of the story of Esther (Est.7:9 – 10); and finally Jesus (Acts 2:22;5:30; 10:39; 13:29).

However, the Tree of Knowledge was not there because of Satan. Satan merely corrupted its proper use. It was important to humanity’s development into the fullness of the image and likeness of God and it would have been there regardless. God designed the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil to help human beings understand the need for good boundaries and from whom those boundaries are given. Of course Adam and Eve would later bear

---

<sup>14</sup> Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3.23.6

<sup>15</sup> Meredith Kline, *Kingdom Prologue* (self-published, 1993), chapter 4, section 2

<sup>16</sup> The questions of where Satan came from and the nature of his rebellion needs to at least be attempted. One traditional Christian answer is that Satan was an angel who rebelled against God because he resented God’s command that the angels serve human beings (e.g.Ps.91:11) because we will judge the angels (1 Cor.6:3). Satan did not appreciate or understand the symmetry that God had designed in the heavenly realms: His command to the angels to serve humanity was modeled after Himself and was an invitation to be like Him in their own way. This is reinforced by the idea that God was somehow present in the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge to serve humanity as part of the creation and from within it. Instead, Satan sought to prove that human beings were not worth serving. Hence, he lied to them and tempted them, tricking them to abuse their free will to corrupt themselves.

children. That was God's intention. Each person, then, would need to respect each other's boundaries: spouse to spouse, parents to children, sibling to sibling; humanity and the created world. In order to do that, they needed to properly listen to God because He would be the one to help them know how to treat each other. God's fundamental boundary is that they would not define good and evil for themselves. So long as human beings respected God as the high king of His creation, human life would flourish, and healthy human community was truly possible. So the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil was not a trick, a test, or a temptation. It is simply reality. *It symbolized the fact that the definition of good and evil stood outside of humanity, and was much larger and taller, more fixed and immovable, more ancient, and more venerable than humanity.* The Tree gave the necessary physical expression to the source of the definition of good and evil – God Himself – standing above and outside and before human beings. It was a gift from God that physically represented His ancient presence *outside of the human being* to determine and define good and evil for all creation. The power to define good and evil does not rest within the human being.

By not eating from the Tree of Knowledge, *Adam and Eve would have grown in the knowledge of evil.* They would have understood *through experience*, the more time passed, that God is good, and that their lives were filled with His goodness. How would they have known that? Because their lives would have just kept getting better and better for them. If Adam and Eve had continued to grow in love and relational experience with each other in the Garden, they would start to understand by contrast what it might mean to have walked through life alone. God had already shown Adam that creation and goodness followed an arc of development and growth. God had said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone.' (Gen.2:18) That is, when God first created him, Adam was alone and unable to bring forth more life on his own. God declared that to be 'not good,' a jarring utterance compared with the resounding repetition of 'and God saw that it was good' all over Genesis 1. But Adam had to understand it viscerally and personally for himself. He alone had that experience, and he could talk about it. He could name it. Other people could hear it and imagine it because they were growing in their experience of God and His goodness. Adam's 'aloneness' wasn't evil per se in a moral sense, and God did not leave him there, but it was a physical analogy to what evil would really be like if they chose it: alone, isolated, unfruitful – the opposite of what God intended. And in fact Adam did blame Eve after the fall (Gen.3:12), drawing them both into some degree of aloneness and isolation. Furthermore, God had made the light shining on the earth 'good' on the first 'day' of creation (Gen.1:4) to contrast with the darkness on the earth. It wasn't that physical night and darkness were evil per se, but they could begin to serve as a physical analogy of what evil would really be like if they chose it: not able to see, to behold, to face something and know its nature and call it good. And in fact, they became unable to fully see a blessing.

If Adam and Eve had had their first child in the paradise, they would start to understand by contrast what it might mean to lose their child. Thus, the only way to understand evil is actually to resist it, reject it, and pursue growth in the goodness of God's will. That's because when we do evil, we rationalize it, blame someone else, and get used to it, and therefore we simultaneously lose insight into what evil really is and how terrible its consequences are. That is why I contend that the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil really did provide knowledge of good and evil. If Adam and Eve had continued to reject the evil (trying to be their own gods), and grown in the goodness of God's plan (being centered on Him and drawing life and love from Him), they would have understood evil very well, not by actually doing evil and internalizing it into their own beings, but by rejecting it utterly. Similarly, when one does something kind and loving for another person, or does a community service activity, and feels that whisper of satisfaction and meaning, one feels more energy and motivation to continue. A sense of purpose slowly emerges. Then, looking backward, the person can see by contrast that she did not have as much purpose, meaning, and enjoyment of goodness before. She understands evil, not by participating in it and doing it, but by going in the other direction: into the goodness God designed. C.S. Lewis describes a world and a race which did not fall into temptation, in his book *Perelandra*. In that story, the Adam figure says:

'We have learned of evil, though not as the Evil One wished us to learn. We have learned better than that, and know it more, for it is waking that understands sleep and not sleep that understands waking. There is an ignorance of evil that comes from being young: there is a darker ignorance that comes from doing it, as men by sleeping lose the knowledge of sleep. You are more ignorant of evil [on Earth] now than in the days before your Lord and Lady began to do it. But [God] has brought us out of the one ignorance, and we have not entered the other.'<sup>17</sup>

Adam and Eve would have understood that God's boundaries were good for them, and brought life to them and others. Not just the one boundary of not eating from the Tree of Knowledge, but all boundaries, although the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge symbolized all other proper God-given boundaries and summed them up in itself. By not eating the fruit from the Tree of Knowledge, they would understand that they must not internalize boundary

---

<sup>17</sup> C.S. Lewis, *Perelandra* (New York, NY: Collier Books, 1944), p.209

breaking. As such, *the tree of knowledge is fundamentally good in itself* and was a manifestation of God being present within and ‘indwelling’ in some manner His own creation for the good of humanity. What Meredith Kline believed about the Tree of Life is also true, I believe, for the Tree of Knowledge: It was a sacramental tree, and somehow a physical embodiment of God’s presence, a sign of the humility of God who stoops to invest Himself in His physical creation to serve humanity. Hence, in the creation, I believe we have a Trinitarian theophany of sorts: the transcendence of God physically represented in the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, the sharable life of God physically represented by the Tree of Life, and the hovering presence of God who walked with humanity in the Garden of Eden. This bears a curious resemblance to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

If this is true, then in what sense did God *know* good and evil prior to the fall? For God said after the fall, ‘Behold, the man has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil...’ (Gen.3:22). Is God both good and evil? No: He is only good. God *knows* good and evil in the sense of *determining* and *defining* good and evil. Because He determines the good, and is the highest good, He can understand the evil of alienation from Himself as a hypothetical possibility, but not because He *causes* both good and evil. Before the fall, evil as it pertains to human beings did not exist in an embodied way. It was only a theoretical possibility. God understood evil as a theoretical condition that the human beings could fall into, and also as a real condition into which Satan had fallen.

Hence, the fall of Adam and Eve is an irony for it did not bring us true knowledge: in our efforts to be ‘like God,’ we took to ourselves the prerogative of God and became twisted and corrupted in our nature. When Adam and Eve did eat from this Tree, they not only broke a boundary, they became boundary breakers. They decided to supplant God’s authority in creation as the one who defines what good and evil are. In effect, they tried to become their own gods. They cut themselves and the creation off from God as the life source of all creation. True to God’s warning (Gen.2:17), they became dying beings, not because God had to invent death as a penal consequence for their action, but because the consequence was already built into the creation and was meant to be constantly negated and refused by human obedience in the goodness God commanded.

Does this mean that human beings could have just obeyed God in love, eaten from the Tree of Life, and been joined to God forever? *Yes. It could have been that simple.* Did God *have* to come in human form in Jesus to die for our sins? There is a tradition of thought that the Son of God would have come in human flesh in some way, even if the fall never happened.<sup>18</sup> However, that is debated. What does seem clear is that God allows us to be co-creators with Him of *our own nature*.

This is why God was wooing Adam and Eve to Himself through the goodness of the creation. What would life have been like had the fall never happened? Adam and Eve would have had time to befriend and love one another. They would have enjoyed a wide assortment of fruit. They would have partnered together in spreading the garden over the wild creation, bringing forth more beauty, order, and life to reflect their increasing knowledge of, creativity in, and partnership with the created world. They would have enjoyed sex, and deepened in their sexual knowledge of one another and the pleasure they took in one another. They would have had children, and deepened in their love for one another by their appreciation for each other’s unique differences in relating to their children. Their capacity for joy and affection would have increased. Their emotional capacity would have expanded with the birth of each new child, and then grandchildren, and then more descendants. And all throughout that time, they would have walked with God in the garden. They would have spoken with Him. They would have realized the pleasure they had with every deepening in their own relationships was already present in Him. They would have realized the joy of giving birth to every new child was present in a deeper way in Him. They would have realized by the quality of their lives that He was the source of all this increasing nourishment, diversity of tastes, beauty, majesty, diversity of life, pleasure, affection, love, growth in love, and increasing life. ‘In him was life’ (Jn.1:4). They would have sensed God wooing them into something deeper. At some point, they would have enquired about the meaning of the Tree of Life, and then eaten from it. Then they would have been drawn up into the life of God. They would have sealed their will into their nature. So they were invited to freely choose to always choose God.

The New Testament provides more insight into this because of Jesus’ revelation of God as Triune. As a Trinity, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit love one another freely. Yet it is their very divine nature to love one another, and they would never violate their own divine nature. Perfect freedom is the ability to choose according to one’s nature. What, then, was the nature and freedom of human beings in the pre-fall creation? If human beings

---

<sup>18</sup> Revelation 13:8 is unusual and deserves special comment. John Piper, for example, believes, ‘Before the world was created there was a book called the book of life of the Lamb that was slain’ (John Piper, ‘Suffering and the Sovereignty of God’, edited by John Piper and Justin Taylor, *Suffering and the Sovereignty of God*, p.82 – 83). He reasons from that point that the fall and the crucifixion of Jesus were pre-ordained from ‘before the foundation of the world.’ However, NASB arranges the clauses differently, and translates Revelation 13:8, ‘All who dwell on the earth will worship him [the beast], everyone whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who has been slain.’ In this rendering of the clauses, the Lamb being slain is incidental to human history, and not necessarily from the foundation of the world. For more information about this, please see my analysis of Revelation 13: [http://nagasawafamily.org/john\\_revelation-13.book.analysis.pdf](http://nagasawafamily.org/john_revelation-13.book.analysis.pdf).

were to be like the Triune God, and bear His image, we would have to both love God and one another, and do so freely. So God originally made our human nature good ('it was very good' in Gen.1:31) and inclined us towards Him in love. We had a free choice to love God. And God, precisely because He respects human free will out of His love for us, wanted to give us the choice to fuse our free will to our good nature permanently, so that we would never sin, i.e. so that we would voluntarily choose to always love God eternally and bind ourselves to Him.

Lest this distinction between one's nature and one's will be considered arbitrary and overly nuanced, I offer that the Nicene debates in the third and fourth centuries about God's being (*ousia*) and the three Persons (*hypostases*) and the Chalcedonian debates in the fifth century about Christ's two natures and singular Personhood logically required the human being to also have a singular human nature and personhood as distinct categories. How else could Jesus take a 'human nature' without being reducible to simply a human being? Moreover, the immense Monothelite controversy of the seventh century concerned these matters. The Eastern Orthodox tradition holds very firmly to this distinction between human nature and human personhood; in fact, twentieth century Russian Orthodox theologian Vladimir Lossky said fascinatingly that the Son of God saves human *nature* and the Spirit of God saves human *persons*.<sup>19</sup> Why is this language completely missing in Western Christianity? This distinction, which undergirds the ontological substitution atonement theory, could easily serve to qualify and revise the penal substitution atonement theory, which fails to make that critical distinction.

Nevertheless, if one is not inclined to grant as much weight to the early creeds and Eastern Orthodoxy as I do, consider how this distinction between nature and personhood solves logical problems that cannot be solved without it. Without the distinction between human nature and human will, and a developmental union of the two in the love of God, there is no real explanation for why God gave human beings free will in creation but apparently takes away that free will in the consummation of heaven and earth described in Revelation 21 – 22. For if each human being is simply a 'will,' then what prevents people from sinning all over again when the final resurrection happens? What is the explanation for why God did not and could not have created us without the possibility of sinning from the start? Furthermore, in creation, if the distinction between human nature and human will is removed, then this would mean that the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil was not *developmental* for human beings but rather *probationary* and merely a test of the human will. Eastern Orthodox theologian Kallistos Ware offers a concise summary of the difference between Eastern and Western theologians on humanity in creation:

'Man at his first creation was therefore perfect, not so much in an actual as in a potential sense. Endowed with the image from the start, he was called to acquire the likeness by his own efforts (assisted of course by the grace of God). Adam began in a state of innocence and simplicity. 'He was a child, not yet having his understanding perfected,' wrote Irenaeus. 'It was necessary that he should grow and so come to his perfection (*Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching*, 12). God set Adam on the right path, but Adam had in front of him a long road to traverse in order to reach his final goal. This picture of Adam before the fall is somewhat different from that presented by Saint Augustine and generally accepted in the west since his time. According to Augustine, man in Paradise was endowed from the start with all possible wisdom and knowledge: his was a realized, and in no sense potential, perfection.'<sup>20</sup>

If Augustine is correct about Adam already possessing a static perfection (as opposed to Irenaeus' recognition of a development), then did God create something essentially evil and place it in the creation? If so, then this would mean that God introduced an essential evil into the otherwise good creation, and that would mean that God is partly evil and arbitrary, or quite simply, evil. American evangelical biblical scholar Meredith Kline, because he sees the Tree as 'probationary' (in his words), runs afoul of exactly this problem. The problem is especially acute if one believes that God willed the fall.

Also, I maintain that Adam and Eve corrupted their human nature by internalizing into themselves something that should have remained outside of them: the reference point for defining good and evil which properly exists only in God. Adam and Eve internalized in themselves the impulse to define good and evil from within the human being. That is why we, the children of Adam and Eve, are prone to the contradiction of being *relativistic absolutists*: defining good and evil from a center in myself or ourselves, like Cain in Genesis 4:16 – 25 or all

---

<sup>19</sup> Vladimir Lossky quoted in Chris Jensen, 'Shine as the Sun: C.S. Lewis and the Doctrine of Deification', *Road to Emmaus*, Vol. 8, no. 2 (#29), 2005.

<sup>20</sup> Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Church* (New York: Penguin Books, 1993 2<sup>nd</sup> edition), p.219 – 220, also found here: [http://www.fatheralexander.org/booklets/english/history\\_timothy\\_ware\\_2.htm#n2](http://www.fatheralexander.org/booklets/english/history_timothy_ware_2.htm#n2), although I believe Ware needs to further elaborate in what sense Adam had 'a long road to traverse in order to reach his final goal.' In eating from the Tree of Life and participating in the immortality offered to him, no. But in understanding God's love and goodness, yes – although we might also say that the journey of a finite human to experience the infinitely loving God must be infinite, so in that sense, do human beings ever reach our 'final goal'? Is 'goal' the appropriate language to use here?

humanity at Babel in Genesis 11:1 – 9. Human nature became fundamentally corrupted in the bodies of Adam and Eve. The narrative of Genesis 2:4 – 4:26 shows us that Cain is jealous of the approval Abel receives from God without direct provocation from Satan. In other words, the lie no longer needs to come from outside humanity to produce temptation; *covetousness and jealousy now exist in human nature itself*. The ‘circumcision of the heart’ is one language set within Scripture, appearing significantly at the very end of the Pentateuch (Dt.30:6; echoed in Jer.4:4; Rom.2:28 – 29) that indicates God’s desire to separate off the corruption of human nature from human nature itself in each human person. Even though Moses commanded Israel to circumcise their own hearts (Dt.10:16), he simultaneously acknowledged that the Lord had not yet brought about the fundamental change in human nature that was needed: ‘Yet to this day the LORD has not given you a heart to know, nor eyes to see, nor ears to hear’ (Dt.29:4). God would circumcise the human heart of Israel after the exile (Dt.30:6). This, in the patristic and Eastern Orthodox view, constitutes the central problem that the atonement of Jesus is meant to resolve.

Adam and Eve then passed that corruption onto their descendants. This is indicated by the genealogy of Adam in Genesis 5:1 – 6:8. The words ‘likeness’ and ‘image’ occur at the beginning of the genealogy from Genesis 5:1. This is a new literary unit, called ‘the book of the generations of Adam.’ The genealogy begins with the repeated narration of God’s creation of ‘man’ in the likeness of God, and significantly mentions their gendered personhoods: ‘He created them male and female’ (Gen.5:2). The genealogy also says, with heavily weighted words, that Adam ‘became the father (ancestor) of a son (descendant) in his own likeness, according to his image’ (Gen.5:3). The problem, as we know from Genesis 2:4 – 4:26, is that Adam and Eve had damaged the image of God in themselves, and corrupted their own human nature by internalizing rebellion into their very selves. And thus, each person named in this genealogy, with the husband representing his wife as well, creates new human beings, but in a contradiction of his very being, also creates dying human beings. First, he becomes the biological father of children, and a specially named son (or male descendant possibly more than one generation removed) is highlighted, presumably because he was faithful to God as well, and this is cause for readers to rejoice; in this sense, each person named lives out and bears witness to the fact that he, with his wife, is made in the likeness of God.

Yet, second, each man also dies. The fate of Adam and Eve brought about by their rebellion against God is physically communicated to all human beings, and manifested by humanity’s mortality. Implicitly, each person’s own personal sin will aggravate their mortality as well, as Paul will point out (Rom.5:12 – 14). Gordon Hugenberger has argued that the unusually long life spans of the men in Genesis 5:1 – 6:8 are a literary, idiomatic way of saying that each one walked with God in a manner close to the ideal, but nevertheless fell short, for the number 1000 was a number used in ancient literature to reflect an ideal, and none of the men listed in the genealogy attain that number.<sup>21</sup> So the cadence of this genealogy highlights these two simple things: birth and death. It is hopeful yet bitterly ironic. The capacity for giving birth to life is transmitted from one generation to the next, but also transmitted is a human nature infected by sin and our captivity to physical death. This is what it means for all human beings to bear ‘his image,’ the image of Adam, the contradictory one who both bears and tarnishes the image of God in himself. Here is a Jewish reflection from a book outside the Bible, the *Wisdom of Solomon* 1:13 – 16, which says, correctly, in my opinion:

‘God did not make death,  
Neither does He have pleasure over the destruction of the living.  
For He created all things that they might exist,  
And the generations of the world so they might be preserved;  
For there was no poison of death in them,  
Nor was the reign of Hades on the earth.  
For righteousness does not die.  
But the ungodly summoned death by their words and works;  
Although they thought death would be a friend, they were dissolved.’

Thus, God makes a diagnosis of the human heart at the end of the literary section: ‘Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. The LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart.’ (Gen.6:5 – 6) From a literary standpoint, the diagnosis comes at the perfect time. After showing how the symptoms of the condition spread from Adam and Eve to all their descendants in Genesis 2:4 – 4:26, and after noting the spread of death even

---

<sup>21</sup> Gordon P. Hugenberger, lecture citing Bill T. Arnold, Bryan E. Beyer, *Readings From the Ancient Near East: Primary Sources for Old Testament Study* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), p.150 – 151. The Book of Revelation speaks of a 1,000 year reign of Jesus. Thus, it seems that the concept of a thousand is being used to idiomatically indicate an ideal period or ideal life. Literarily, it might be akin to the modern English idiom, ‘living large,’ or other such phrases.

in the line of Seth in the end of the third literary section of Genesis, Genesis 5:1 – 6:8, the audience is ready to ask the question of what exactly happened, and what must be done to resolve it. God repeats His diagnosis after the flood, saying, ‘The intent of man’s heart is evil from his youth’ (Gen.8:21), and implying that the flood may have solved the problem of human bloodshed cursing the ground, but it did not solve the problem of the human heart. That problem is manifested again in a second fall. Despite God providing a ‘new creation’ of sorts through the flood, Noah and his family manifest the same corruption, involving nakedness and a violation of origins (Gen.9:20 – 22), paralleling the first fall involving nakedness and a violation of origins. Just as Cain built a city and oppressed his son Enoch because he did not trust God’s word of protection, so Nimrod (Gen.10:10 – 12) leads all humanity in building a city and a tower and a name (Gen.11:4), presumably thinking that the tower will allow them to outlast another flood, because they did not trust God’s word of protection that He would not flood the earth again. This symmetry of narration shows that the same internal problem exists in humanity: the corruption of human nature. But I am getting ahead of myself, for there is still much to discuss about the fall from Genesis 2:4 – 4:26, to correctly understand the atonement.

The damaging of human nature caused a corresponding failure in humanity’s intended relationship with the *land*. This is the second area of alienation that must be considered as we study the atonement and Israel’s sacrificial system. Turning away from the life source of all creation, God, made the bringing forth of all life – in human reproduction (Gen.3:16) and in agriculture (Gen.3:17 – 19) – more difficult and more painful. I find it important to explicitly state that the curses on the ground and on childbearing are not penal in nature. Rather, they are God’s descriptive consequences of Adam and Eve’s attempt to be independent of God and exile Him from His own creation. *In fact, they are conditions that God Himself had to start overcoming.* The fall of Adam and Eve entailed an abandonment of the original commission given by God regarding the land. It was not only an estrangement between humanity and God, and a corresponding estrangement of each person from true human identity, but also an estrangement between all subsequent members of the human family as we see in Adam’s accusations of Eve and the Cain and Abel story. It was an estrangement between humanity and the land. Whereas the land was previously God’s agent of unmitigated blessing to humanity, Adam and Eve cursed it so that it became a mixed blessing. We exiled God from the Garden, not the other way around, even though we tend to remember it as God exiling us from the Garden, perhaps because we are reading back God’s exiling of Israel from the Promised Land as wholly symmetrical with what happened in the original Garden. But no: Even our recollection of the fall reflects the distortion in our human nature and the depravity of the human mind.

Therefore, we see God as the initiator of sacrifice, immediately after the fall. Emile Nicole, in his defense of penal substitution from his exploration of the sacrificial system, says, ‘Sacrifice does not appear in OT primeval history as a divine command but rather as a human initiative. Abel, without any previous instruction, took the initiative to offer fat portions from the firstborn of his flock.’<sup>22</sup> I am not suggesting that all penal substitution advocates would agree with that statement. But Nicole is probably mistaken on this point in two ways. First, implicitly, God most likely shed animal blood to make the ‘garments of skin’ for Adam and Eve (Gen.3:21). Many other scholars concur that the animal sacrifice had theological meaning and did not merely serve the practical benefit of being more durable than fig leaves, though undoubtedly that was its physical function and the physical point of departure for further conceptual reflection by Adam and Eve and their descendants. The Hebrew verb *kippur*, rendered in most places *to atone*, at its most basic level means *to cover*, and we see God *covering* Adam and Eve here. So what did these garments of skin mean? This was the first time that Adam and Eve saw that God was willing to sacrifice animal life – not simply plant life, which may have been somehow connected to the curse on the ground – from within the creation for their benefit, to cover their now dying bodies, which is the locus of their feeling of shame. Sacrifice therefore is God’s initiative. In Genesis, the slaying of animals when Adam and Eve were exiled from the land of Eden signified (1) bloodshed (the first blood being shed) and a covering for their bodies, in which now exists the corruption of their human nature by sin and death; (2) protection and nourishment during that exile being assisted by God’s personal association with the blood of innocent animals, which seems to provide an additional measure of life from which God could nourish the cursed ground, as Malachi 3:8 – 12 indicates and as I will describe below in section four; and (3) a foreshadowing of how God will bring humanity back to paradise one day in a full sense: innocent blood will one day be shed for God to reclothe humanity in a deeper, more profound way, that is in the new humanity of Jesus Christ, to restore humanity to Himself and the land to humanity.

In anticipating my discussion in later sections about the sacrifices offered by priests at the sanctuary, I believe that we should interpret these sacrifices as expressions of God sustaining the life of Adam and Eve and their descendants upon the land. God began to undo their own act of separating themselves from Him and therefore putting Him at a remove from the creation. In some sense, God had ‘inhabited’ or ‘indwelt’ the Tree of Life and

---

<sup>22</sup> Emile Nicole, ‘Atonement in the Pentateuch,’ editors Charles E. Hill and Frank A. James III, *The Glory of the Atonement* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), p.42

the Tree of Knowledge. Now that Adam and Eve had violated one the Tree of Knowledge, and the Tree of Life had to be removed from them as well for their own good, God ‘inhabited’ in a symbolic way another physical part of His creation to protect and nourish fallen humanity: animal sacrifices. God took upon Himself a mediating role between humanity and the land through these sacrifices to shed innocent lifeblood.

I cannot find any other compelling explanation for why Cain and Abel believed they had to bring sacrifices before God in Genesis 4. Cain was making a similar mistake that Adam and Eve made when they sewed fig leaves together; the now cursed and dying realm of plant life is insufficient to mediate in the direction of humanity towards God. Israel’s peace offering, made of grain, would later serve as an image of receiving an agricultural blessing *from* God. So Cain reversed what was appropriate, symbolically offering *God* his blessing and offering peace *towards* God. This makes more sense for why God ‘had regard for Abel and his offering’ of the firstlings of his flock, but ‘for Cain and his offering,’ which was ‘the fruit of the land,’ God ‘had no regard’ (Gen.4:3 – 5). Cain was offering back to God what God had brought forth from the land Himself, and not offering innocent lifeblood to nourish the very land that produced it. He was acting as if God had somehow propitiated him, and was now graciously extending God a token of peace!

The second reason why I believe Nicole is mistaken about sacrifices is that the sacrifices provide a form of protection for human beings in the form of the animal skins for Adam and Eve, and after Noah, nourishment as well, and this is a continuation of the theme of eating from the creation order itself, which started *prior to humanity’s fall*. God provided nourishment for humanity, to serve humanity, and arguably entered into the creation itself via the Tree of Life to invite humanity’s participation in His eternal life. Furthermore, there are clear literary connections between the Tabernacle and Eden, which indicate that the Tabernacle was seen as a very limited and partial restoration of Eden itself, the place where God’s special presence was concentrated. I will explore that the thematic connection of Eden, nourishment, eating in God’s presence, and participation in a section below. The flaw in Emile Nicole’s essay is highlighted by the fact that he titles it ‘Atonement in the Pentateuch.’ Unfortunately, from a literary and theological perspective, he almost completely isolates the sacrificial system from *the rest of the Pentateuch*. His methodology exemplifies what I find to be problematic about most Protestant evangelical treatments of the sacrificial system.

Moreover, the tensions between humanity and the land deepened with Cain’s murder of Abel. Cain heightened the association between blood, land, and curse. The relationship between the land and humanity, which had already soured because of Adam and Eve, soured further with Cain, who was ironically a tiller of the ground (Gen.4:2). When this tiller of the ground tilled *his brother’s blood* back into the ground, Abel’s blood cried out to God from the land, and Cain cursed himself from the land in an amplification of Adam’s alienation from the land. Whereas Adam had to toil on the land and produce thorns and thistles, at least he was able to eat of the plants of the field and produce bread; but with Cain, matters were far worse: ‘Now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand. When you cultivate the ground, it shall no longer yield its strength to you; you shall be a vagrant and a wanderer on the earth’ (Gen.4:11 – 12). Cain then identified the symmetrical position God and the land stood in relation to an estranged humanity: ‘Thou hast driven me this day from the face of the ground, and from Thy face I shall be hidden.’ He described his alienation from one by his alienation from the other. There again is the association: land – agriculturally fruitful land – represents the face of God to human beings. In the view of the Pentateuch, the land, which God could make fruitful because of an association He makes between Himself and animal blood, was not meant to receive human blood, and this more than anything makes the land unfruitful for humanity.

Cain then took refuge in a city he named after his son, Enoch (Gen.4:16ff.). Here we see the start of a peculiar link between city-building and sons. In an attempt to regain security and eternity, Cain connected his life with his son. Perhaps after turning away from God, Cain hoped that Enoch his son would provide him with security. Enoch could farm, cultivate the ground, and defend and protect him; Enoch could overcome God’s decree. His son was now responsible for organizing this city, for providing for his father, for housing the murderer, for defending him from suspicion and insult, for making him feel secure in a world that is otherwise hostile to him, for meeting the tremendous need that only God can truly fill.

But what about Enoch? Bound to his father in a new way, Enoch could not leave Cain. Whereas God decreed that a man shall leave his father and mother to cleave to his wife (Gen.2:24), Cain made this difficult if not impossible for his son. Enoch lived in the struggle to provide food, protection, security, and justification for his father. He was duty bound. Here begins the story of the father who trusts no one but his sons to be loyal and faithful to him, but in turn places demands on them which crush their sanity, drive them away or turn them against him. This is a very well known human situation that is explored in both classic and modern works, not least the Book of Samuel. This relation also describes the patriarchal and communitarian nature of all ancient civilizations, as well as many non-western cultures in the present. *This is a form of child sacrifice*. Enoch’s attention was necessarily riveted onto his father, not God, which makes the city – human civilization – the first sociological and spiritual limitation on

the freedom given by God to human beings. Cain established this limitation. Even though the Hebrews attributed certain economic, artistic, and technological growth to the city, since animal husbandry, music, and metallurgy originated with the descendants of Cain, the builder of the first city (Gen.4:20 – 22),<sup>23</sup> the relational and spiritual aspects of life deteriorated with the city because of this link between city-building and sons, which is another pattern in the rest of the Scriptures. Now we find a curious progression in the names of Enoch's descendants. Enoch, whose name meant 'consecrated,' named his son Irad, which meant 'townsman' or 'witness,' in this context a witness to the glory of man. Irad named his son Mehujael, 'smitten of God,' suggesting that they saw themselves as victims of God. And Mehujael named his son Methushael, 'death of God.' Worst of all was Lamech ('despair'), the first polygamist recorded in the Scriptures, who murdered a young man in a fight, retaliating far beyond the logic of 'an eye for an eye.' Lamech boasted about this, poetically saying that he did not need the same protection God offered Cain because he would rely on his family's prowess in weaponry instead.

The narrative concludes with humanity engaging in urban life, the antithesis of the divinely assisted garden life that we will see upheld as an ideal in Israel's Mosaic Law. With these developments – Cain and his family in a city, Cain's descendants developing non-nomadic and non-rural ways of life, and more human blood being shed – the narrative hints at a hope for a renewed humanity through the line of Adam through Seth through Enosh (4:25 – 26) which would ultimately give way to Abraham, the nation Israel, and the promised victorious seed of the woman. This genealogy, then, fills out the fall from the ideal situation described in the first creation account, and explained to rural Israel why human cities sit on God's land, why human labor is so intense in a world that should be at rest. Estrangement from God meant estrangement from the land, and although the relations were not completely severed, neither were they completely intact. Humanity would now range from being partially effective on the land (Adam) to being non-effectual and alienated from it (Cain). God would continue to use the land to mediate both blessing and curse to humanity, and Israel enjoyed a special relationship with the land because of their special relationship with God. None of the interpreters of the atonement that I listed above takes this into account. This is unfortunate given that the heading of this section is about *the land*, what caused God to withdraw His presence from the land, separating heaven from earth, and what impact that had on the previously supernatural sustenance of the earth. The section is, after all, an account of how the heavens and the earth came to be what they are.

One problem with many treatments of the fall is the overwhelming tendency for interpreters and commentators to treat Genesis 1 – 3 as a literary section describing 'creation and fall.' This tendency is shared by Lutheran theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer in lectures he gave in 1932 – 33 and now in a book called *Creation and Fall*,<sup>24</sup> and Catholic Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger in his 1986 book *In the Beginning: A Catholic Understanding of Creation and Fall*.<sup>25</sup> The problem may be stated this way: Genesis 1 – 3 is not a literary section. Yet this tendency among interpreters has the very unfortunate effect of disconnecting the fall in general from the internalization of jealousy and covetousness into human nature in particular, the disruption of human relations in general from fratricide in particular, work in general from urbanization in particular, and hope in a future human champion in general from child sacrifice in particular. We must take Genesis 2:4 – 4:26 as a literary unit in order to offer a fully biblical exposition of the fall and its full effects on humanity. By effectively amputating Genesis 4 from the narration of 'creation and fall,' we fail to understand, for example, the mind of the biblical writers who see human beings twisting God's promise of the 'seed of the woman' – God's promise in Genesis 3:15 to bring forth a human champion to defeat the serpent for the sake of *all humanity* – by establishing the hegemonic power of the older generation over the younger, or the father over the son, or the husband over his wife/wives, for the sake of the *family alone*. Humanity sins by *parodying* God and *twisting* God's declared intentions to their own purposes. Therefore, by truncating Genesis 4 off from its literary context of the genealogy of Genesis 2:4 – 4:26 – an inappropriate literary decision to begin with – we lose insight into God's dealing with His chosen family in Genesis 12 – 50; in the remainder of Genesis, God is undoing fratricide, urbanization, and child sacrifice as an integral part of His partnership with Abraham and Sarah and their descendants as they undo the sin of Adam and Eve. So I firmly resist any attempt to treat Genesis 1 – 3 as 'the narrative of creation and fall.' I suspect, in fact, that this tendency is the result of the cultural bias towards individualism of European and American biblical interpreters who place less emphasis on familial and social dynamics. We must include Genesis 4 in the narrative.

The story of Noah and the flood (Gen.6:9 – 9:29) is the fourth literary section of Genesis, and it contains implications for humanity's relationship with the land. The connection between land and a sacrificial offering of animals is directly given here. The problem with humanity that brings on God's flood seems to be a nexus of issues: the line of faith flowing through the line of Adam through Seth has resulted in only one person righteous, Noah;

---

<sup>23</sup> Lewis Mumford, *The City in History*, and other secular scholars have demonstrated that humanity found it first possible to divide up labor via urbanization. Also, politics, law, and modes of human organization evolved rapidly in the city.

<sup>24</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, (lectures given in 1932 – 33; Fortress Press, 1997)

<sup>25</sup> Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, *In the Beginning: A Catholic Understanding of Creation and Fall* (Eerdmans, 1986, 1995)

human violence is rampant because of the corruption of human nature, jeopardizing God's plan to bring forth a human champion called the 'seed of the woman' and a human community that would protect and nurture and follow him; and, implicitly, the human blood staining the earth needed to be wiped away in order for God to renew His agricultural blessing on humanity. God then sends the flood waters to serve as a new creation of sorts, complete with the same motifs contained in the first creation of Genesis 1: waters covering the earth, the Spirit of God hovering over the waters, the emergence of land, and God's blessing to be fruitful and multiply. As Noah and his family exited the ark, they offered burnt offerings. Very significantly, in response, God promises to never curse the ground by flooding:

<sup>18</sup> So Noah went out, and his sons and his wife and his sons' wives with him. <sup>19</sup> Every beast, every creeping thing, and every bird, everything that moves on the earth, went out by their families from the ark. <sup>20</sup> Then Noah built an altar to the LORD, and took of every clean animal and of every clean bird and offered burnt offerings on the altar. <sup>21</sup> The LORD smelled the soothing aroma; and the LORD said to Himself, 'I will never again curse the ground on account of man, for the intent of man's heart is evil from his youth; and I will never again destroy every living thing, as I have done. <sup>22</sup> While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease.' (Gen.8:18 – 22)

Because of its context, this particular burnt offering involves the relationship between God, humanity, and the land and mediates that relationship. The burnt offering, like Abel's offering in Genesis 4, implies that innocent animal blood is shed on the land, covering it on behalf of human beings who have corrupted blood. That is strongly inferred by Malachi 3:8 – 12. Notice in the Noah account, the distinction between clean and unclean animals is introduced for the first time; as readers, we are left to assume that this distinction was introduced before Noah, perhaps all the way back after the fall. Because of this burnt offering of clean animals, of which the rising smoke symbolizes God 'eating' the offering, God smells something other than the corruption of sin in human blood. God apparently anthropomorphically 'smells' or detects human sin, either in the residual bloodshed on the ground or in the corruption of human nature itself which is the ultimate source of human sinful activity. I think the latter is more textually warranted, since that diagnosis is stated again in the immediate context. Notice also that no active sins committed by Noah or his family are mentioned in this context. The corruption of human nature affects humanity's ability to live peaceably on the land. Therefore, the burnt offering becomes one aspect of the overall picture of atonement, an atonement that must eventually resolve the problem of the human heart and the broken relationship with both God and land, the sources of humanity's origin. Rather than the burnt offering symbolizing Christ as a substitute for the worshiper, I believe the burnt offering is less specific and more categorical; it thematically anticipated God eventually consuming human sinfulness itself. I will examine the picture of Noah's ark as a connection point to atonement in a later section. Significantly, after the fifth literary section of Genesis (Gen.10:1 – 11:27), paralleling humanity's second descent into a second city to Cain's first descent into the first city Enoch, the next major symbol of atonement is given in the sixth literary section, the life of Abraham (Gen.11:28 – 22:19): circumcision.

## **Theme #2: Circumcision, the Introduction to Israel and Israel's Hope**

Circumcision marked the entrance of a man into Judaism. Circumcision is also the motif that Moses used to express the internal change that God would bring about in His people after Israel went into exile: 'Moreover the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, so that you may live' (Dt.30:6). It is this later appropriation of the practice of circumcision that interests me here, for this internal change of heart-circumcision is the language used by Moses and later biblical writers to explain what God must do to prevent Israel from sinning against God again. Spiritual heart-circumcision therefore becomes an eschatological motif, and is related to God's resolution of the human problem of rebellion and resistance to Him. Paul also spoke of spiritual circumcision as something Jesus himself went through (Col.2:11) and subsequently all who believe in him (Col.2:9 – 14; Rom.2:28 – 29). Presumably, we would expect the sacrifices and the centralization of those sacrifices in the Tabernacle to also have some bearing and relation to that eschatological resolution found in God's ultimate response to human sin. Indeed, there is. For circumcision represents God's judgment in cutting off of something unclean from a person in such a way that both God's cleansing and forgiveness flow to the person. But first, I want to explore the meaning of physical circumcision because it serves as the grounding and launching point for understanding spiritual circumcision.

Circumcision physically marked Abraham and all his male descendants. As Genesis tells us, and as Paul reminds us, God gave circumcision to Abraham after the pivotal moment when Abraham had faith in God's promise (Gen.15:1 – 21). So circumcision seems to be given as a sign of Abraham's faith. It served, not as automatic membership in the covenant itself (e.g. Ishmael was circumcised in Gen.17:18 – 27), but more as a reminder or an

invitation from God to be part of His covenant by faith. The Abraham story weaves together many elements that are surprising from the standpoint of this narrative being located in a patriarchal culture with a typical focus being on the man and his genetic descendants: the prominent role of Abraham's wife Sarah; episodes that might be considered morally embarrassing for Abraham and Sarah such as Abraham's lying about Sarah and Sarah's hostility towards Hagar; God's blessing Hagar the Egyptian and her son Ishmael, and especially Hagar's own relationship with God whereby she names God Himself and discovers a sacred well in the wilderness; and so on. I believe that the narrative is already showing in the microcosm of Abraham's family that women and Gentiles will be blessed by God in a larger sense. God does not only bless Hebrew men.

The significance of circumcision being a sign that is marked in the flesh of Abraham and all his *male* descendants, however, is significant to consider. God commands that Abraham be circumcised in the central turning point of this narrative, for the Abraham narrative is structured in the form of a chiasm:

*Structure of the Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar Story*<sup>26</sup>

- A. God calls Abram to trust His word, leave his homeland, gives promise of seed (11:27 – 12:3)
- B. Abram builds an altar, calls on the name of the Lord (12:4 – 9)
- C. Abram and Sarai sojourn in Egypt, Abram lies about Sarai (12:10 – 20)  
Separation of Lot (13:1 – 13)  
Blessing: God reiterates promise of seed and many descendants (13:14 – 18)
- D. Abram wars on behalf of Sodom and Gomorrah, rescues Lot and them (14:1 – 24)
- E. God again promises Abram seed despite Abram's old age; Abram believes (15:1 – 6)  
God promises birth of Israel from a hopeless situation: bondage (15:7 – 21)
- F. Sarai relies on herself and fails (16:1 – 6)  
God hears Hagar (who names God) and promises blessing on Ishmael (16:7 – 16)
- G. God marks Abram with circumcision, symbol of purification back to Eden  
God says, 'I will multiply you exceedingly' (17:1 – 2)  
God renames Abram to Abraham, promises land, kings, nations (17:4 – 8)  
God gives Abraham the sign of circumcision (17:9 – 14)
- F'. God renames Sarai to Sarah, promises Isaac to Sarah, and kings, nations (17:15 – 17)  
God promises blessing on Ishmael (17:18 – 27)
- E'. God again promises Sarah seed despite Sarah's old age; Sarah laughs, believes (18:1 – 15)  
God promises birth of son from a hopeless situation: Sarah's womb
- D'. God wars on Sodom and Gomorrah, rescues Lot (18:16 – 19:38)
- C'. Abraham and Sarah sojourn in Gerar, Abraham lies about Sarah (20:1 – 18)  
Blessing: Isaac is born (21:1 – 7)  
Separation of Ishmael; promised blessing on Ishmael and many descendants (21:8 – 21)
- B'. Abraham plants a tree and calls on the name of the Lord (21:22 – 34)
- A'. God calls Abraham to trust His word, sacrifice his son, gives blessing on the seed (22:1 – 19)

The literary significance of chiasms is well known. The center of the chiasm is the place of emphasis and interpretive power. Although we may be inclined to think that the sacrifice of Isaac in Genesis 22 is surely the high point of Abraham's faith – and perhaps it is – the narrative itself invites us to examine Genesis 17:1 – 14 as the center point from which we interpret the other aspects of the story. Circumcision is a key element of that center point.

Another arrangement of the five speeches of God in Genesis 17 suggests this emphasis:

*Structure of Genesis 17:1 – 25*

- A. Abram's age (17:1a)
- B. The LORD appears to Abram (17:1b)
- C. God's first speech, regarding 'I will multiply you' (17:1c – 2)
- D. Abram falls on his face (17:3)
- E. God's second speech, regarding Abraham (emphasizing names/land/ kings/nations) (17:4 – 8)
- F. God's third/most important speech (emphasizing covenant and circumcision) (17:9 – 14)
- E'. God's fourth speech, regarding Sarah (emphasizing names/land/kings/ nations) (17:15 – 16)
- D'. Abraham falls on his face (17:17 – 18)

<sup>26</sup> Modified by Mako Nagasawa from Duane Garrett, *Rethinking Genesis: The Sources and Authorship of the First Book of the Pentateuch* (2<sup>nd</sup> publishing Ross-shire, Great Britain: Christian Focus Publishing, 2000), p.114

- C'. God's fifth speech, regarding the choice of Isaac and not Ishmael (17:19 – 21)
- B'. The LORD goes up from Abram (17:22 – 23)
- A'. Abraham's age and household (17:24 – 27)

Literary structures like these can overlap, so there is no necessary conflict with seeing a chiasmic structure in the Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar story as a whole (Gen.11:27 – 22:19) and seeing this chiasmic structure in the granting of circumcision and renaming moment (Gen.17:1 – 25). In either case, the rite of circumcision is a key to interpreting the rest of the Abraham narrative. Thus, I wish to make the argument that circumcision was a symbol not merely that Abraham *had* faith, but of *the content* of Abraham's faith. Specifically, I believe there is a deeper structure of content shared by circumcision and the sacrifice of Isaac.

First, circumcision represents the death of the man being circumcised. This is physically apparent because Abraham must endure pain when he was circumcised as a grown man. Some African men who were circumcised as teenagers have told me that the pain can be intense, and any erection they develop within the few weeks afterwards is greeted by immense pain. Also, in circumcision, the knife comes rather close to cutting off the whole penis, making the man a eunuch, and cutting off his reproductive abilities completely. Surely this connotation was not lost upon Abraham, whose main concern at that point was future progeny! There is an emotional and spiritual 'death,' however, that goes beyond the physical 'death.' Circumcision represents the fact that Abraham, despite being the patriarch in a patriarchal age, is not the one to determine his own heir. Earlier, God rejected his proposal that Eleazar of Damascus be his heir (Gen.15:2 – 4). Then God rejected Ishmael from being the heir as well, despite Ishmael being of genetic descent from Abraham, despite Abraham's love for Ishmael, and despite the surrogate motherhood of Hagar being a culturally acceptable way of producing an heir (Gen.16:1 – 16). Though we should be quick to add that God respected Ishmael and his mother Hagar, along with Abraham's love for Ishmael, God nevertheless did not choose Ishmael to be Abraham's heir. Instead, God insisted that Sarah, Abraham's wife, be the mother of the heir. This reinforces God's original creation order for marriage as a union of oneness between husband and wife (Gen.1:26 – 28; 2:18 – 25), and was the lesson for Abram and Sarai to learn in Egypt when Abram endangered Sarai's participation in God's promise and blessing (Gen.12:9 – 20). Abram had to learn that God's promise (Gen.12:1 – 8) was not actually just to him, but to Sarai as well. Surely God's desire to produce a miraculous birth from Sarah's 'dead' womb was part of the reason for that, as Paul writes in Romans 4:16 – 25.

However, in the literary development of Genesis, framing God's desire to produce a miraculous birth through the reproductively dead Sarah, is God's desire to honor His own design for human marriage from Genesis 1 and 2, that the legitimate wife of Abraham be the one to produce an heir. In the context of Genesis 17, *God gives circumcision to Abraham as a sign of the curtailment of male biological and social power to determine his own heir.* Abraham 'dies,' in that sense, too, when God gives him the sign of circumcision. For if God was going to restore the creational blessing which Adam and Eve lost, then God will also restore creational marriage as He intended it. The assumptions and attitudes that Abraham and Sarah had that did not come from God's original creation vision for relationship *had to be cut away*. When Abraham and Sarah stood naked before one another in their marital union, as Adam and Eve originally did, they would be reminded of God's promise, and not be ashamed of themselves, their old age, and their past mistakes. Through the sign of circumcision, God was restoring the creation condition of husband and wife being naked and unashamed, through their confidence in the God who brings life out of death.

Additionally, in the rest of Genesis there is a pattern of the patriarch's power, desires, and decisions being overruled and cut off. Despite the patriarch Isaac's love for his son Esau, God chooses the other son, Jacob, beloved of the matriarch Rebekah (Gen.25). Despite the patriarch Jacob's love for Joseph and Benjamin and his affection for Rachel over Leah, God chooses Judah, the oldest legitimate son of Leah, Jacob's first wife, to be the true firstborn among his brethren and bearer of Israel's kingship (Gen.49:8 – 12). Despite Judah's attempts to break his vow and disinherit the ethnically Canaanite woman Tamar out of the family, God vindicates Tamar over her father-in-law Judah and grants her twin boys whose birth signifies divine blessing (Gen.38). God seems to be recalling the 'seed of the *woman*' prophecy of Genesis 3:15. God connected His messianic promise most emphatically to the *wife*. Without any more information, Israelite husbands could assume that they were biologically involved, but this meant that a husband had to regard his wife with peculiar interest and care. For in the age of 'the patriarchs' – and we should certainly question the overwhelming tendency of commentators to call Genesis 12 – 50 the section about 'the patriarchs' without much mention of 'the matriarchs' also – God insists on honoring the *wife*, making her station and even her affection, choice, and naming of her child the determining factor in who is the heir of promise. We can understand this as a reversal of the cultural power of the patriarch, but it is not simply an arbitrary decision on God's part to spite the power of the patriarch: God is reasserting the significance of His original creation order, where husband and wife are one, and are equal partners in His commission to bring forth life (Gen.1:27 – 28). Now that God is preparing the nation Israel to be His covenant partner, He is cultivating this 'chosen family' for four generations. The spiritual formation of this family will engrain attitudes and patterns of thought into all the children

of Israel, which had unusually high views of women until the incursion of Greek anti-woman prejudice in the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE. The ‘death’ that Abraham must embrace in his circumcision is to endure a spiritual surgery at the hands of a God who cuts off a deep prejudice from him at the same time He cuts off Abraham’s foreskin. God cuts a sinful attitude away from Abraham, and brings him and Sarah in their marriage one step back to His original creation order. God cut off Abraham’s fears and propensity to lie about Sarah, leaving her vulnerable (Gen.12:10 – 20). Then God cut off Abraham’s power to name an heir outside his own bloodline (Gen.15). Then God cut off Abraham’s power to use impregnate a woman other than his legitimate wife (Gen.16). Then God cut off a piece of Abraham’s penis (Gen.17). The message could not be clearer.

Thus, at the same time, if circumcision represents the death of the man being circumcised, and a judgment on his sin, it also represents his resurrection and cleansing. Physically, circumcision enacts the rite of the knife missing the base of the penis and cutting off only the foreskin. Abraham learned that human life could continue; the line of promise and covenant could continue; the potentiality of God’s promise was newly ‘uncovered’ through the rite. But the physical experience was a connection to the emotional and spiritual. By relinquishing the power his culture gave him to name an heir, Abraham was drawn back to God’s creation order to properly value his wife Sarah as an equal partner in the story of redemption. This is suggestive. For Genesis portrays the knowledge of God as passing down genealogical lines, from Adam to Noah and then Noah’s son Shem, to Shem’s descendant Abraham. This genealogical line passes down knowledge of the biblical past and hope for God’s redemption in the future. Abraham knew something of God’s pronouncement that a ‘seed of the woman’ would one day crush the evil one on the head. So by turning back towards God’s original creation order for marriage, however humbling that was for him, Abraham experienced a renewal: a renewal of hope that through Sarah and himself, God would somehow undo the sin of Eve and Adam. And even though in Genesis 17, Abraham was one hundred years old and Sarah ninety and barren and well past menopause, even though sex for them was surely not a youthful diversion any more, even though childbirth would raise questions of Sarah’s health, this became a clarifying moment for the couple: God will draw up their small act of faith to bring forth a disproportionate result. He will bring forth new life out of barrenness and death. This will be a ‘new creation’ of sorts, similar to the *creation ex nihilo* of Genesis 1 but taking instead the raw material of an old couple’s human flesh and their small but potent faith to receive His word unto themselves. This was Abraham’s ‘resurrection.’ Whether or not the ancient Jews thought there was some medical or hygienic benefit to circumcision for both husband and wife remains in doubt, but the larger connotations seem clear to me: circumcision represents a cleansing by cutting away, a restoration of a man to the state God intended.

Second, for Abraham, circumcision must also symbolize the death and resurrection of Isaac, as well. I am not suggesting that it meant this initially. There is no way Abraham could have known at the time God gave him the sign of circumcision that God would ask him to sacrifice Isaac on an altar. But in the text of Genesis, with the whole chiasmic story of Abraham from Genesis 11:27 – 22:19, and I submit for Abraham personally towards the end of his life, circumcision comes to mean this by association, especially if Abraham was the one who compiled his life in the form of this chiasmic mnemonic device for future generations to consider. If circumcision is a cutting off of a part of one’s self, in particular the foreskin of the organ of reproduction and future life, then this bears a thematic resemblance to Abraham’s willingness to cut Isaac off from himself in Genesis 22, because Isaac in fact embodied his reproduction and future life. Abraham’s faith was about God’s work in the future, and circumcision, being about the penis, was a symbol of the future. However, we can reasonably deduce from the narrative of Genesis – and we also *know* this from Hebrews 11:19 – that Abraham fully expected God to raise Isaac from the dead. This is because Abraham’s confidence in God’s faithfulness to fulfill His word became higher and higher throughout his life. For instance, Abraham had seen God protect Sarah despite his lies about her (Gen.12:10 – 20; 20:1 – 18). And he apparently believed that God would care for Hagar and Ishmael even in the barren wilderness (Gen.21:1 – 19), which would ordinarily be impossible without God’s provision.<sup>27</sup> So by the time God asks Abraham to bring his knife to Isaac’s throat and offer him on an altar, Abraham understands that there is no conflict between God’s promises (to bless him and the world through Isaac and Isaac’s own descendants) and God’s commands (to kill Isaac). Abraham is left to deduce that the only way both things can be true is if God will raise Isaac from the dead. This type of faith is what Abraham cultivated, for which circumcision was seen to be the appropriate sign. Circumcision, after all, was a claim on the future of Abraham in a very personal way. It was a physical mark on the body of Abraham that his trust in God concerned the future, a future now embodied in the person of his son Isaac. God had cultivated trust in Abraham – trust that He is reliable and powerful to bring about what He had promised. For that future-oriented faith, Abraham received from God an appropriate symbol to permanently etch into his flesh.

---

<sup>27</sup> Eleonore Stump, *Faith and the Problem of Evil* (Veritas Forum lecture 2002), argues persuasively that Abraham’s trust that God will provide life after the sacrifice of Isaac is the necessary and symmetrical confirmation of his faith that God will provide life for Ishmael in the wilderness. Both scenarios involve God providing life in the face of death. Accessed from <http://veritas.org/talks/faith-and-problem-evil/>.

Circumcision therefore comes to be associated with the sacrifice of the beloved son to God. This would later become ritualized in Israel because of God's command to 'sacrifice' and 'redeem' their first-born sons (Ex.13:1 – 16; 22:29 – 30; 34:19 – 20), which must also be considered part of Israel's sacrificial system, in conjunction with the rite of circumcision performed on these sons.<sup>28</sup> The association between sons, sacrifice, blood, and promise is clear. For God to mark His people on the male sexual organ, representing reproduction, children, hope, and the future fulfillment of God's promise, surely makes any man undergoing circumcision, or watching it done on his infant son, to think of God's relation to the future, and not just the future in a vague and general sense, but his own personal future and the future of his descendants. For the fathers and mothers of the chosen family in Genesis 12 – 50, there is a curious but unmistakable pattern. God wants to draw the chosen son into His larger purpose of blessing the world. But He does this against the opposition of the parents of that son because of their desire to shelter that son and raise up that son to provide hope and meaning for the local family, not global humanity. Hence, the parents, and most notably in the narrative, the fathers, must sacrifice their favored sons to God. This is the reversal of the Cain's treatment of his son Enoch, and a negation of the presumptive patriarchal prerogative to have power over one's own sons. Abraham has to make a choice to trust God with Isaac in Genesis 22; that choice is symmetrical with the choice he made with Ishmael in Genesis 21. For in both cases, God has larger designs for these sons than Abraham can completely understand. Isaac must also give up his favoritism of his son, Esau, and give his blessing to the physically weaker Jacob, the son beloved by his wife Rebekah. Jacob in turn must learn how to lose Joseph, due not to God's own designs but the ten brothers' jealousy; and then at the hands of Joseph incognito, Jacob must lose both Simeon and Benjamin, and then bless Judah and not Joseph with the coming kingship. The story of these fathers and sons is a saga of loss, then miraculous recovery into an utterly different quality of relationship. God assures Abraham that both Ishmael and Isaac will prosper in their own ways (Gen.21:12 – 13). He makes Jacob prosperous, and brings reconciliation to Esau and Jacob, who are both present at Isaac's death to bury him with honor (Gen.35:29). And He protects Joseph in his meteoric rise in Egypt to save human life from the regional famine, and reunites him with his father Jacob, so that the seventeen years they have together before Jacob dies (Gen.47:28) echo but far exceed in goodness the first seventeen years of Joseph's early life (Gen.37:2). Each father must let God interpose Himself in his relation to his own son. For the great price of being God's chosen people is that God claims possession over all one's children, especially the favored and beloved ones, because through these children, God wants to bless the entire world, and not just the immediate family. Every father in Israel must expect to undergo a loss of his son akin to death, and a reunion with his son akin to resurrection.

Circumcision is therefore a 'sign' akin to the 'sign' God put on Cain (Gen.4:15), although Scripture remains curiously silent on what that was. We do know, however, that the semantic link is made between Abraham and Cain through the word 'sign' (Gen.17:11). I also believe that circumcision is a sign that inverts and rebukes the sin of Cain. Circumcision is a shedding of blood to remove something unclean from a man, so he can be part of the people of God who will inherit the land as a gift from God. That is the mirror image of Cain sinfully shedding his brother's blood, alienating himself from God and the land. And this is where a literary-thematic exploration of Scripture needs to be added to the 'word study' method of biblical exegesis; for only by doing more robust literary analysis can we see Abraham as the inversion of Cain

Not only is Abraham the inversion of Cain, but Nimrod as well. For the motif of land is being contrasted with the motif of the city. For Cain oppressed his own son, Enoch, in a city named Enoch; Nimrod did the same in a city called Babel. I am assuming that Abraham knew the stories of his family, the family of Shem, marked in the biblical text as possessing unusual life (Gen.11:10 – 26). Hence, Abraham would have recognized the pattern in rejecting a city and inheriting a garden land, for that had already happened twice in Genesis 1 – 11. God now called Abraham out of a city, Ur of Mesopotamia, invited him to be a pilgrim in a foreign land in a way that Cain refused to, and required that he relinquish the power to name his own heir, the power to elevate his own fertility without regard for the role of his wife, the power to impregnate his wife on his own natural power, and especially the power to hold his son hostage to his own designs and fears. Circumcision is an utter rebuke of Cain's bloodshed, insecurity, and apathy towards the God who still wanted to protect and redeem him. The repeating of this kind of sin by Nimrod, in the city of Babel (Gen.11:1 – 9) elicited a move from God that would remind his chosen people that their children and their future utterly belonged to God and rested in His hands. Henceforth, God's people would possess a sign that would turn them away from the sin of Cain. It cleansed them of a sinful posture. This was the decisive

---

<sup>28</sup> See also Jewish scholar Jon D. Levenson, *The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son: The Transformation of Child Sacrifice in Judaism and Christianity* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993), although I disagree with his interpretation of early Judaism as continuing in child sacrifice. Levenson takes Exodus 22:28 out of context and therefore sees in this law a reference to actual child sacrifice, as opposed to the Hebrew practice of redeeming a first-born son. He also takes Ezekiel 20:25 – 26 out of context as if it referred to child sacrifice. Significantly, Levenson does not treat the portrayal of Cain and Enoch in Genesis 4 as the beginning of child sacrifice in principle, and the beginning of Israel's vigorous critique of it as a complete inversion of both life in the original garden and life lived in hope of the messianic deliverer.

break that the covenant, with circumcision as its sign, made into the people of God. *Circumcision, therefore, referred to a cutting away of a part of the human being that offended God, so that the human being as a person could be cleansed. It was a judgment of God on sin for the cleansing of the person.* Thus, I am arguing that circumcision was a preliminary sign that the wrath of God was and is directed at the corruption in our human nature, and *not* at our personhood as penal substitution advocates claim, whereas the love of God *is* directed at our personhood, for our cleansing and ultimate union with God. This sets the stage for understanding why I believe ontological substitution is the correct atonement theory that is taught by Scripture.

### **Theme #3: Passover, Circumcision, and the Firstborn Son**

Steve Jeffery, Michael Ovey, and Andrew Sach in their book *Pierced for Our Transgressions: Rediscovering the Glory of Penal Substitution*, argue that ‘the Passover lamb functioned as a penal substitute, dying in the place of the firstborn sons of the Israelites, in order that they might escape the wrath of God.’<sup>29</sup> They argue that the most important event in biblical history immediately prior to this was God’s covenant promise to Abraham to make his descendants numerous, to give them a land of their own, and to bless them with a special relationship with Himself. In order to fulfill His covenant promise, God carries out an act of penal substitution. While deliverance from the tyranny of the Egyptians is part of the meaning of the original Passover (Ex.11), more significant is that Passover is a means of deliverance from the judgment of God (Ex.12).<sup>30</sup> Their argument is that, whereas the previous nine plagues on Egypt posed no threat to Israel, the tenth plague did. Israelite families would have lost their firstborn sons along with Egyptian families if they did not carry out the Passover ritual. Why would Israelite not obey the command of Moses and Aaron in this matter? The authors cite Ezekiel 20:4 – 10 as the reason: ‘The Israelites participated in the idolatry of their Egyptian masters; they too were guilty, and were no less deserving of God’s judgment. Only by God’s gracious provision of a means of atonement, a substitutionary sacrifice, were they spared.’<sup>31</sup>

The authors proceed to connect Passover themes to Jesus’ self-sacrifice. Naturally, Jesus’ Last Supper occurs on or just before the Jewish Passover, and Jesus taught his disciples that his body and blood would now be the means of deliverance, from *God’s wrath*, according to these three authors. They rightly cite John’s Gospel as displaying Jesus as a Passover lamb through the details of the crucifixion: his bones were not broken, in the same way that the bones of the Passover lamb were not broken (Jn.19:35 – 36, quoting Ex.12:46). They helpfully cite Peter’s reference to God’s people being ‘redeemed...with the precious blood of the Christ, a lamb without blemish and defect’ (1 Pet.1:18 – 19) and Paul’s reference to ‘Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed’ (1 Cor.5:7) serving as the basis for the Corinthians to cleanse themselves of the ‘yeast’ of corruption, connecting the imagery of the first Passover in which the Israelites were to cleanse themselves of yeast (Ex.12:8, 15, 18 – 20; 13:3 – 7)..

I agree with Jeffery, Ovey, and Sach that there is a clear substitutionary role the Passover lamb plays, but it is far from clear to me that the lamb is a *penal* substitute. That is, I do not believe that the lamb served to symbolize God pouring out His wrath on the lamb *instead* of Israel. Rather, the lamb served to symbolize a judgment *on* Israel, to which they had to submit in order to be cleansed of their idolatry – idolatry of various kinds, as I will demonstrate – as part of their reception of the covenant. Much like circumcision was to Abraham, the Passover is the moment of Israel receiving a judgment on itself that led to a cleansing. The lamb, therefore, is a substitute that symbolically carries the uncleanness of the Israelite, rather than symbolizing the Israelite himself. This fits much more comfortably in the ontological substitution model of the atonement than with penal substitution. Furthermore, I argue that the authors’ attempts at explaining the presence of Passover imagery in the New Testament are similarly mistaken.

First, the authors unfortunately do not consider how circumcision is directly linked to Passover and informs Passover in the narrative of the Pentateuch. After God first speaks with Moses and tells Moses that he will confront Pharaoh with the news that God will take the lives of Pharaoh’s first born son (Ex.4:20 – 23), there is a curious inclusion of a short story about circumcision of Moses’ son(s).

<sup>20</sup> So Moses took his wife and his sons and mounted them on a donkey, and returned to the land of Egypt. Moses also took the staff of God in his hand. <sup>21</sup> The LORD said to Moses, ‘When you go back to Egypt see that you perform before Pharaoh all the wonders which I have put in your power; but I will harden his heart so that he will not let the people go. <sup>22</sup> Then you shall say to Pharaoh, ‘Thus says the LORD, ‘Israel is My son, My firstborn. <sup>23</sup> So I said to you, ‘Let My son go that he may serve Me’; but you have refused to let

---

<sup>29</sup> Steve Jeffery, Michael Ovey, Andrew Sach, *Pierced for Our Transgressions: Rediscovering the Glory of Penal Substitution* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007), p.14

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, p.15

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, p.18

him go. Behold, I will kill your son, your firstborn.’”<sup>24</sup> Now it came about at the lodging place on the way that the LORD met him and sought to put him to death.<sup>25</sup> Then Zipporah took a flint and cut off her son’s foreskin and threw it at Moses’ feet, and she said, ‘You are indeed a bridegroom of blood to me.’<sup>26</sup> So He let him alone. At that time she said, ‘You are a bridegroom of blood’--because of the circumcision. (Ex.4:20 – 26)

Several finer points of this story may continue to elude us. But for the purpose of my essay, there is clarity enough. By this point in the story, God takes seriously circumcision as a mark of obedience for anyone who would claim to represent Him. Circumcision is God’s command for all men who would enter the covenant community of Abraham. Circumcision ties all of the men among God’s people back to Abraham, certainly to reflect on his story, and probably to take the same lessons to heart. Apparently, Moses had not yet circumcised his sons, and this caused God offense. Perhaps Moses did not yet identify himself fully as a Hebrew, or thought that his sons might benefit socially by remaining in the more uncommitted state of being uncircumcised, or had despaired of his association with the people of Israel. But in any case, this is the first link between circumcision and the Passover. I believe that we are being invited by narrator of the Pentateuch to see the Passover itself as an act of cutting off and cleansing similar to circumcision.

I doubt whether we can call this ‘vicarious’ bloodshed. This is *actual* bloodshed. And the motif of shedding the blood of the son – and at times one’s own blood, as with Abraham – through circumcision ties Israel literarily and thematically to the Abrahamic promise of inheriting the land as part of God’s people. First, as with Abraham, this symbolic sacrifice of the son to the Lord represents the father’s release of the son into the purposes of God. Cain’s descendant Lamech shed human blood because in Cain’s line, fathers controlled sons for their own purposes: to provide them with food, protection, retribution, vengeance, etc. By contrast, Israel shed the blood of circumcision so that fathers could *release* their sons to God for God’s purposes. Second, as also with Abraham, the shedding of Israel’s blood by Israel represents the inversion of human violence for land. Cain shed Abel’s blood and was cursed from the land. Israel would shed its own blood to inherit the land. Third, God shed innocent animal blood to cover Adam and Eve’s corrupt blood (Gen.3:21) to live life outside the garden land. But now, God sheds corrupt human blood so they can live life inside a new garden land. Something that represents human corruption must be cut away *from one’s own self* in order to enter into the identity of God’s people, and enter into the inheritance of God’s garden land. Therefore, bloodshed via circumcision was not ‘vicarious.’ It was actual, at least for Israelite males. To the extent we can connect circumcision to atonement, as various passages call us to do (Dt.30:6; Jer.4:4; 17:1 – 10; 31:31 – 34; Rom.2:28 – 29; Col.2:12), we can say that God is not ‘satisfied’ by substituting a stand-in for the party with whom He wants reconciled to Himself. Nothing will do until God cuts away the uncleanness in every person and draws them, renewed, to be one with Himself.

The Pentateuch connects Passover with circumcision in two other explicit ways. God limits the celebration of the Passover anniversary to those who are circumcised (Ex.12:43 – 48). One might argue that this is purely incidental, as circumcision came to signify those who belong to the covenant community and identify with its history. But I think it is deeper than that. More tellingly, consider the second link: the parallel between the birth of a son and the birth of Israel as a nation. In Levitical law, a new born son was to be circumcised on the eighth day (Lev.12:1 – 8).

<sup>1</sup> Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, <sup>2</sup> ‘Speak to the sons of Israel, saying: ‘When a woman gives birth and bears a male child, then she shall be unclean for seven days, as in the days of her menstruation she shall be unclean. <sup>3</sup> On the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised. <sup>4</sup> Then she shall remain in the blood of her purification for thirty-three days; she shall not touch any consecrated thing, nor enter the sanctuary until the days of her purification are completed. <sup>5</sup> But if she bears a female child, then she shall be unclean for two weeks, as in her menstruation; and she shall remain in the blood of her purification for sixty-six days. <sup>6</sup> When the days of her purification are completed, for a son or for a daughter, she shall bring to the priest at the doorway of the tent of meeting a one year old lamb for a burnt offering and a young pigeon or a turtledove for a sin offering. <sup>7</sup> Then he shall offer it before the LORD and make atonement for her, and she shall be cleansed from the flow of her blood. This is the law for her who bears a child, whether a male or a female. <sup>8</sup> But if she cannot afford a lamb, then she shall take two turtledoves or two young pigeons, the one for a burnt offering and the other for a sin offering; and the priest shall make atonement for her, and she will be clean.’ (Lev.12:1 – 8)

Now the cords of connection between the Passover and circumcision should be plainly evident. The time frames are identical. In the original Passover, for seven days prior to the day the lamb being slain, Israel was to abstain from leavened bread, according to a passage that is quite repetitious about eating only unleavened bread for that full seven days (Ex.12:14 – 20). After the original Passover, the future consequence for eating leavened bread during the holy

days of the feast of Unleavened Bread would be rather severe: ‘that person shall be cut off from Israel’ (Ex.12:15). The significance of being ‘cut off’ as a parallel to circumcision ought to be noted. God delivered Israel on the next day, the eighth day. The symmetry between Israel being cleansed by God’s command for seven days and then sacrificing a lamb while enacting a ritual with blood to be set free on the eighth day is surely meant to be connected to a baby Hebrew boy being cleansed by his association with the covenant community for seven days and then being circumcised on the eighth day. Just as every male entering the covenant community of Israel had to submit to his own blood being shed, so the marker for entering the deliverance of God out of Egypt was to shed the blood of the Passover lamb, mark the doorposts with its blood, and then walk through the blood – like a birth canal – into a new identity. This deliverance, significantly, was open to Egyptians and resulted in a mixed multitude leaving with the six hundred thousand men of Israel (Ex.12:37 – 38).

We must not read the statement in Leviticus 12 as if girls were less valuable than boys. Rather, these cleanliness laws signify something about circumcision, and Passover by virtue of its connection to circumcision. Circumcision reduces the uncleanness and impurity by half, from two weeks for a girl to one week for a boy, presuming that he is circumcised. I suggest that this ritual impurity is highlighted by the Sinai Law to illustrate the corruption in human nature. This is why a sin offering and a burnt offering are to be offered for a newborn, and why a new mother must be cleansed and atoned for simply because she gave birth. Baruch Levine says of this,

‘Ancient man seldom distinguished between ‘sin’ and ‘impurity.’ In man’s relation to God, all sinfulness produced impurity. All impurity, however contracted, could lead to sinfulness if not attended to, and failure to deal properly with impurity aroused God’s anger. The point is that the requirement to present a sin offering does not necessarily presume any offense on the part of the person so obligated. The offering was often needed solely to remove impurity. Childbirth, for example was not sinful – it involved no violation of law – yet a sin offering was required.’<sup>32</sup>

The human being is a gift from God but also a sign of contradiction (e.g. Gen.3:16 – 4:26; 5:1 – 6:8) that obscures the character of God because of the corruption of his nature, his tendency to sin, and his vulnerability and captivity to death. This new human being also misrepresents God. Hence, what was implicit with Abraham and with Moses is explicit in Leviticus when it is to be generalized for all Israelite families to follow. Circumcising a boy reduces, or takes away, his remaining ceremonial uncleanness by cutting something away. This fact therefore establishes the link between circumcision and one of the main objectives of the centralized sacrificial system: to cleanse the worshiper. I argue, further, that closer examination of the Tabernacle, the sacrificial system, and the addition of priests and sin offerings suggests that circumcision is the dominant paradigm that the sacrifices are illustrating. But I will discuss that in a later section.

Seen in this light, the Passover lamb is not a substitute for the worshipping *person*, but a substitute for his *sinfulness*. Just as circumcision aims to excise and cast something away from the man, so the Passover ceremony involving the death of the paschal lamb aimed to excise and cast something away from the person/nation. The laying on of hands, which most scholars accept as a gesture of identification and/or impartation between the human being and the animal, represents the impartation of the person’s sinfulness upon the animal, which is not corrupted by sin. But in this case, what human sin is in view?

To explain why God might have taken the firstborn of Israelite families in Egypt but for the Passover lamb, Jeffery, Ovey, and Sach reach into Ezekiel for the answer of ‘idolatry.’ It is significant that the text of Exodus does not contain this answer. By doing this, Jeffery, et.al quote from but misunderstand Ezekiel, and misconstrue Exodus as well. The text of Exodus does not tell the Israelites to say to their descendants, ‘Although we also worshiped the gods of Egypt, yet because God provided us with our Passover lamb, we escaped His wrath.’ Any such thought is remarkably absent from the Pentateuch and the Jewish Passover tradition, including Ezekiel. Instead, they were simply to interpret the Passover remembrance with this explanation:

<sup>14</sup> And it shall be when your son asks you in time to come, saying, ‘What is this?’ then you shall say to him, ‘With a powerful hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt, from the house of slavery. <sup>15</sup> It came about, when Pharaoh was stubborn about letting us go, that the LORD killed every firstborn in the land of Egypt, both the firstborn of man and the firstborn of beast. Therefore, I sacrifice to the LORD the males, the first offspring of every womb, but every firstborn of my sons I redeem.’ (Ex.13:14 – 16)

---

<sup>32</sup> Baruch Levine, *Leviticus*, JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), p.74. Cited by Helaine Ettinger, *Tazria: Our Children/God’s Children*, edited by Rabbi Elise Goldstein, The Women’s Torah Commentary (Woodstock, Vermont: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2000), p.202 – 210

After the Passover, God made His claim on the firstborn that opens every womb (Ex.13:1 – 2), which is later clarified to mean the firstborn son (Ex.13:8, 14 – 16). The connection between circumcision and sons is now expanded to include the Passover and the symbolic redemption of sons. After observing the seven-day feast of Unleavened Bread (Ex.13:6 – 8), Israel was to put to death every firstborn male animal. It was God's claim on Israel and his prerogative (Ex.13:11 – 13), clearly meant to show, among other things, that God was taking responsibility for Israel's future and their agricultural blessing and that He wanted them to trust Him. And symbolically, every Israelite family was to sacrifice its firstborn son to God as well. But while the families were to putting to death their firstborn animals, they were to redeem their human firstborn sons from death for God's service, as God redeemed Israel for His service in the Exodus.

Therefore, the specific, proximate reason for the Passover judgment on Egypt is that Pharaoh was stubborn about letting Israel go and interfered with God's claim on Israel. Egypt's actual idol-worship may have been judged by the plagues, but the death of the first born had a specific cause tied to Pharaoh. He tried to obstruct the cleansing and blessing that God wanted to accomplish in His 'firstborn son.' As God redeemed His 'firstborn son' Israel to be cleansed and serve His purposes of blessing the entire world, so each Israelite family had to perform a similar act at every subsequent Passover. They had to redeem their firstborn son to serve God's larger purposes, and in the process cleanse themselves – or at least reflect on the fact that God's constant invitation to them was to cleanse themselves – of their own sins of possession, control, parochialism, and small-heartedness. They, too, like Abraham, had to surrender their beloved sons to God. They had to submit to the judgment of God for their own cleansing.

I believe God was cleansing Israel of a similar sinful attitude that Abraham had prior to God giving him the sign of circumcision: the sinful desire to control their own sons and not release them into the wider purposes of God. Israel's context in Egypt ultimately involved the theme of sonship and the treatment of the son. The Egyptian Pharaoh refused to let Israel go free from their slavery to building cities, Pithom and Rameses (Ex.1:11). Thus, he was reenacting the sin of Cain building his city at the expense of his son Enoch. This was true enslavement. But the son in question was not the Egyptian son, but rather God's 'firstborn son,' Israel (Ex.4:22; cf. Rom.9:4). Israel is personified as a 'son' because God wanted to bestow on this 'son' an inheritance commensurate with being the 'firstborn.' That is, God wanted to give Israel a land inheritance, to fulfill His promise to Abraham. Due to Pharaoh's attempt to kill all the boys of Moses' generation, and his stubbornness at trying to keep God's firstborn son, Israel, captive, Egypt will lose all of its firstborn sons to God. Pharaoh's resistance to God was termed 'hardness of heart' and that itself has deep significance for Israel's internal problem, which Jesus would also call 'hardness of heart' (Mt.19:6), not to mention all the prophets' reference to the problems of Israel's 'heart.' Once again, there was a very real 'letting go' and 'releasing' that every Israelite family – and perhaps the father in particular – had to do. In a time and culture when a family's future was thought to be everything, and when that future was thought to rest on a first born son, God was exerting His claim on each family to release their future to Him for the sake of the wider world. This was a very practical heart-level lesson that was meant to prepare Israel to leave the Promised Land under the Messiah and be his ambassadors to the Gentile world. And it was meant to help Israel understand the person and work of the Messiah as well, as I will discuss below.

Ezekiel saw that the idolatry in Egypt needed to be cleansed out of Israel, because *it eventually led to child sacrifice of their firstborn in the wilderness in that very passage* (Ezk.20:26) and others (Ezk.16:21, 45; 23:39), perhaps because all false gods eventually demand child sacrifice. Ezekiel first narrates the idolatry of the Israelites in Egypt and God's merciful decision to bring them out of Egypt anyway (Ezk.20:4 – 10). Next, Ezekiel narrates the wilderness episode of the first generation of Israelites, their sin and God's perseverance with them (Ezk.20:11 – 17). Then, Ezekiel speaks of the second generation of Israelites, their sin and God's perseverance with them (Ezk.20:18 – 22), including God's promise to send them into exile among the nations because:

<sup>20:26</sup> I pronounced them unclean because of their gifts, in that they caused all their firstborn to pass through the fire so that I might make them desolate, in order that they might know that I am the LORD. (Ezk.20:26)

Ezekiel's historical memory about Israel performing child sacrifice in the wilderness is corroborated by Amos in Amos 5:25 – 27 and Luke through the speech of Stephen in Acts 7:39 – 43. This was what God was trying to purge out of Israel. Nowhere does Ezekiel suggest that the Passover ritual served as a penal substitute for Israel's sin. Rather, the Passover served to warn Israel against child sacrifice, which was in principle the same sin that Pharaoh committed: the sin of oppressing and eventually killing the firstborn son. Thus, in the process of living through the Passover, and remembering the Passover throughout the centuries, Israel was supposed to go through a cleansing. God was 'circumcising' Israel, calling Israel to reflect on the sin of Pharaoh, so they might cut off their own tendency to sin in that particular way. I will show in the next section how the Pentateuch demonstrates the insufficiency of the Passover and Exodus to stimulate faith and obedience in Israel. So it seems to me that Jeffery, Ovey, and Sach are putting words into both Moses' mouth and Ezekiel's.

When we step back to examine the placement of Passover among the annual Mosaic feasts, we find this interpretation of Passover corroborated, along with the ontological substitution theory. In Deuteronomy 15:19 – 16:17, Moses commanded the Israelites to travel three times a year to the place where God would later put His name: Jerusalem. The three Jerusalem feasts were Unleavened Bread/Passover, Weeks/Pentecost, Booths/Tabernacles. God's summons for Israel to meet Him at the Temple on Mount Zion prefigured the triple-layered meaning of the union of God and humanity in the true Temple, Jesus Christ. The Feast of Unleavened Bread/Passover signified cleansing by death and resurrection by union with Christ, represented by cleansing from leaven and passage into new life through the innocent blood of the Passover lamb. The Feast of Weeks/Pentecost signified the bestowal of the Spirit, represented in Israel's calendar by reaping the fruit of creation's harvest (Dt.16:9). The Feast of Booths/Tabernacles signified God's accompaniment with His people in mission to the world in a new kind of 'wilderness phase' prior to the promised land inheritance (1 Cor.6:18 – 20; 10:1 – 13), represented by the Israelites dwelling not in houses but in the more vulnerable tents of the wilderness wandering, when God also tabernacled with them in a tent and dwelled with them. In the life of Israel and of Jesus, these 'moments' were chronologically separated. But in the life of the Christian, they are chronologically simultaneous but logically sequenced. The pilgrimages to draw near to God in the Temple would become a reflection of union with God in the physical body of Jesus. The motif of removal of uncleanness represented by de-leavening the diet and life of the Israelite is thematically akin to circumcision. The Feast of Unleavened Bread/Passover logically undergirds the other two experiences.

For now, I believe I have firmly tied the circumcision to the Passover. To corroborate my analysis of the Pentateuch and my proposal that the Passover was God's judgment on Israel for cleansing, I turn now to the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 5. The passage is worth quoting in its entirety:

<sup>5:1</sup> It is actually reported that there is immorality among you, and immorality of such a kind as does not exist even among the Gentiles, that someone has his father's wife. <sup>2</sup> You have become arrogant and have not mourned instead, so that the one who had done this deed would be removed from your midst. <sup>3</sup> For I, on my part, though absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged him who has so committed this, as though I were present. <sup>4</sup> In the name of our Lord Jesus, when you are assembled, and I with you in spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus, <sup>5</sup> I have decided to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. <sup>6</sup> Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough? <sup>7</sup> Clean out the old leaven so that you may be a new lump, just as you are in fact unleavened. For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed. <sup>8</sup> Therefore let us celebrate the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. <sup>9</sup> I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people; <sup>10</sup> I did not at all mean with the immoral people of this world, or with the covetous and swindlers, or with idolaters, for then you would have to go out of the world. <sup>11</sup> But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he is an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler--not even to eat with such a one. <sup>12</sup> For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within the church? <sup>13</sup> But those who are outside, God judges. Remove the wicked man from among yourselves. (1 Cor.5:1 – 13)

If the atonement consisted of penal substitution, then Paul's comments would be very difficult to understand indeed. For what would be his purpose in making that point now? Contrary to Jeffery, Ovey, and Sach, in this context where Paul is addressing a man who was having sexual relations with his stepmother, he does not suddenly talk about the wrath of God being diverted onto Jesus instead of the Christians. They simply assume that this is what he means by his mention of 'Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed,' but that is the very thing I am questioning. Not only does Paul avoid that kind of language, but what he does say does not connect at all with any ideas associated with penal substitution or orbiting around it. Paul does not, for example, develop a framework for Christian motivation from penal substitution, that out of gratitude for Christ paying their debt or taking their punishment, they should do this or that. That is not how Paul understands Jesus being the true paschal lamb. Nor does the psychological 'debt-forgiveness' or 'judicial forgiveness' motivation that penal substitution advocates tend to use square up well with how Paul actually gives a framework for Christian motivation based on one's own participation in Christ Jesus (e.g. Rom.6:1 – 11). Nor does penal substitution offer a compelling explanation for why delivering this man to Satan for the destruction of his flesh but, hopefully, later salvation fits with its theory of atonement.

To Paul, the cleansing of the Christian body at Corinth is similar to the cleansing of the Israelite community through the feast of Unleavened Bread. This is clear from his references to 'a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough' (1 Cor.5:6) and his command to 'clean out the old leaven' (1 Cor.5:7). In those two verses, he parallels the Corinthians *to the bread itself*. This means, of course, that they should remove the unrepentant man from times of

sacred worship where the unity of the church was expressed, such as at communion; view him as ineligible for leadership roles; and regard him as an unbeliever who needs to be reevangelized (e.g. Mt.18:15 – 17). Paul’s short and puzzling statement, ‘For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed’ (1 Cor.5:7b), is sandwiched in between his references to the feast of Unleavened Bread on either side. After this, Paul returns to the imagery of Israel celebrating the feast of Unleavened Bread, but this time the Corinthians are *the celebrants*, not the bread: ‘Therefore let us celebrate the feast, not with old leaven...but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth’ (5:8). Why does he use the imagery of these two feasts? And why does he happily jumble the analogy?

It makes far more sense within the ontological substitution atonement model to use this imagery. For if the atonement consisted of Jesus cleansing his own humanity of sin, as the true unleavened bread and as the true Passover lamb, putting it ultimately to death so he could raise up a cleansed human body and a God-fulfilled human nature in his resurrection, then it makes perfect, linear, logical sense that the body of Christ – that is, Christians – need to follow suit and live in that reality by removing the unrepentant man. Jesus’ cleansing of his personal body necessitates the cleansing of his corporate body.<sup>33</sup>

Paul in 1 Corinthians 5 does not use the Passover lamb as an image of Jesus being a penal substitute, but of a combination of the Passover lamb *and the unleavened bread* which must be internalized. The two feasts were already seen in the Old Testament as virtually identical (Ezk.46:21), so this pairing should not be difficult to understand. Actually, Paul conflates all three Passover feasts – Unleavened Bread, Passover, and Firstfruits – as he explains the work of Jesus. Later he speaks of ‘Christ our firstfruits’ because of his bodily resurrection (1 Cor.15:20). As with the unleavened bread and the firstfruits, Christ is also the lamb who has been internalized and must be internalized again – eaten and consumed, partaken of and shared. The Corinthians had a corresponding action to take. They had sin (leaven) in the midst of their community, their body. Christ is our true unleavened bread because he cleansed himself from sin, died to eliminate the corruption (leaven) from within his own humanity, and rose to offer us a new and cleansed (unleavened) humanity. Jesus treated his own divine-human union as a lump of dough out of which he removed the yeast of sin. Jesus also treated his own body as a Passover lamb by dying to circumcise the corruption of sin out of himself, and mark a way through his blood for us to be cleansed also. To eat of him – that is, to internalize his Spirit – is therefore to experience God’s deliverance from sin ourselves, personally. And Jesus became our firstfruits in his resurrection, which we can enjoy and participate in by the Spirit. Paul is therefore telling the Corinthians to be a clean community (an unleavened lump of dough) in 5:5 – 6, and then implicitly to celebrate again the achievement of Jesus through the image of feasting on him, as he is the cleansed, leaven-free bread and spotless lamb.

I therefore conclude that Paul’s logic and rhetoric behind breaking Christian fellowship with this man and treating him as an unbeliever does not involve penal substitution logic, but ontological substitution logic: Jesus’ cleansing of his own body is to be matched by the church cleansing its own body, for it is, in reality, Jesus’ body.

I would also like to address the claim of Jeffery, Ovey, and Sach that John in his Gospel sees Jesus as a penal substitute in Passover terms. Simply because John makes very rich literary connections between Jesus and the Passover lamb does not mean that the Pentateuch or John’s Gospel regards penal substitution as the mechanism for Jesus’ atonement. Rather, I think the textual evidence overwhelmingly points us towards ontological substitution. Jesus brought about a new, cleansed humanity in himself, which he shares by his Spirit, which John highlights by using the literary frameworks of new creation and new exodus.

First, let me highlight John’s overarching allusion to the Exodus.

<b>Israel’s First Exodus</b>	<b>Israel’s New Exodus</b>
Name of God revealed: “I AM”	Name of Jesus: “I AM” – Ten times? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I am the bread of life (6:35)</li> <li>• I am the light of the world (8:12)</li> <li>• Before Abraham was, I am (8:58)</li> <li>• I am the door (10:7)</li> <li>• I am the good shepherd (10:11)</li> <li>• I am the resurrection and the life (11:25)</li> <li>• I am the way, the truth, and the life (14:6)</li> <li>• I am the true vine (15:1)</li> <li>• I am (18:5)</li> <li>• I told you that I am (18:8)</li> </ul>

<sup>33</sup> In Colossians 2:11, Paul speaks of ‘the circumcision of Christ,’ which I take to mean Christ’s spiritual circumcision of his own heart to excise and cast away the corruption that was in him. I will comment more on that particular thought in Colossians later.

Ten Miracles of Death Un-Creating Egypt and Creating Israel <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• First Miracle: Water to Blood</li> <li>• Last Miracle: Death of First Born Sons</li> </ul>	Seven Miracles of Life <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• First Miracle: Water to Wine</li> <li>• Last Miracle: Raising of a First Born Son, Lazarus</li> </ul>
Passover Lamb <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One lamb per household</li> <li>• Surrounded by bitter herbs</li> <li>• Bones not broken</li> <li>• Pierced</li> </ul>	Passover Lamb <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Jesus is the Lamb of God (Jn.1:29, 36)</li> <li>• Surrounded by three women all named Mary, meaning 'bitter' (Jn.19:25)</li> <li>• Bones not broken (Jn.19:33, 36)</li> <li>• He was pierced (Jn.19:34, 37)</li> </ul>
Deliverance from Egypt <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Blessing of Peace/Shalom</li> </ul>	Deliverance from Sin <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Blessing of Peace/Shalom (Jn.20:19, 21)</li> <li>• Forgiveness of Sins (Jn.20:22-23)</li> </ul>
Identity as the Covenant Community <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Israel becomes God's first-born adopted son (Ex.4:22)</li> <li>• New Family</li> </ul>	Identity as the New Covenant Community <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Believers in Jesus are adopted by God (Jn.20:17)</li> <li>• New Family: John and Mary are now son and mother (Jn.19:26-27)</li> </ul>

But in what sense was Jesus a Passover lamb? How exactly did John think that the atonement 'worked' or 'works'?

The earliest reference in John's Gospel comparing Jesus to the paschal lamb is found on the lips of John the Baptist, who says, 'Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world' (Jn.1:29, 36). The introduction, notably, does *not* say, 'Behold the Lamb of God, who absorbs or turns away from us the wrath of God.' The distinction is subtle but very significant. It is a clue that does not fit as comfortably within the penal substitution framework.

John's Gospel overwhelmingly repeats the theme of cleansing. Shortly after the 'Lamb of God' statements in 1:29 and 36, which occur in connection with baptism, itself a motif of cleansing, what should appear in John's narrative but the stone jars of purification in 2:6? The stone jars, which would have been ruined by the placement of wine in them, find their fulfillment by becoming vessels of overflowing wine at the enacted echo of the messianic wedding feast (2:1 – 11). The stone jars are also connected literarily to the stone Temple in Jerusalem (2:12 – 25). Since the jars were used for purification, it stands to reason that the Temple was also designed for purification, and would similarly be exhausted by the presence of Jesus filling it. Cleansing is implicit again in Jesus' dialogue with Nicodemus, when Jesus speaks of new birth through water and Spirit (3:1 – 10), especially in contrast with another mention of 'flesh' (3:6). Cleansing through the motif of water is also implicit in the transformation of the Samaritan woman (4:1 – 42). It is also implied in Jesus' teaching on coming out from the tombs (5:21 – 29), since death was understood to be a type of uncleanness. The theme of death to life emerges after an interlude when Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead (11:1 – 44). Then, Jesus lifts and basin and towel to wash his disciples' feet (13:1 – 35) to model love and service but to also discuss his carrying of his human nature back to the Father (14:1 – 21), which means reciprocally the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples, so that Jesus can be with his disciples by the Spirit, and vice versa; they can be with him by the Spirit. But Jesus' action carries with it the meaning that he is the servant who washes the feet (and more) of all who enter the Father's house (14:1 – 3). For all who desire to enter the Father's house, the true Temple, must in reality enter into Jesus himself by the Spirit. When we cleanse or purify someone, our wrath (so to speak) does not burn against the personhood of people, but against the dirt and impurity.

Near the end of the narrative, Jesus again draws Passover motifs into the service of cleansing and purification. Jesus declared his thirst, which caused someone to lift a hyssop branch to him. Hyssop branches were used at Passover to place the blood of the lamb onto the doorposts (Ex.12:22). This is one more indication that Passover lamb imagery is being applied to Jesus. But this time it is happening, I believe, in conjunction with his earlier saying, 'I am the door' (Jn.10:7). He is being marked as the door through whom all may enter, and participate in him, in his personal deliverance through death and resurrection. The Passover lamb imagery is already very strong in John 19: three 'bitter herbs' (three women named Mary, which means 'bitter') surround him; his bones are not broken; he was pierced; even quotations from the Psalms of King David suggesting that David thought of himself as a 'Passover lamb' of sorts. Therefore, Jesus calls for our *participation* in his death and resurrection, in much the same way as Paul's union with Christ language would suggest. Penal substitution advocates have tried to hold

together the idea that ‘Jesus died instead of us’ with the idea that ‘we die and rise with Jesus,’ but there are basic logical, pastoral, and rhetorical problems that arise here.<sup>34</sup>

So how did Jesus take away the sin of the world? Was Jesus the passive recipient of the wrath of God? It seems much more responsible to say, in accordance with the narrative of John, that Jesus overcame ‘the flesh’ (*sarx*) he had taken to himself and cleansed his human nature. In his introduction, John notes that the Word united himself to human ‘flesh’ (Jn.1:14) and presumably began to heal it from within. John does not simply say that the Word became ‘a man’ (*anthropos*) or ‘a body’ (*soma*). Instead, when describing the incarnation, John says that the Word took on ‘flesh’ (*sarx*). ‘Flesh’ was potentially a very negative term to describe humanity in Greco-Roman and Jewish contexts.<sup>35</sup> For example, Paul wrote, ‘I know that no good dwells in me, that is in my *flesh*’ (Rom.7:18). By using this term, Paul appears to indicate not our physical materiality, which God affirmed from creation as being very good, but the corruption within our human nature, which was originally good but was marred by the fall. Similarly, the Hellenistic Jewish commentator Philo Judaeus, a contemporary with both Jesus and John, wrote:

‘It is impossible for the Spirit of God to remain and to pass all its time, as the law-giver himself shows. “For,” says Moses, “the Lord said, My Spirit shall not remain among men forever, because they are *flesh*.” For, at times, it does remain; but it does not remain forever and ever among the greater part of us; for who is so destitute of reason or so lifeless as never, either voluntarily or involuntarily, to conceive a notion of the all good God. For, very often, even over the most *polluted* and accursed beings, there hovers a sudden appearance of the good, but they are unable to take firm hold of it and to keep it among them; for almost immediately, it quits its former place and departs, rejecting those inhabitants who come over to it, and who live in defiance of law and justice, to whom it never would have come if it had not been for the sake of convicting those who choose what is disgraceful instead of what is good.’<sup>36</sup>

I have italicized the words ‘flesh’ and ‘polluted’ to highlight the connection between the terms that existed in Philo’s mind: because of a corruption that has set into humanity, God’s Spirit would not abide forever. This is Philo’s explanation of Genesis 6:3, where God, before the flood, speaks of limiting the life of humanity. Thus, the apostle John appears to have chosen the most negative and provocative way to describe Jesus’ incarnation. He chose the word that connotes the tainted ontological nature of humanity. By taking on this *sarx*, forcing it into compliance with his own will, forcing it to be transparent to the love of God (‘I only do what I see my Father doing’, etc.), passionately struggling against it (John’s parallel to the Synoptics’ Gethsemane story is Jesus angrily weeping by the tomb of Lazarus in John 11 because he knows that he too will taste death), and ultimately putting this *sarx* to death in an act of purification, Jesus cleanses his humanity of it. Thus, when he shares his Spirit after his resurrection, it is a purified humanity he shares by the Spirit. Sharing in Jesus’ own personal purification is what liberates the disciples

---

<sup>34</sup> The question comes in how one can integrate penal substitution, with all of its attendant implications, and union with Christ, with all of its implications. The question may be stated this way: When a pastor, preacher, or friend speaks to another Christian, and tries to exhort and encourage said Christian to grow in Christ and not sin, what motivational language should they use? Should they say, ‘Jesus died instead of you to take the wrath of God, therefore you ought to...’ as in penal substitution? Or should they say, ‘You have died and risen with Christ, therefore you are now different’ as in union with Christ? Who died and when? Is it up to the person doing the encouraging and teaching to decide which logic to use? And here is the logical and pastoral problem. Some take penal substitution logic to apply to Christians throughout their whole lives, thinking that only a proper reverence for God’s holiness-justice-wrath will produce fruitful obedience. In this view, human motivation must be rooted in a sense of debt-forgiveness and/or legal-penal-forgiveness because apparently Christ died instead of us to satisfy our debt to God and/or criminal sentence levied by God. Often the assumption is that Christians do not want to mature spiritually and therefore must be reminded of Jesus’ sacrifice. It is a psychological motivation in response to an event external to the person. But is this Paul’s motivational language? It would not appear so according to, say, Romans 6 – 8, 2 Corinthians 1 – 5, Galatians 4, Ephesians 1:15 – 6:20, and Colossians 1 – 3, where Paul says we have died and risen with Christ, therefore have a new identity that undergirds Christian worship, morality, ethics, and spiritual warfare. If we go with Paul’s pastoral language and use union with Christ, then is penal substitution to be used only with non-Christians? Why then did he not use that language in Acts where he places all his weight on Jesus’ resurrection (Acts 13:13 – 42; 14:14 – 17; 17:22 – 31; 22:1 – 21; 23:1 – 12; 24:10 – 21; 26:1 – 23)? Only Acts 20:28 could be construed to be a penal substitution text, but the phrase ‘purchased with his own blood’ can be understood in an ontological substitution sense, where it would refer to Jesus’ shaping of a new humanity through his life, death, and resurrection, and offered to his people through the Spirit, and not necessarily a penal substitution sense where his life paid a ransom to God. And in any case, Acts 20:28 occurs in a context with Christian elders, not non-Christians. The evidence that Paul used penal substitution language anywhere tends to be restricted to Romans 3:21 – 26, Galatians 3:13, 1 Corinthians 6:20, 2 Corinthians 5:21, Ephesians 1:6 – 8, and Acts 20:28, but, needless to say, the meaning of those texts is vigorously debated because Paul does not extrapolate from there the conclusions that many penal substitution advocates have made.

<sup>35</sup> N.T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, Book I (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), p.490 – 492, says, ‘The ‘flesh,’ however, though itself neither good nor bad, comes to connote the whole human being seen from the angle of being essentially corruptible, decaying, a quintessence of dust that has no permanence or stability. Paul’s critique of ‘works of the flesh’ and the ‘mind of the flesh’ is thereby linked with his critique of idolatry: ‘flesh’ draws attention to the creaturely existence which, owing its life to God the creator, has none in itself apart from him. That is near the heart of Paul’s analysis of ‘sin’ seen as a human propensity and action.’

<sup>36</sup> Philo, ‘On the Giants,’ *Commentary on Genesis*, V.19 – 21.

from the dominion of Satan and sin and death. We will explore this connection between Passover in the Old Testament and Jesus' portrayal as a Passover Lamb in the New.

#### **Theme #4: The Bronze Serpent and the Passover**

Fourth, to develop further my argument regarding John's Gospel and the Pentateuch simultaneously, I will examine the incident of Moses holding up the bronze serpent (Num.21:4 – 9) in the book of Numbers and in the Pentateuch as a whole as a motif of atonement. Sailhamer again makes very intriguing observations.<sup>37</sup> He argues for a literary symmetry between Exodus 1 and Numbers 22. Israel is called a 'mighty nation' in Exodus 1:9 and Numbers 22:3 and 6.<sup>38</sup> This refers to their sheer numbers, and it provoked fear in Pharaoh of Egypt and Balak of Moab, respectively. Both Gentile rulers tried to harm Israel in response, preventing Israel from leaving for the Promised Land (Ex.1:10) or finally entering the Promised Land (Num.22:6). So both Pharaoh and Balak/Balaam are powerful Gentile figures that initially oppose Israel and God's purposes for the people. As Sailhamer notes, both Pharaoh and Balak made three attempts to counteract God's blessing and decrease the population of Israel. Pharaoh appointed slave masters over the Israelites to enslave them (Ex.1:11 – 14); issued a command to all Hebrew midwives to kill all the male children (Ex.1:15 – 21), and then commanded every male child be thrown into the Nile (Ex.1:22). Balak made three attempts to curse Israel through the lips of the enigmatic Gentile prophet Balaam (Num.23:1 – 12; 23:13 -26; 23:27 – 24:9) but each attempt to enlist Balaam to speak a curse was reversed and turned to a blessing (Num.23:11 – 12; 23:25 – 26; 24:10 – 11). After Pharaoh's third attempt, a deliverer (Moses) rose from Israel to deliver them (Ex.2ff.). After Balak/Balaam's third attempt a prophecy is given of a deliverer ('the star out of Jacob') who will rise from Israel to deliver them from their enemies (Num.24:15 – 19), presumably like unto Moses but even greater, for this prophecy uses the same language Jacob did in his prophecy of the king who will come out of the tribe of Judah (Gen.49:8 – 12). Pharaoh was 'hardened' (Ex.7:14; 8:11, 28; 9:7; 10:1; 14:4) whereas Balak promised to 'honor' or 'reward' the seer Balaam (22:17, 37; 24:11). The words for 'hardened' and 'honored-rewarded,' interestingly enough, share the same Hebrew root word.

This literary placement is surely not accidental. There can be little doubt that the selection and arrangement of all this material is part of the author's conscious intention. Sailhamer suggests that this should draw our attention to the narrative section of Exodus 16 – Numbers 21. That may very well be *part* of the author's intention. But I believe that a greater case can be made for paralleling the two incidents so that the deliverance of the first generation of Israelites from Egypt in Exodus 1ff. is paralleled to the deliverance of the second generation of Israelites from the wilderness in Numbers 18ff. Here is why I believe that.

#### *Chiastic Structure of Numbers 1 – 36*

1. God numbers Israel for the camp and Tabernacle (Num.1 – 10); first generation
2. Plague breaks out due to complaining about not having meat (Num.11)
3. God defends Moses' leadership (Num.12)
4. Spies see the land of Canaan; two have faith; Moses intercedes for Israel; Canaanites beat Israelites; Temple sacrifices and teaching are given, presumably as part of the response (Num.13 – 15)
5. Korah leads rebellion against Moses; God punishes it; reaffirms Aaron (Num.16 – 17)
6. Aaron's sons must 'bear the guilt' for the sanctuary (Num.18)
- 6'. Red heifer ashes and water to cleanse the people from contact with death of the first generation of Israelites (Num.19)
- 5'. Miriam dies; Moses and Aaron rebel against God and misrepresent God to the second generation of Israelites; God declares Moses' death; Aaron dies (Num.20); shift from Moses and Aaron to the priests to mediate the covenant
- 4'. Israel defeats Canaanites; people complain; serpents strike Israel; Moses lifts bronze serpent for healing through faith; more preliminary victories over Canaanite enemies (Num.21)
- 3'. God defends Israel from Balaam's curse; hope for Messiah (Num.22 – 24)
- 2'. Plague breaks out due to worshiping Baal of Peor (Num.25)
- 1'. God numbers Israel for inheriting the land and cities of Canaan (Num.26 – 36); second generation

The symmetry of Numbers is worth a lengthy explanation in itself. I hope that my basic outline will suffice for this purpose. The parallels seem clear: the numbering of the camp at the beginning and the end (1 and 1'); the plagues (2 and 2'); the leadership questions (3 and 3'); the issue of despair and faithlessness upon seeing the Promised Land

<sup>37</sup> John H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), p.41 – 44

<sup>38</sup> NASB translates this 'mightier' in Ex.1:9 and 'numerous' in Num.22:3 and 'mighty' in Num.22:6.

remedied by Moses' direct intercession and later the despair and faithlessness as they fight some Canaanites in the wilderness remedied by the bronze serpent (4 and 4'); the rebellions and deaths (5 and 5'). The turning point of the narrative of Numbers involves the establishment of priestly continuity through the sons of Aaron, and the unusual ceremony of the red heifer, which purified Israel from its contact with death. This turning point meant that the role of priestly mediator shifts from the larger-than-life personalities of Moses and Aaron to the institutional priesthood. This is important because immediately afterwards, all of the first generation of Israel's larger-than-life leaders die: Miriam, Aaron, and Moses will soon follow (Num.20). By the end of Numbers, we find an accounting of the second generation of Israelites in the camp, compared to the first generation of Israelites in the camp. Only Caleb and Joshua will remain from the first generation to enter the Promised Land, with Moses' death to come quickly. Thus, I believe that the Passover-Exodus deliverance of the first generation of Israelites from Egypt is to be compared with the cleansing of the second generation of Israelites in the wilderness. In fact, the narrative suggests that in the wilderness, God is delivering the second generation of Israelites out from the sin, faithlessness, complaints, and despair of the first.

Both the red heifer and the bronze serpent recall the Passover lamb and Exodus deliverance. God ordered the red heifer procedure to handle the deaths of the first generation of Israelites, given that God's holy presence in the Tabernacle made death a special complication and contaminating factor. The person who touched a dead body or grave or tent where someone died became impure for seven days (Num.19:11 – 16), just as Israel had to cleanse itself from leaven for seven days in Egypt. Hyssop was used in both ceremonies: Eleazar the priest was to burn hyssop with the red heifer to make an ash and water combination (Num.19:1 – 10), and apply the water using hyssop to cleanse a person who has touched a dead body (Num.19:17 – 19), just as the Israelite family was to use hyssop to apply the blood of the lamb to the doorposts in Passover. One heifer was used for all affected people for simplicity's sake. The color red was used because of its connection with blood. Blood was associated with both the death of the uncleanness that was symbolically killed with the animal, and for the life of the animal released by its death, which then was available to cleanse the Israelites.

The bronze serpent also looks backward to the Passover. On Pharaoh's royal headdress was a serpent, and Moses' first miraculous sign involved the defeat of the Egyptian serpent which symbolically represented the forces preventing Israel from leaving for the Promised Land. This connection was surely meant to be a figurative expression of victory and a sign of God's victory over Pharaoh concerning the fate of Israel (Ex.4:1 – 5; 7:8 – 11). So also the bronze serpent lifted up in the wilderness represented a poison or venom that had infected the first generation of Israelites, despite the fact that God had delivered them from Egypt. The fact that this episode in Numbers comes right before Balaam's oracles of Israel's final deliverer (Num.22 – 24), symmetrically arrayed in my proposed chiasm to parallel Moses as Israel's first deliverer (Num.12), is also very important, as is the fact that it straddles the period when the first generation of Israelites are dying in the wilderness, beginning with Miriam and Aaron and soon, Moses (Num.20); the second generation of Israelites were readying themselves by faith in God to march into the land without their greatest heroes. Israel's hope and faith were being clarified. Israel, in effect, is being cleansed, renewed, and forgiven. Once again, the twin themes at the heart of the atonement – cleansing and forgiveness – are not to be separated, which penal substitution advocates inexplicably do. In fact, ontological priority is given to cleansing, and forgiveness follows.

The healing brought about by the bronze serpent (Num.21:4 – 9) is paralleled to the earlier intercession of Moses (Num.14:13 – 19), who has sinned and will soon no longer be with the people. Thus, both incidents involve atonement in principle, even though the word 'atonement' is not present in the narratives. In both cases, Israel complains and despairs of being in the wilderness. The provocations are similar:

'Would that we had died in the land of Egypt! Or would that we had died in this wilderness! Why is the LORD bringing us into this land, to fall by the sword? Our wives and our little ones will become plunder; would it not be better for us to return to Egypt?' (Num.14:2 – 3)

'Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we loathe this miserable food.' (Num.21:5)

However, the immediate contexts do differ with respect to some elements. In the earlier incident, the Israelite spies spied out the land and returned with news. The people, lacking the necessary faith, despair. In response, God delayed Israel's entrance into the Promised Land until the first generation of Israelites died in the wilderness. In the later incident, the Israelites won a preliminary battle against the Canaanite king of Arad at Hormah, then complain about having to wander in the wilderness still longer. In response, God sent fiery serpents among the people to bite them; many died. The people confessed their sin to Moses and asked him to 'intercede' for them (Num.21:7). God then gave Moses the instruction to lift a bronze serpent on a pole so that people could look at it with faith in God and

be healed. This parallelism is significant. In the earlier incident, Moses' words of intercession were enough to prevent God from wiping out the people of Israel and starting over with him. God accepted Moses' faith as a proxy for the lack of faith by all the rest of the people. But as the narrative looks forward towards the day when Moses will die and no longer be with the people, a different form of intercession appears. Thus in Numbers 21, God did not invite Moses to pray on the people's behalf. Instead, He used a peculiar method that required each individual to look for herself or himself at the bronze serpent. The importance of each person's faith was more important in the second episode. God was apparently sensitizing the second generation of Israelites to the importance of each person's personal conviction and faith.

Furthermore, the narrative draws the reader's attention back even further to the 'poison' of the most ancient serpent which tempted Eve and Adam and led them into rebellion against God (Gen.3:1 – 8), which drew the curtain of the original Garden Land against them. The repetition of the literary motif of the serpent all the way back to the fall of Adam and Eve cannot be overlooked, for this reveals to us something about the nature of sin, the corruption in human nature, and the ontological healing and cleansing – not merely a legal-penal forgiveness as a declaration over their heads – that God would need to bring about on behalf of humanity. In the Exodus deliverance from Egypt, Israel had been externally freed from the serpentine rule of Pharaoh, who wanted to prevent them from receiving God's blessing of the Promised Land. But the episode in Numbers shows that Israel had still not been truly freed from the internal serpentine poison of unbelief and faithlessness and personal resistance to God, which threatened to stop them from receiving God's blessing of the Promised Land once again. The fact that the motif of the serpent is used in the deliverance of the first generation of Israelites from Egypt and also in the deliverance of the second generation of Israelites from crippling unbelief, is a commentary on something more deeply wrong with human nature, induced by the original serpent of old, who did not want humanity to live in the original Garden Land. That serpent's power, lurking behind both moments, must be defeated, and, like the bronze serpent hung on a pole by a dying deliverer, must be hung on a pole by another deliverer. The serpent's poisonous lie, which still dwells in human nature, must be undone and cleansed by that one, the one who will come like a star out of Jacob.

The multiple levels of parallelism here are instructive. My argument about the bronze serpent lends even more weight to my earlier argument that the Passover was a cleansing of Israel through a judgment on the nation, not a forgiveness of Israel by drawing God's judgment onto the lamb through a legal fiction. It bears repeating that when Jesus referred to the episode of Moses lifting the bronze serpent, this fit right into John's wider theme of Jesus being a paschal lamb; this intentional parallel by Jesus coincides very well with my own theory that the author of the Pentateuch already saw the parallel between the paschal lamb for the first generation of Israelites and the bronze serpent for the second. Even more significant for my case, moreover, that the ontological substitution atonement theory is the theory that better fits the biblical data than penal substitution, are the mechanics of the bronze serpent episode. The people were already poisoned and were dying, so this was not about a punishment looming in the future, but rather a problem that was already unfolding and affecting everyone. What was mounted on a pole was not a bronze image of an Israelite, but a bronze image of the source of the poison. In other words, the bronze serpent did not symbolize God's judgment on the sinful Israelite who complained and muttered against God and Moses in the wilderness; rather, it symbolized the poison *within* the Israelite. Thus, it can be conceptually connected to *circumcision*, the excising away of something unclean within the person, to cleanse the whole person, like the whole experience of the Passover can be understood also. When Jesus used the bronze serpent as an image for himself on the cross, in one of the clearest statements of atonement in John's Gospel, he seemed to be saying that on the cross, his 'flesh,' the corrupted human nature which he shared with all other human beings, would be judged by God and expunged of its corruption. He was bearing the poison within his own body, then, as Israel's final deliverer. Jesus was therefore not using a penal substitution image. He was using an ontological substitution image.

Central to understanding John's own atonement theory is the interpretation of John chapters 2 and 3. As penal substitution proponents argue, the Temple sacrifices represented a 'penal substitute' symbolically. John's own understanding of the Temple's purpose appears to undermine that interpretation. How? In John 2, there are literary and conceptual links made between the miracle at Cana (Jn.2:1 – 12) and the cleansing of the Temple (Jn.2:13 – 25). (1) At Cana, the miracle happened on the third day. At the Temple cleansing, Jesus points to a miracle yet to happen on the third day. (2) Both occur in the joining of two: marriage joins two people, the Temple joins God with humanity, heaven with earth. (3) In both cases, something good is being made into something better, and both symbolize the filling of humanity by the Holy Spirit in the body of Jesus. The six stone jars filled with wine represented the Spirit within Jesus (notice the chain of communication about Jesus which flows from John the Baptist to the first two disciples to the next two disciples in 1:35 – 51 is mirrored by the chain of communication about Jesus which flows from Mary to the servants in 2:5). The presence of God in the Temple also represented the physical body of Jesus, as Jesus himself indicates when he says, 'Destroy this temple and I will raise it up in three days' (Jn.2:19 – 22). (4) Both involve stone instruments of purification: the stone jars of purification at Cana, the stone Temple at Jerusalem. (5) At Cana, the stone jars of 'purification' (Jn.2:6) are ruined by being filled with wine, as

they could no longer be used to hold the waters of purification. At Jerusalem, Jesus implies that the Temple is ruined because its purpose has been fulfilled by him; he is the new Temple containing truly the presence of God. (6) Thus, in both cases, something depleted or exhausted is being transplanted by something full. I would argue that this link between the stone jars and the stone Temple is intentional in John, and it substantiates my argument that the Temple sacrifices were not ‘penal’ in their symbolism. They served as symbols of ‘purification.’ Of course, there was an element of God’s judgment and the putting of something to death. How else could purification occur? But the Temple sacrifices were not substitutes for the *worshiper*; they were representatives of the worshiper’s *sinful nature*, which then was consumed by God. Thus, the Temple sacrifices did not symbolically pay the human side of sin’s penalty; they symbolized the cleansing of humanity which God would enact in Jesus.

In John 3 with his conversation with Nicodemus, Jesus returns to motifs of atonement. As I argued above, the bronze serpent lifted up in the wilderness in Numbers 21 is also an act of God’s medical purification of Israel, not a penal image, and Jesus’ invocation of that episode as an analogue for his own death only strengthens my case here. Jesus’ controversial act of clearing the Temple made the authorities spring into action. Nicodemus, ‘the teacher of Israel’ in Jesus’ own words, a member of the Sanhedrin, the ruling court of the Jews, tried to broker a deal with Jesus. Nicodemus came at night to apparently negotiate with Jesus, as one powerful person to another. He probably wanted to keep the Sanhedrin in power, the Temple in order, his career in place, and the Romans happy. He wanted to entreat Jesus to not be a political or military threat. So Nicodemus does not want to testify about Jesus, like John the Baptist did to his two disciples (Jn.1:35 – 37), like Andrew did with Simon Peter (Jn.1:40 – 42), and like Philip did with Nathanael (Jn.1:43 – 51), the servants at the wedding by the direction of Mary (Jn.2:5), or the Samaritan woman would do later with her village (Jn.4:28 – 29, 42). Nicodemus did not want to lose his position by affirming Jesus’ identity. So the physical setting of night becomes a symbol for understanding that Nicodemus was also in spiritual darkness.

Jesus had no qualms about challenging this senior statesman. Since the Hebrew Scriptures were the common foundation between them, the discussion unfolds as between two rabbis. Jesus speaks of being ‘born again’ and ‘born from above’, which aside from being deliberately provocative to the aging Nicodemus, accompany the mention of ‘water and Spirit’ (Jn.3:3 – 8) to reference Ezekiel 36:26 – 36. In that passage, Ezekiel envisioned God giving ‘hearts of flesh’ in exchange for ‘hearts of stone.’ The ‘wind’ reference connects to Ezekiel 37:1 – 12, where the wind of the Spirit blows across a valley of dry bones and resurrects them into new life – a companion vision to the new covenant hope of heart change. Ezekiel had a diagnosis of the human heart which corresponded with Moses’ (Dt.30:6) and Jeremiah’s (Jer.4:4; 17:1 – 10; 31:31 – 34). Surely for Jesus to engage with Nicodemus over Ezekiel means that he was pressing Nicodemus to fully embrace Ezekiel’s diagnosis of the problem, as well as its solution. And Ezekiel himself seemed to be thinking about Genesis 1 in the following way:

<b>Genesis 1</b>	<b>Ezekiel 36 – 37</b>	<b>John 3</b>
God created life by His Spirit hovering over water (Gen.1:1 – 2)	God will create a new humanity internally by water and Spirit (Ezk.36:26 – 36)	Jesus causing birth of new humanity by water and Spirit (Jn.3:5)
God breathed into Adam (Gen.2:7)	God will breathe His Spirit like wind into Israel to cause new life (Ezk.37)	Spirit blows like wind to cause new birth; after his resurrection, Jesus breathes his Spirit (Jn.20:22)

Jesus quoted that passage in this context to warn Nicodemus against trying to control the movement of the Spirit. The Spirit was guiding Jesus, and bringing about those who believe in Jesus. In effect, Nicodemus was trying to deny what the entire Old Testament and the history of Israel pointed to: that the human heart needs transformation by the Spirit. That is why Jesus was so pointed and sharp with Nicodemus.

So how would Jesus solve this problem? Following the narrative of John’s Gospel, we know that the Spirit resided in Jesus (1:32 – 33), and as of Jesus’ conversation with Nicodemus, had not yet been poured out (Jn.7:38; 14:16 – 21; 20:22). That would only happen after Jesus’ resurrection. So the question remains: Why could Jesus not pour out his Spirit on his followers prior to his death and resurrection? John’s simplest explanation for that is that Jesus was not yet finished creating in himself a renewed humanity that is fully reconciled with the Spirit. Permit me to step back and take a high level view of John’s Gospel once again, which will make John 3:1 – 21 more clear. Here is a strong structural literary allusion John is making to Genesis 1 – 2:

<b>Old Creation</b>	<b>New Creation</b>
In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. (Genesis 1:1)	In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. (John 1:1)

	<b>7 Miracles</b>	<b>7 Discourses</b>	<b>7 'I AM' statements</b>
1	Emptiness to joy. Water into wine at Cana. (2:1-10)	Second birth with Nicodemus (Jn.3:1-21)	I am the bread of life (6:35)
2	Sickness to health. Healing of the royal official's sick son. (4:46-54)	Living water with Samaritan woman (Jn.4:1-42)	I am the light of the world (8:12)
3	Debilitation to wholeness. Healing the invalid man. (5:1-15)	The 'Son and Father relationship' debate with the Pharisees (Jn.5:16-45)	I am the door (10:7)
4	Hunger to satisfaction. Multiplication of bread. (6:1-14)	Bread of Life (Jn.6:22-71)	I am the good shepherd (10:11)
5	Fear to peace. Walking on water. (6:16-21)	Abraham debate with the Pharisees (Jn.8:12-59)	I am the resurrection and the life (11:25)
6	Blindness to sight. Healing of the blind man. (9:1-41)	Good shepherd (Jn.10:1-38)	I am the way, the truth, and the life (14:6)
7	Death to life. Resuscitation of Lazarus. (11:17-44)	Upper Room discourse (Jn.13:1-17:26)	I am the true vine (15:1)

<b>Old Creation</b>	<b>New Creation</b>
Then the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being. (Genesis 2:7)	Jesus breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit.' (John 20:22)

Seldom are large, macro literary parallels this clear and this simple. Naturally, one of John's theological purposes in structuring his Gospel narrative this way is to say that Jesus is truly God. But Christian interpreters have long been convinced that John affirms the humanity of Jesus, not only because he demonstrates human tiredness and thirst and emotions, but especially because he 'became flesh' (Jn.1:14). Jesus was preparing his own body and the human nature therein to be shared by his Spirit. It was not yet ready to be shared until Jesus had taken it through death and resurrection. He was cleansing it for the world. When he said, 'In my Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you' (Jn.14:2), he was speaking of himself and the temple of his own body (Jn.2:21), not some 'heavenly palace.' Jesus clarifies that he was speaking of himself in the very next verse, 'If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to *myself*, that where I am, there you may be also' (Jn.14:3). This connects with his statements just minutes later about his disciples being 'in him,' and him being 'in them,' by the Spirit 'in that day,' that is, in the era of his resurrected humanity being available to all (Jn.14:20 – 23). The Spirit will take of Jesus, not merely his 'knowledge' or 'spiritual power' but his very own new humanity, and share him personally with the believer: 'He will glorify me, for he will take of mine and will disclose it to you' (Jn.16:14).

Furthermore, fascinating as these large structural allusions to the Exodus and the creation are, these themes cannot be interpreted alone. For in the Old Testament, the Exodus itself structurally echoes the creation. Creation and Exodus were thematically related events. In Genesis 1, God uttered ten 'Let there be...' or 'Let us bless' declarations in Creation, establishing boundaries between light and darkness, land and water, and bringing forth and blessing life (Gen.1:3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 22, 24, 26, 28). In Exodus, God again uttered ten declarations, but it was ten plagues on Egypt. These plagues on Egypt reversed the creational pattern: God *relaxed* the boundaries between light and darkness, land and water, ruler and subordinate. God established those boundaries in the creation to establish order and life, but the plagues upon Egypt erased those boundaries and thereby brought about chaos and death. Ultimately, the Egyptian army and Pharaoh drowned in water, which echoes the primordial watery chaos of the creation before life (and the flood of Noah before new life on earth). But the watery demise of Egypt in the Red Sea also signaled the birth of Israel as a nation. Israel emerged to inherit the garden land, like Adam and Eve emerged to inherit the original garden land. Therefore, it makes sense that Jesus brings about a new creation and new exodus. This provides the basis for integrating the new exodus theme in John with the new creation theme also clearly present in John.

Hence, returning to John 3, Jesus suggested in his interview with Nicodemus that his death would accomplish the reversal of a poisoning. He said:

<sup>3:14</sup> 'As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; <sup>15</sup> so that whoever believes will in him have eternal life. <sup>16</sup> For God so loved the world, that He gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life. <sup>17</sup> For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through him. <sup>18</sup> He who

believes in him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. <sup>19</sup> This is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light, for their deeds were evil. <sup>20</sup> For everyone who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. <sup>21</sup> But he who practices the truth comes to the light, so that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God.’ (Jn.3:14 – 21)

Penal substitution advocates will naturally interpret this saying of Jesus as supporting their atonement theory: Jesus predicts that he will die in place of others, just as the bronze serpent was symbolically judged in place of Israel. In response, I argue three things. First, a word of caution: Old Testament examples on their own frequently underdetermine their future use by the New Testament. So I would want to be cautious about appropriating it too quickly one way or the other.

Second, however, the past incident of the snake suggests that there is an internal problem in human beings that must be resolved, not simply a legal-judicial problem that was internal to God manifested by a ‘conflict of His attributes’ and an opposition between his holiness and his love. Yes, the poison came about because of snakes sent by God to bite the people for their sin (Num.21:4 – 11), so in that sense God’s judgment and wrath against Israel was manifested. However, the snakes’ venom merely made evident what Israel was already learning, that there was a deeper poison already in them because they share in the humanity of a fallen Adam and Eve. Hence, even in the symbolism of the episode of Moses holding up the bronze serpent, we find that God’s forgiveness of the people and His cleansing of them are not two separate things. They are joined. I will elaborate still further about the placement of this episode in Numbers and the Pentateuch as a whole, which will add more weight to my argument. For now, if we can go a bit further say that bronze was a metal associated with God’s judgment by virtue of being the metal out of which altars were made, and if being hung on a wooden pole was already a symbol of God’s judgment as well (which I think is reasonable, even though Dt.21:22 – 23 had not yet been written as such), or became that as a result of this episode, then God arranged for a bronze snake, as the source of venom, to be judged symbolically, and offered to the Israelites to heal them. Forgiveness and healing/cleansing are absolutely joined, in the Pentateuch and in John’s thought. They are not compartmentalized between the Son who supposedly offers forgiveness and the Spirit who supposedly offers cleansing, as in penal substitution theory. No: The Father has localized forgiveness and cleansing together in the Son, and shares the Son with us by the Spirit. What Jesus has worked out *in himself*, the Spirit works out *in us*. Ontological substitution holds the roles of the Son and the Spirit closer together logically than does penal substitution, which keeps them a bit further apart.

The ontological substitution atonement theory has a further advantage over the penal substitution theory because it better explains the symbolism of the serpent in the wilderness. It captures the sense that Jesus is participating personally in the very thing that is causing the problem, to be the resolution to that problem. Jesus seems to parallel his being lifted up to the lifting up of the serpent in this way: Human beings are now the source of the real venom of sin, pictured in the form of the serpent of old. The venom is now part of our very being, though it was not originally. Since human beings are already under judgment, already dying from this poison, Jesus had to become a source of the venom himself in human flesh, hang in the place of the guilty on the wooden cross, and thereby judge the poison at its source: in the corrupt ‘flesh’ of the human being. Hence Jesus’ statement in John 3:18 that God’s judgment is not only future, but already overlaps with the present: ‘He who does not believe has been judged already.’ The poison, or corruption, is already present in human beings. Thus, on the cross, Jesus condemned the sinful ‘flesh’ he had taken on. He killed it in himself so that he could rise as a new human being with a thoroughly God-soaked, God-united human nature, to share his Spirit with us.

Third, I believe the language of darkness and light, judgment and truth in John 3:16 – 21 confirms the central thesis of ontological substitution better than it does penal substitution. Of course, this language is tailored (either by the writer John, or, as I take it, Jesus himself) to be a commentary on Nicodemus. Will Nicodemus come ‘to the light’ of Jesus, or remain in darkness? The immediate question of whether Nicodemus will ever stop coming to Jesus by night and proclaim his connection with Jesus by day becomes a physical representation of a deeper spiritual question. The implication for the choice to remain in darkness is that there is a poison – a venom – that already exists in human beings. That is probably why Jesus’ remarks about being born of ‘flesh’ (*sarx*) appear here in this dialogue with Nicodemus (Jn.3:6). Perhaps this is also why Jesus reserves his strongest condemnatory language for this episode with Nicodemus: ‘men loved darkness rather than the light, for their deeds were evil’ and so on. Nicodemus had the Hebrew Scriptures at his disposal, yet was covering up the truth of its diagnosis of humanity, and God’s desire to heal human beings through His Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth. That, more than anything else in John’s Gospel, is ‘evil’ and a willful repudiation of God’s light for darkness instead. The judgment of God is already against those who identify with this fleshly corruption in their nature, refuse to acknowledge the truth of the

Old Testament's diagnosis, refuse to see the truth of who Jesus is, and pretend that human beings can simply go their own way.

Finally, one major literary feature of John's Gospel must be noted. If being passively obedient is central to Passover lamb imagery, why does John seem to deliberately excise that imagery and any reference to Jesus' supposed passivity? Rather, John stresses Jesus' active obedience throughout his Gospel, which makes an interesting challenge for penal substitution advocates to explain. For John is more explicit than Matthew, Mark, and Luke that Jesus was thoroughly in command over all the circumstances of his own death. Jesus referred to his death not as a demand made upon him from the Father, but as an ability of his own: 'I lay down my life for the sheep...I lay down my life so that I may take it again. No one has taken it away from me, but I lay it down on my own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This commandment I received from my Father.' (Jn.10:15 – 18). John's phrasing strongly suggests that it is the *death* of Jesus, not the pain experienced by Jesus, or the supposed spiritual torture suffered by Jesus<sup>39</sup>, or some visit by Jesus' soul into hell<sup>40</sup>, which effects the atonement. Also, John does not include the story of Jesus' agonized prayer in Gethsemane, which could be interpreted (I would be quick to add, *mistakenly*) as Jesus ceding control of his own life, or as a brewing conflict of sorts between the Father and the Son. John's exclusion of that story corroborates his marked stress on Jesus' active, not passive, obedience. Instead, John includes Jesus' emotion at the tomb of Lazarus, where Jesus was 'troubled,' as in indignant and angry, and moved to tears (Jn.11:33 – 35). From a literary standpoint, shifting the location of Jesus' strongest emotions from the garden of Gethsemane to the tomb of Lazarus demonstrates that Jesus saw sin and death as the ultimate tyrants to be conquered on behalf of all humanity, exemplified by Lazarus, and not only over his own bodily existence.

Then Jesus gives verbal explanations about his death in relation to the will of the Father. Jesus said his death glorifies, or reveals, the Father (Jn.12:28; 17:1 – 5), which according to the great Father-Son discourses of John 5 and 14 – 17, refers to the will of the Father to give new life to human beings in and through Jesus by the Spirit (e.g. Jn.5:19 – 27; 14:8 – 13). But in the active sections of the narrative, this glorification and revelation of the Father is not achieved by an editorial explanation of the cross as a collision of divine wrath and divine love, but in concrete interactions between Jesus and everyone around him, including Jesus' love for others, witness to them, rejection of all the lies of human beings, and most importantly, unswerving victory over his own flesh. Jesus came out of the garden of Gethsemane and, with the word of divine self-disclosure, 'I am,' laid flat the cohort that came to arrest him (Jn.18:1 – 11). Even though the high priest and Pontius Pilate wanted to interrogate Jesus, Jesus clearly interrogated *them* in a brilliant turnabout of questioning (Jn.18:12 – 19:16); Jesus even turned Pontius Pilate into his witness to the Jewish leaders, since Simon Peter did not serve as an adequate witness. Then, when Jesus was on the cross, knowingly and actively brought one last detail of Passover lamb imagery towards himself: 'knowing that all things had already been accomplished, to fulfill the Scripture, said, 'I am thirsty.' A jar full of sour wine was standing there; so they put a sponge full of the sour wine upon a branch of hyssop and brought it up to his mouth. Therefore when Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, 'It is finished!' And he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.' (Jn.19:28 – 30) I have already explored the Passover imagery involving hyssop and the doorway; they are emblematic of an invitation to participate in 'dying and rising with Jesus,' as Paul would say. What Matthew, Mark, and Luke note in terms of Jesus giving up his life on the cross, John makes thoroughly, colorfully, and emphatically explicit. More details of John's narrative can surely be explored. But I think that what I have listed above is sufficient to raise a very significant problem for penal substitution advocates: John is the writer who most highlights Jesus' role as the true Passover lamb, but he is simultaneously the author who most pointedly stresses Jesus' active obedience and removes anything that could suggest a 'passive obedience of Christ.' Even *the resurrection* is not, in John's narrative, the working of an active Father on a passive Son, but of the *Son* actively obedient to the will of the Father (Jn.5:26; 10:17 – 18). This corroborates my claim that there is no 'passive obedience' of Christ. Our salvation is wrought by the will of the Father enacted in and by the Son in his active obedience, triumphing over the corrupted flesh that resisted the Father, and cleansing his own humanity to share with others by his Spirit.

---

<sup>39</sup> R.C. Sproul, *Christ's Descent into Hell*, says, 'Sin against an infinite being demands an infinite punishment in hell. In a few hours, Jesus suffered and exhausted the infinite punishment that impenitent people cannot exhaust even after an eternity in hell. He could do this because, in His deity as the Son of God, He is an infinite being... On the cross He suffered the full wrath of God that is poured out in hell... the hopelessness of losing the gaze of His Father's blessing and the torment of experiencing God's wrath for the sins of His people.' <http://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/christs-descent-into-hell/> last accessed December 10, 2013.

<sup>40</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, book 2, chapter 16, paragraph 10 believed that Jesus descended into hell *after his death*: 'If Christ had died only a bodily death, it would have been ineffectual. No — it was expedient at the same time for him to undergo the severity of God's vengeance, to appease his wrath and satisfy his just judgment. For this reason, he must also grapple hand to hand with the armies of hell and the dread of everlasting death... No wonder, then, if he is said to have descended into hell, for he suffered the death that, God in his wrath had inflicted upon the wicked!'

In John's Gospel, for Jesus to be the new Passover lamb means that he is God's true humanity. He has himself gone through an exodus out of the state of corruption, through death, and into the liberation of resurrected, cleansed, and purified humanity. Thus, after considering John's Gospel and Paul's brief comments in 1 Corinthians 5, I return to the subject of the Pentateuch. Already in the Pentateuch, we see that the Passover lamb should not be understood as a substitute *for* the worshiper to avoid punishment, but as an expression *of* the worshiper who was really putting some idolatry to death (the possessive control of one's own sons) through the mechanism of the Passover lamb. It was costly, and expressed repentance. In that sense, the Passover lamb carried the sin of the Israelite away. The blood of the lamb placed on the doorway symbolized a new birth into, or perhaps within, the life of another which was made possible by a real and costly repentance. And as such, it was a foreshadowing of the truest act of the truest Israelite, the Messiah of Israel, who would really put sin completely to death through the mechanism of his own death. Jesus would give up his life to vanquish the *corruption within* his humanity, carrying it away from us, and opening up to us a doorway to a new birth into and within his resurrection life.

Circumcision, in the Pentateuch, governed the interpretation of Passover. God cleansed Israel through the feast of Unleavened Bread for seven days, decisively finished with that cleansing through the Passover on the eighth, and brought them into new life in Firstfruits. Similarly, through circumcision, God was cleansing the human baby boy for seven days (and girls in fourteen), decisively cleansed them through circumcision on the eighth day, and brought them into new life symbolically as part of the covenant community. The reason why the Passover lamb had to be perfect and spotless, as did all the sacrifices, is because they symbolized the thing sacrificed being cleansed and being costly. Ultimately, Jesus would sacrifice himself, having cleansed himself through his life and death, not merely symbolically but ontologically, to emerge into the new life of resurrection on the eighth day, 'on the first day of the week' (Jn.20:1).

#### **Theme #5: The Tabernacle and the Priests – God's Plan B**

Penal substitution advocates frequently focus on burnt offerings and sin offerings as if they expressed the same idea. They tend to ignore peace offerings. And they treat the Tabernacle as if it represented a judicial system that primarily extracted blood and life from the animal without considering the complementary question of who ate the sacrifices. Professor Emile Nicole demonstrates exactly this methodological problem as he defends penal substitution. As he argues that sin offerings were really no different than other offerings, Nicole says:

'There [is] no hint whatsoever that the considerations of Leviticus 17 pertaining to the use of blood in sacrifice and its atoning value were to be limited only to sin offerings. On the contrary, since they were included in the general dispositions relative to the slaughter and eating of animals and they referred to the placing of blood on the altar, a common disposition for all sacrifices, it reveals the atoning aspect present in all sacrifices, be they mandatory or voluntary.'<sup>41</sup>

Thus, for Nicole, the important thing about sacrifices is their blood was shed.

To understand blood, the sacrifices, and the priesthood, we must understand the Pentateuch as a whole. I have argued above that God sacrificed animals to clothe and *cover* Adam and Eve after the fall (Gen.3:21), enacting physically the root meaning of the Hebrew word for atonement, *kippur*, to *cover*. Cain and Abel knew of some kind of sacrificial offering (Gen.4:3 – 4). Noah made a burnt offering on an altar he built immediately after leaving from the ark (Gen.8:20 – 21). Mention of altars subsequently implies sacrifices. And Abraham built altars at Shechem (Gen.12:7), east of Bethel (Gen.12:8), Hebron (Gen.13:18), and on Mount Moriah (Gen.22:13). Isaac built an altar at Beersheba (Gen.26:25). Jacob built another altar at Shechem (Gen.33:20) and Bethel (Gen.35:1 – 7). Moses built an altar at Rephidim after successfully fighting the Anakim (Ex.17:15). Jethro offered burnt offerings on behalf of Israel (Ex.18:12). Moses, at the foot of Mount Sinai (Ex.24:4), offered burnt offerings and young bulls as peace offerings to God before sprinkling the altar and the people with the blood (Ex.24:6 – 8) to signify the covenant God was making with Israel. Israel was told by God to use solitary altars as the tabernacle was being constructed, in accordance with the regulations given in Exodus 20:24 – 26 (see, e.g. Dt.27:5 – 7 with Josh.8:30 – 35; Judg.6:24 – 27; 1 Sam.7:17; 2 Sam.24:18, 25; 1 Ki.18:30 – 35; 19:10, 14, etc.). Those sacrifices were later centralized at the sanctuary (Lev.17).

Reformed theologian and Orthodox Presbyterian Church minister Peter Leithart further suggests that the burnt offering detailed in Leviticus 1:3 – 17 represents a reenactment of the Passover deliverance from Egypt.<sup>42</sup> He argues that 'ascension offering' is a better translation of the Hebrew word 'olah' that is used for this offering. The

---

<sup>41</sup> Emile Nicole, 'Atonement in the Pentateuch,' editors Charles E. Hill and Frank A. James III, *The Glory of the Atonement* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), p.43

<sup>42</sup> Peter J. Leithart, *Covenant by Sacrifice, Leviticus 1:1 – 17*, <http://www.leithart.com/archives/000754.phpl> accessed April 3, 2013

word 'olah' comes from a verb that means 'to go up, to ascend.' I concur with this way of translating the term. However, Leithart appears to take the sanctuary itself as the starting point for understanding the burnt/ascension offering, whereas I believe that the chronological starting point of Genesis 4 needs to be taken as the starting point. Leithart notes that the sequence of the offering resembles Israel's deliverance from Egypt to its covenant making moment at Mount Sinai. The Israelite would bring the animal to the door of the sanctuary (Lev.1:3) and place one's hand on the head of the animal (Lev.1:4), which is like the consecration of the Passover lamb (Ex.12:3 – 6). The Israelite would slay the animal (Lev.1:5), as the Passover lamb would have been slain (Ex.12:6). The priest would take the animal's blood and splash it on the bronze altar, which corresponds to putting the blood of the Passover lamb onto the doorposts of the house (Ex.12:7). The priest then would stir the fires of the altar (Lev.1:7), making the altar resemble and represent in miniature Mount Sinai wreathed with a flaming cloud (Ex.19:16). The Israelite would wash portions of the animal (Lev.1:9), corresponding to Israel's baptismal-deliverance through the Red Sea (Ex.14). The priest would then put the washed portions of the animal onto the altar fire, turning the animal to smoke (Lev.1:9), corresponding to Moses ascending into the cloud on Mount Sinai as Israel's covenant representative. Leithart argues that these offerings recapitulate Israel's exodus and covenant-making at Mount Sinai, or to be more precise, Moses' covenant mediation at Sinai.

I think that Leithart's suggestion is extremely valuable but takes the wrong starting point as its foundation. The first biblical mention of any kind of offering – presumably a burnt/ascension offering – is not at Israel's sanctuary but east of Eden, in the story of Cain and Abel (Gen.4:4). The very next sacrificial offering, that of Noah, was specifically called a burnt/ascension offering (Gen.8:20 – 21). Thus, because the sacrificial offerings *predate* Israel's covenant at Sinai and the tabernacle constructed there, we are invited to consider how Israel's Sinai covenant *changed the original meaning and nature* of the offerings.

The basic picture we glean of burnt, grain, and peace offerings is of a meal shared between God and the worshiper. An offering, in general, was 'the food of their God' (Lev.21:6), 'the food of your God' (Lev.21:8), and 'the food of his God' (Lev.21:17, 21). The primitive altar was a table of fellowship. Let me be quick to add that the Israelites did not think of God as literally 'eating' the animal sacrifice (Ps.50:12 – 13). They understood symbolism perfectly well: The fire consumed the meat and the smoke ascended to the heavens as a symbol of God eating the meal, perhaps because Eden remained veiled beyond the reach of the worshiper. This seems to have overtures to the Edenic motif of humanity eating with God in the Garden. Eating in God's presence at an altar recaptured something of the mystery and the glory of days long past, but, needless to say, at a far distance. I will explore the literary motif of eating in God's presence in a later section, and the theme of blood in another.

What was the role of the priests and the sanctuary? In his book, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, John Sailhamer argues convincingly that the Tabernacle, priesthood, and various laws were the result of Israel's sinful failure to meet God face to face on Mount Sinai in Exodus 19. As a result, God chooses Moses and Aaron to mediate the covenant and represent the rest of Israel. This resulted in God giving laws in Exodus 20:1 – 27, and Israel trembling in fear again in Exodus 20:18 – 20. God responds by giving more laws in Exodus 20:21 – 23:19. The covenant appears to be stabilized momentarily when Moses, Aaron, and seventy elders ascend the mountain and eat with God in Exodus 23:20 – 24:11. God gives Moses the Tabernacle instructions in Exodus 24:12 – 31:11. But Israel breaks the covenant again, with Aaron's personal participation, in the golden calf incident in Exodus 32:1 – 29. Then we reach the central point of the Pentateuch as a whole: Moses' personal mediation for Israel to restore the covenant, in Exodus 32:30 – 33:23. The story turns around this chiasmic center as follows:

*The Literary Structure of the Pentateuch*<sup>43</sup>

1. God's Spirit 'hovers' as God creates heaven and earth; God places humanity in a garden land; origin of all nations, but in exile and with a corruption in human nature: Gen.1 – 11
2. Covenant inaugurated with Abraham, blessings and curses: Gen.12:1 – 8
3. God's faithfulness to the chosen family: Gen.12:9 – 50:26
4. Deliverance of first generation of Israelites from Egypt, arrival at Sinai: Ex.1 – 18
  5. Covenant inaugurated, broken, re-asserted: Ex.19:1 – 24:11
    - a. God calls Israel to meet Him on the mountain on the third day: Ex.19:1 – 15
    - b. Israel's failure – to come up the mountain: Ex.19:16 – 23
    - c. God resumes with Moses and Aaron: Ex.19:24 – 25
    - d. God gives Israel the Ten Commandments: Ex.20:1 – 17
    - e. Israel's failure – Israel afraid of God's voice: Ex.20:18 – 20
    - f. God gives all Israel 49 laws (7x7): Ex.20:21 – 23:19
    - g. God and Israel agree to a covenant, and Moses, Aaron, and 70 elders see God, and eat and drink in His presence: Ex.23:2 – 24:11
  6. Tabernacle instructions given to house the **veiled** presence of God: Ex.24:12 – 31:11
  7. God commands Israel to observe the Sabbath and the Covenant is documented on stone tablets: Ex.31:12 – 18
    8. Covenant broken; Israel worships Aaron's golden calves: Ex.32:1 – 29
    9. Moses mediates for Israel, restores the covenant: Ex.32:30 – 33:23
    - 8'. Covenant affirmed: Ex.34:1 – 17
  - 7'. God commands Israel to observe three annual feasts and the Covenant is documented on stone tablets again; Moses **veils** his face as a sign of judgment, hiding God's glory from the nation: Ex.34:18 – 28
  - 6'. Tabernacle built to instructions; presence of God comes **veiled**: Ex.35 – 40
    - 5'. Covenant mediation inaugurated, covenant broken, re-asserted: Lev.1:1 – 27:34
      - a. God calls Israel to approach Him, gives priests a Code for sacrifices: Lev.1:1 – 9:24
      - b. Priests' failure – two of Aaron's sons offer strange fire, are consumed: Lev.10:1 – 7
      - c. God resumes with Aaron's two others sons: Lev.10:8 – 20
      - d. God gives Israel's priests a Priestly Code for the community: Lev.11 – 16
      - e. Israel's failure – God addresses worship of goat idols: Lev.17:1 – 9 (Acts 7:42 – 43)
      - f. God gives all Israel a Holiness Code: Lev.17:10 – 25:55
      - g. God and Israel agree to a covenant: Lev.26:1 – 27:34
  - 4'. Departure from Sinai, deliverance of second generation of Israelites from the sins of the first: Num.1 – 36
  - 3'. God's faithfulness forms the basis for Moses' exhortation: Dt.1 – 26
  - 2'. Covenant offered to Israel – blessings and curses: Dt.27:1 – 29:29
  - 1'. God must circumcise human hearts after Israel's exile (Dt.30:6); 'heaven' and 'earth' (Dt.32:1) witness destiny of Israel and nations; God's Spirit 'hovers' (Dt.32:11) over Israel as they enter garden land: Dt.30:1 – 34:12

I see the significance of this literary analysis as follows: The Tabernacle (and later, the Temple) was not God's Plan A. It was Plan B. God wanted 'a Temple people', a people with whom He talked face to face. He did not want 'a people with a Temple.' God veiled His glory via the Tabernacle as a concession for abiding among the people, and a judgment on them for their refusal to approach him face to face the first time, on the mountain. The imagery here is apparently drawn from Eden. Eden may have been a kind of mountain, since four rivers flowed out from it; rivers in nature naturally converge, not diverge. Thus, Eden must have been a supernatural source of these rivers, and/or be higher in elevation. Also, Adam and Eve walked with God and spoke with Him face to face. Thus, God's initial invitation to Israel was to resume the life, in some sense, that Adam and Eve once had. V.J. Steiner, scholar of the Hebrew Scriptures, is therefore incorrect when he says:

---

<sup>43</sup> For this chiasm, I am indebted to Sailhamer and a Jewish scholar whose work I have, sadly, misplaced.

‘The literary-thematic center of the Pentateuch fixes on Yahweh’s sanctuary as the place of Yahweh’s residence and relationship with a called out people of blessing.’<sup>44</sup>

So also is another scholar of the Hebrew Scriptures, Rolf P. Knierim, whom Steiner quotes approvingly:

‘The ultimate goal of Israel’s encampment at Sinai during its migration from Egypt to the Promised Land is not the covenant – as important as it was as a precondition – but the permanent sanctuary as the place of Yahweh’s presence or appearance in Israel’s midst, along with the organization of Israel as a strictly theocratic community around the sanctuary. At the same time, this goal provides the prototype for the ultimate meaning of Israel’s existence as a settled community in the Promised Land.’<sup>45</sup>

The Tabernacle was important, but it was not Israel’s ‘ultimate meaning’ for existence. Israel’s ultimate meaning lay in its hope for another mediator who would be greater than Moses: the Messiah, who would restore Israel to Plan A and dispense with the sanctuary. For the sanctuary was not another Eden, but another representation of *human exile just on the outside of Eden*. Eden lay on the other side, the heavenly side, of the presence of God who dwelled between the cherubim. Only one person in Israel could even get that close; and even he could only do so once a year. Israel longed for a mediator of a new covenant as soon as the Sinai covenant was stabilized under Moses. Moses himself longed for a new mediator and a tearing of that veil.

However, Israel’s failure to meet God face to face meant that access to Eden was drawn tightly against them, as it was against Adam and Eve after the fall. The angelic cherubim guardians reappear, this time not to guard the way to the tree of life but engraved on the lid of the ‘mercy seat’ to guard the threshold of heaven and earth. And instead of all Israel being able to commune with God directly, a series of priestly mediators are instated between the people and God, with only the high priest able to walk behind the veil of the most holy place to stand in God’s presence, as He stood at the boundary between heaven and earth, trembling in fear, with smoke and incense obscuring his upward vision so that he could not look directly at God. Thus, the Tabernacle represents the conditions of the *fall* of humanity, on the outside of the Garden of Eden, not Eden itself. This was as close as anyone could get to God after the fall, and Israel is ‘near’ but, like everyone else, on the outside of the threshold.

If the Tabernacle sanctuary was not the main point of the Pentateuch, neither was the Sinaitic law code. The distance between Israel and God was institutionally fixed because Israel failed to trust and obey God from Exodus 19. In response to this, God gave Israel laws. Sailhamer suggests that the number of laws is disproportionately larger in the latter half of the story because God responds to Israel’s progressive failures with more laws. This is ostensibly the apostle Paul’s own understanding: ‘The Law was added because of [Israel’s] transgressions.’ (Gal.3:19) In other words, laws were God’s response to Israel’s failure, to point out their sin to them until a future time when God would resolve the situation. Ezekiel seems aware of this heaping up of laws:

‘<sup>25</sup> I also gave them statutes that were not good and ordinances by which they could not live’ (Ezk.20:25).

Jeremiah also understood the history of Sinai in this way:

‘<sup>22</sup> For I did not speak to your fathers, or command them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings and sacrifices. <sup>23</sup> But this is what I commanded them, saying, ‘Obey My voice, and I will be your God, and you will be My people; and you will walk in all the way which I command you, that it may be well with you.’ <sup>24</sup> Yet they did not obey or incline their ear, but walked in their own counsels and in the stubbornness of their evil heart, and went backward and not forward.’ (Jeremiah 7:22 – 24)<sup>46</sup>

---

<sup>44</sup> V.J. Steiner, ‘Literary Structure of the Pentateuch,’ edited by T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker, *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), p.552

<sup>45</sup> Rolf Knierim, *The Task of Old Testament Theology: Substance, Method, and Cases* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), p.365, quoted in R.E. Averbeck, ‘Sacrifices and Offerings,’ edited by T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker, *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), p.552

<sup>46</sup> As Sailhamer, 1992, notes on p.51, the translation of the RSV, NRSV, NASB, NJPS, and KJV follows this rendering. The NIV translators attempt to correct what they perceive to be a problem in Jeremiah’s understanding of the Sinai event by adding the word ‘just’: ‘I did not just give them commands about burnt offerings and sacrifices.’ But this addition is an interpolation and probably incorrect.

Hence, Levenson's rather unusual opinion that Ezekiel was referring to a command that Israel literally sacrifice their firstborn in Exodus 22:28 – 29<sup>47</sup> is adequately refuted by Sailhamer's analysis: The laws 'that were not good' do not refer to Exodus 22 but refer instead to (1) some of the later laws of Exodus and Leviticus, as I will suggest below, the laws pertaining to the sanctuary in particular, and probably (2) the overall Sinaitic framework of blessings and curses that would come upon Israel for their obedience to these laws and eventual failure against them (Dt.27 – 29). Moses spoke of Israel's exile as assured (Dt.30:1 – 5) because they had the same internal condition of corruption that all humanity shared, as God explicitly diagnosed (Gen.6:5 – 6; 8:21), and were in need of God's 'circumcision of heart' (Dt.30:6) just like all the Gentiles. Whether we see the 'statutes that were not good' as being the later laws of the Sinai law code, or the Sinai covenant as a whole with its consequences of exile, is immaterial for my purposes. Law-keeping was never meant to be used as a basis for self-justification (individual self-righteousness) or for ethnic distinctiveness (national self-righteousness). Hence the Pharisees of Jesus' day were wrong on both counts. Therefore, we can question to what extent the Sinaitic law reveals the character of God, or whether 'law' should be elevated to a principle – coordinated with God's holiness and justice – alongside 'grace and mercy' as a character attribute in God. But I am interested in the role of the priests.

What role did the priests play? They were mediators of the covenant. As Sailhamer observes, from Exodus 19, God first referred to Israel as a kingdom *of* priests, and then shifts His language in the course of the narrative to referring to Israel as a kingdom *with* priests. The former is found when Israel camped at the base of the mountain, Moses ascended the mountain to meet with God, and God announced His intention to form a covenant with Israel: 'Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation' (Ex.19:5 – 6). After heartily resolving to do whatever God said to do, Israel received the word from God that they were to meet him 'on the mountain' on the third day. 'When the ram's horn sounds a long blast, they shall come up *on* the mountain' (Ex.19:13). Moses' recollection of the Sinai encounter to the second generation of Israelites come out of Egypt reflects this understanding: 'The LORD spoke to you face to face at the mountain from the midst of the fire, while I was standing between the LORD and you at that time, to declare to you the word of the LORD; *for you were afraid* because of the fire and *did not go up the mountain*' (Dt.5:4 – 5). Sailhamer acknowledges that English translations of that verse do not always reflect this thought of coming up 'on the mountain.' But the same view is offered by Exodus 3:12, 'you shall worship God *on* this mountain.' Thus does the New Jewish Publication Society translate the verse. Sailhamer gives a thorough explanation and discussion of this.<sup>48</sup>

The use of fire as a physical expression and symbol of God's refining and purifying love throughout the biblical story has its origins at the burning bush and Mount Sinai. God's earlier appearance in the burning bush to Moses (Ex.3:2) anticipated God's intended purpose in forming a covenant with Israel and dwelling in the midst of His people, burning away their impurities by His word. For this God is 'a consuming fire, a jealous God' (Dt.4:24; Ps.29:7; 50:3). The prophets likened the hoped-for messianic work of God as a purifying fire burning away Israel's impurities (e.g. Isa.29:6; 30:27 – 30; Mal.3:2 – 3). When Jesus appeared and started his public ministry, John the Baptist likened his work by the Spirit to fire (Mt.3:11). The Holy Spirit's descent at Pentecost was signified by tongues of fire above each disciple's head (Acts 2:3), which is especially significant because Pentecost commemorated God's giving of the Mosaic Law at Sinai; these tongues of fire made each person out to be a Mount Sinai upon whom God descended to purify. Paul and Peter referred to the return of Jesus as having the effect of a purifying fire that reveals the true quality of each person (1 Cor.3:12 – 15; 2 Pet.3:10 – 16).

I believe the best explanation of Jesus' usage of 'fire' and 'outer darkness' as motifs of hell (Mt.5:22; 8:12; 13:40 – 42, 49 – 50; 22:13; 25:30) is that he was drawing from Israel's failure at Sinai. Israel failed to respond to God's invitation to come higher up and further in, seeing only 'fire' (Dt.4:11, 12, 15, 24, 33, 36; 5:4, 5, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26) and 'darkness' of smoke (Dt.4:11; 5:23). To my knowledge, this is the only place in Scripture where 'fire' and 'darkness' are used in reference to the same event. Arguably, Jesus understood Israel's decision to see God as only fire and darkness, and to remain outside God, as covenant refusal, a refusal to enter more deeply *into God*. Israel's fear and resistance to go up the mountain to meet with God represented their unwillingness to be cleansed and truly receive the word of God. After Israel declined, God had given a short lament to Moses, knowing that the human hearts of the Israelites had not yet been changed, 'Oh that they had such a heart in them, that they would fear Me and keep all My commandments always, that it may be well with them and with their sons forever!' (Dt.5:29) Purification by fire and circumcision of heart (Dt.30:6) therefore converge as mutually interpreting symbols pointing to the same reality: the removal of the corruption of sin from human nature.

---

<sup>47</sup> Jon Levenson, *The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son: The Transformation of Child Sacrifice in Judaism and Christianity* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993), p.4 – 7

<sup>48</sup> Sailhamer, 1992, p.51 – 59

The center of the Pentateuch is not the Tabernacle apparatus, nor the Sinaitic law code, but the mediation of Moses to stabilize the Sinai covenant. In fact, the progressive growth of mediation is what stabilizes the covenant between God and Israel. Without Moses' mediation, God would have simply given up on the nation and started over with Moses, which is the center of the chiasmic structure (Ex.32:30 – 33:23). However, even Moses dies before entering the Promised Land and enjoying God's sabbath rest, perhaps symbolic that the Law (represented by Moses) cannot bring one into rest, which is how the author to Hebrews interprets this fact with respect to Joshua (Heb.4:8 – 9).

The sharing of priestly mediation with Aaron and sons as Levitical priests brings stability to the Sinai covenant, *for a time*. After all, the priests, too, share in the same corruption of human nature that infects everyone else. Aaron himself sins by producing the golden calf (Ex.32:1 – 29). After Moses mediates for all Israel, including Aaron as priest, God adds more laws and the covenant is stabilized another time, then we have another incident of priests disobeying: Two of Aaron's sons offer strange fire and God consumes them (Lev.10:1 – 7). God then resumes with two other sons of Aaron (Lev.10:8 – 20) and installs them as priests, mediating the covenant. God then gives the priests a code to handle the coexistence of Israel with God in the sanctuary (Lev.11 – 17), which will become very important to examine with respect to penal substitution's claim to the Day of Atonement in Lev.16. The action of the high priest in the holy of holies on the Day of Atonement (Lev.16) served as the annual act of covenant mediation, as the high priest reenacted the mediation of Moses on top of the mountain.

The tabernacle sanctuary most immediately represents Mount Sinai. God permitted different degrees of access to Himself at Mount Sinai. Those different levels became mirrored in the sanctuary. The people of Israel had to stay at the perimeter of the mountain when they failed to ascend to God's presence at the top of the mountain (Ex.19:12). But Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu and seventy elders went up the mountain and saw God, and ate in His presence, ratifying the covenant (Ex.24:1 – 11). Moses alone personally went up and entered the very midst of the cloud of God's glory (Ex.24:12 – 18). Similarly, the Israelites, at the base of the mountain, could go into the courtyard of the sanctuary, where the altar and laver were found. Only the priests, like the elders on the mountain, could proceed into the holy place, to be illuminated by the candlelight of God's presence and eat the bread of His presence. Yet even they had to remain outside the veil. Only the high priest, like Moses on the very top of the mountain, could go beyond the veil and see the glory of God. As stated in Ex.25:40, God revealed a pattern for Moses on Mount Sinai, but not in the sense of showing him some mystical, Platonic blueprint. I find it sufficient to assume that Moses simply looked down from the height of the mountain.

Ezekiel later adds the parallel between Sinai and Eden. He provides the understanding that Eden was a mountain of sorts (Ezk.28:13 – 14). Just as a river flowed out of Eden, so also a river of water flowed from the rock at Mount Sinai which Moses struck (Ex.17:5 – 6); it was a supernatural river for the Israelites to drink. Ezekiel's new Temple would also have a supernatural river flowing from it (Ezk.47), an image claimed by Jesus for himself and his followers as referring to the Holy Spirit (Jn.4:14; 7:37 – 38). But let me be clear that I believe Sinai was not a model of *Eden per se*, but a model of *humanity's exile from Eden*. In other words, the varying levels of access to God found at Mount Sinai and reproduced in the sanctuary was never intended from Eden itself. Instead, those varying levels of access are the product of covenant failure. Even Moses' ascent up the mountain and face to face meetings with God in the tent were not seen as his personal entrance to Eden again, but rather a limitation that even Moses could not cross; Moses met with God as God stood on the threshold of heaven and earth, with the true Eden behind God. The reason significance of that distinction will become clear when I discuss the Day of Atonement of Leviticus 16, below.

What were sin and guilt offerings? *The sin and guilt offerings were added to the sanctuary system specifically because of the need to maintain the purity and holiness of the tabernacle, its furniture, its vessels, its gifts and offerings, and to promote purity and holiness in the community at large.*<sup>49</sup> Sin offerings were unique because of the blood application rite attached to them. The innocent animal blood cleansed the things on which they were sprinkled. It was therefore an act of reconsecrating something for service after a human sin had been committed. A priest who sinned had to reconsecrate the sanctuary objects that he regularly touched (Lev.4:5 – 7). If the whole congregation committed error, the sanctuary needed to be reconsecrated with innocent animal blood, too (Lev.4:13 – 18). If a leader of Israel unintentionally committed error, the sanctuary needed to be reconsecrated with innocent animal blood as well (Lev.4:22 – 25). If anyone of the common people unintentionally sins and becomes aware of it, he or she needs to do the same (Lev.4:27 – 35). A person who was under court order to tell the truth as a

---

<sup>49</sup> R.E. Averbeck, 'Sacrifices and Offerings,' in T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker (editors), *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), p.706, italics mine; see also Christian A. Eberhart, *The Sacrifice of Jesus: Understanding Atonement Biblically* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2011), p.60 – 89 and Steve Jeffery, Michael Ovey, Andrew Sach, *Pierced for Our Transgressions: Rediscovering the Glory of Penal Substitution* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007), p.44; Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1 – 16* (Anchor Yale Bible Commentaries) (New York: Doubleday, 1991) p.49 – 50, 254 – 258, 339 – 378 demonstrates that guilt offerings were to make atonement for the desecration of objects, and sin offerings were to atone for their contamination.

witness but did not (Lev.5:1), or a person who touched something or someone unclean (Lev.5:2 – 3), or a person who swore thoughtlessly and then became aware of it (Lev.5:4 – 5) had to bring a guilt offering and a sin offering to cleanse the sanctuary with innocent animal blood (Lev.5:6 – 9). The only case in which blood was not demanded in the sin offering category was when the person was exceptionally poor and had to use fine flour (Lev.5:10 – 13).

Blood from the sin offering was used in consecration, that is, for purifying a person or object for God's holy service in connection with the sanctuary. The word 'atonement' was often used in connection with this act of consecration, even if what was sprinkled with blood was not a person but a non-human and non-moral object: the veil of the sanctuary (Lev.4:5, 17); the horns of the altar of incense (Lev.4:7, 18); the horns of the bronze altar for burnt offerings (Lev.4:25, 30); and the base of the bronze altar (Lev.4:25, 30). These objects needed to be cleansed by a priest with innocent blood after various Israelites sinned, and also by the high priest on the annual Day of Atonement, as I will discuss below.

Sprinkling blood on people happens only three times in the Pentateuch. The first occurrence is when Moses took the blood of the bulls of a burnt offering and sprinkled it on the Israelites to ratify God's covenant with the people (Ex.24:6 – 8). The sprinkling of blood symbolized God giving new life, since the blood of animals was not corrupted as the blood of humans had become since the Fall. The second occurrence is when Moses consecrated the priests for service in the Tabernacle (Lev.8:23 – 24). The third occurrence is found in the laws of impurity: when a skin-diseased person was pronounced clean by the priests, the priests enacted ceremonies much like the Day of Atonement. Two birds were taken; one was killed and the other set free (Lev.14:1 – 7), symbolizing the skin impurity being both extinguished and separated from the healed person. The person was sprinkled by the bird's blood seven times. Then after waiting seven more days, on the eighth day, the person and the priests enacted *another* ceremony much like the Day of Atonement. The healed person brought two male lambs, a yearling ewe lamb, and fine flour for a grain offering (Lev.14:8 – 18). The first male lamb was sacrificed as a guilt offering, with the blood applied to the right ear lobe, right thumb, and right toe of the healed leper, probably symbolizing the person's renewed ability to hear from and serve the Lord. The priest must then offer the second male lamb as a sin offering (Lev.14:19a), eating it, and then offer the ewe lamb and the grain offering as burnt offerings (Lev.14:19b – 20). Variant instructions for a very poor person follows (Lev.14:21 – 31) but Leviticus 14:32 concludes the instruction for the cleansed leper. The priests are given instructions for an unclean house involving the two birds and the blood sprinkling on a cleansed house (Lev.14:33 – 57). These incidents of blood sprinkling are mutually interpreting events. People as well as objects need to be purified, given new life, and healed.

Simultaneously, however, the *flesh* of the animal offered as a sin offering, and not just its blood, was significant as well. This fact is strangely but frequently overlooked by those who study the sacrifices, by defenders and critics of penal substitution alike.<sup>50</sup> The priests were to avoid eating blood at all costs, since it represented the life of the animal, and the life of the animal was to return to the ground to provide a measure of life from God on behalf of humanity. But the priests were to eat some of the flesh of the sin offerings (Lev.6:24 – 30). This act was connected to the overall symbolism of eating, which I will explore below. Moses took this so seriously that he became angry with Aaron's sons Eleazar and Ithamar for not eating the goat offered as a sin offering (Lev.10:16 – 18). As Moses queried Aaron, he made the connection between the priests eating the sin offering and atonement: 'Why did you not eat the sin offering at the holy place? For it is most holy, and He gave it to you to bear away the guilt of the congregation, to make atonement for them before the LORD.' (Lev.10:16) I believe the priests' responsibility to eat the sin offering is of enormous significance to our understanding of atonement.<sup>51</sup> If the Israelite worshiper approached God in the sanctuary, there was a reciprocal eating. God would feed him a meal at His sanctuary, representing something of what humanity lost in Eden: the chance to eat with God. But God would also

---

<sup>50</sup> Penal substitution defender Emile Nicole, 'Atonement in the Pentateuch,' in Charles E. Hill and Frank A. James III (editors), *The Glory of the Atonement* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), p.43, completely neglects the eating of the sin offering, as do Steve Jeffery, Michael Ovey, Andrew Sach, *Pierced for Our Transgressions: Rediscovering the Glory of Penal Substitution* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007), p.42 – 52. Penal substitution critic Christian A. Eberhart, *The Sacrifice of Jesus: Understanding Atonement Biblically* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2011), p.60 – 89 similarly neglects the motif of the priests eating the sin offering sacrifice. This neglect has significant consequences for both biblical studies and systematic theology.

<sup>51</sup> B.J. Schwartz, 'The Bearing of Sin in the Priestly Literature,' in *Pomegranates and Golden Bells: Studies in Biblical, Jewish, and Near Eastern Ritual, Law, and Literature in Honor of Jacob Milgrom*, edited by D.P. Wright, D.N. Freedman and A. Hurvitz (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1995), p.3 – 21. R.E. Averbeck, in the article 'Sacrifices and Offerings' edited by T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker, *The Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), p.718 disagrees, saying that the priests' eating of the sin offering is irrelevant to atonement. His explanation is: 'In its context the eating of the sin offering appears to belong to the priestly prebend regulations beginning in Leviticus 10:12, not to the atoning procedure, which had already been fully accomplished on the inauguration day and graphically approved by the Lord earlier in Leviticus 9:15 – 24.' However, he confuses the one time inauguration of the priesthood in Leviticus 9 with the ongoing necessity of atonement for Israel in what follows, especially climaxing in the Day of Atonement in Leviticus 16. Thus, I maintain that the eating of the sin offerings by the priests is significant, and vital, to atonement in the Pentateuch.

'eat' the sin of the worshiper through His priests. Hence, we must pay close attention to the food that was offered at the Tabernacle/Temple, and to who was to eat what. I will return to this in a later section.

With this understanding of the themes of the Pentateuch, and I would argue *especially with this understanding*, we can more accurately understand the role of the priests, the sanctuary, and the *addition* of sin and guilt offerings to the burnt, peace, and grain offerings that God's people had already offered, before the sanctuary was built. Of course, the Pentateuch lays the foundation for the prophetic expectation that there must be a greater priest – from neither Aaron's line nor from the wider tribe of Levi – who performs a greater sacrifice that will deal with the greatest human problem. In effect, there would have to be a greater mediator who will affirm the covenant between God and Israel, in such a way that it benefits the world. The narrative of the Pentateuch therefore builds hope around the tribe of Judah (e.g. Gen.49:7 – 12) and the coming king of Israel, and later biblical authors will see the priest-king Melchizedek as an archetype of how the king might also be a priest of sorts, but not in an Aaronic way (Ps.110; Heb.7 – 10). From this point, it would be appropriate to understand what role the Israelite priests played, and what role the sacrifices played. The next four sections must be read together.

### **Theme #6: Eating at the Sanctuary Recalls Eating in Eden**

Our need to eat reflects our dependence on nourishment from outside ourselves for growth and healing. Physically, our bodies repair themselves with the help of nutrition. In the original state of Adam and Eve when human language was just beginning, meaning was necessarily conveyed and shaped through their physical experience of life. The dependence of humans on both God and the land were related. Cain made explicit the link between the 'face of God' and the 'face of the land' (Gen.4:14). Moses continued this pattern by defining God's 'blessing and curse' (Dt.11:26 – 28) in relation to the land. If Israel is obedient, God will make the land to be 'flowing with milk and honey' (Dt.11:9) because of the rain of heaven (Dt.11:11, 14). If Israel is disobedient, God 'will shut up the heavens so that there will be no rain and the ground will not yield its fruit' (Dt.11:17).

The sacrificial system commingled in one institution two major clusters of themes that continued intertwined from the narrative of Genesis 1 – 4. From the cluster of blood, sons, land, and city, I now turn to the cluster of themes related to eating and enjoying God's presence. What did it mean for Israel to offer these sacrifices at the Temple, and have various parties – the worshiper, priest, and God – eat them? What does eating have to do with atonement?

The close similarity between the garden of Eden and the appearance, coloration, materials, and role of Israel's tabernacle (compare Gen.2:10 – 12 and Ex.25 – 27) is suggestive of priestly responsibilities given to God's true humanity, Israel,<sup>52</sup> which requires the original humanity to have had priestly responsibilities of some sort to worship at the location of God's presence. They gathered up the praise of God from the creation and give it utterance. They repeated and bore the word of life from the God of life to the rest of creation: 'Be fruitful and multiply.' This means that Eden was at the very least a supernatural manifestation of God's presence. In addition, Eden has very important thematic similarities to another location of God's presence, the more institutionalized tabernacle: Israel's Temple. A supernatural river of life flows out of both – compare Genesis 2:10 with Ezekiel 47:1 – 12. Thus, humanity in creation was designed to spread out from Eden, creation's priestly center, to proclaim human lordship in creation. Likewise, it is significant that in God's scheme of redemption, Christians were sent out from Jerusalem to proclaim Jesus' lordship as God's newly restored humanity.

As I mentioned before, I believe the garden of Eden, the special presence of God in His creation, was meant to expand spatially to make room for more human beings so that more people could eat there. The only way to reconcile the two creation responsibilities given to human beings in Genesis 1 and 2 – on the one hand, to spread out and fill the earth, and on the other hand, to tend a seemingly stationary garden – is to conclude that Adam, Eve, and their descendants were to spread the special conditions of the garden throughout the whole earth. This is not surprising given what we see God promise Israel: When they were humble before Him, He would cause their particular land to be a fruitful garden for them (Dt.11). Likewise, God also promised that when the whole earth is filled with the knowledge of Him, the conditions of life Israel experienced in the promised land would extend throughout the whole creation (Isa.11:6 – 9; 54:2 – 3; 65:17 – 25; Rom.4:13; Rev.21 – 22). Therefore we can reasonably conclude that the original human responsibility was to spread the special conditions of the garden throughout the whole creation. We were to be co-gardeners with God, intermediaries through whom God brought forth even more order and life.

This means that the motif of eating at the Tabernacle/Temple sanctuary in God's presence must also be coordinated with eating in the garden of Eden in God's presence. The two are not perfectly equivalent, of course, but eating at the Tabernacle/Temple must be interpreted within the thematic and theological paradigm set by Genesis

---

<sup>52</sup> Gordon J. Wenham, 'Sanctuary Symbolism in the Garden of Eden Story,' *Proceedings of the World Congress of Jewish Studies* 9 (1986): 19-25.

regarding eating at the garden of Eden. Eating was therefore involved in picturing the *benefits* of atonement. For peace offerings, whether they be lambs or goats, the remark is made alluding to the burning of the sacrifice as a shared meal between the Israelite and God: ‘Then the priest shall offer it up in smoke on the altar *as food*, an offering by fire to the LORD; all the fat is the LORD’S’ (Lev.3:11, 16). When the specifications for eating the peace offering are given later (Lev.7:11 – 21), it is clear that the meal is shared between the Israelite and God, with the priests participating in the meal as well.

But the symbolism went further. Eating was involved in picturing the *mechanics* of atonement, not merely the *benefits* of atonement. Broadly speaking, the sanctuary pictured God sharing a meal with Israel that was reminiscent of how Adam and Eve might have eaten with God in Eden. But the introduction of human sinful corruption needed to be incorporated into the symbolism. Hence, the sanctuary pictured humanity as ‘eating’ God’s provision of atonement. And, as I will argue below, the sanctuary system simultaneously pictured God as ‘eating’ the corruption in human nature, taking it into Himself, and doing away with it. The reciprocal image to eating the animal, however, was the life-blood of the animal, which was symbolized as being given back by God to cleanse the worshiper.

Sin offerings were eaten by the priests (Lev.6:24 – 30). This was a picture of the priest internalizing Israel’s sin, storing it up within himself. Those remains were considered to be so holy that, unlike every other occasion when human contact with a dead animal was a bit circumspect, touching the flesh of the sin offering made the person ‘consecrated’ (Lev.6:27), which means, I presume, *committed* to the eating of the remains. This was a serious matter. Further, to underscore the point, the Pentateuch records an incident when Moses was angry with Aaron’s sons on an occasion when they did not eat the remains of the sin offerings (Lev.10:24 – 26). Although Aaron offers a reason for their hesitation based on his emotional state of losing his two older sons, the fact remains that sin offerings are meant to be eaten by the priest *as the mechanism of atoning* for the people.

The one exception to eating the sin offering was on the Day of Atonement, when the remains of the bull and the first goat were not to be eaten (Lev.16:27 – 28). I will discuss this On the Day of Atonement, the ritual law is very clear that absolutely *no one* is to eat the hides, flesh, or refuse of the bull or goat. That is, the sin is *not* to symbolically cycle back into the priests. The purpose and symbolism of the Day of Atonement absolutely requires that God consume all the sin (iniquity and uncleanness) of Israel, putting all of it to death by simultaneously consuming it within Himself by fire, and separating it from the people through the scapegoat. I will explore this in much more detail below.

### **Theme #7: Blood in the Sanctuary Recalls Blood After Eden**

What is the significance of the blood and the sacrifices involved in the sacrificial system? The animal sacrifices and the blood spilled there did not play a merely symbolic role to anticipate Jesus, although certainly it did have that function. Rather, the animal sacrifices were given to Israel – in part – as God’s way of allowing them to maintain His presence with them, so He might settle them and bless them in the Promised Land. Hence, animal sacrifices and the bloodshed served an actual function for their time. The commandments to sacrifice animals and draw on their innocent blood maintained Israel’s position there and was integrated into Israel’s existence *as the reason God gave for why their land was uniquely abundant*, ‘flowing with milk and honey’ (Dt.11:8 – 15). Moses reminded Israel of the sanctuary and the sacrifices to be offered and eaten there (Dt.12). Within that context, Moses says, ‘Only you shall not eat the blood; you are to pour it out on the ground like water’ (Dt.12:16; 23 – 24; 15:23). This supports my thesis that the innocent blood of animals was God’s provision to humanity, and Israel in particular – for continued life with God on the land, because human blood had become corrupt and alienated from the land. Hence, later, when the prophet Malachi called for the renewal of animal sacrifices, he argued that the land was unfruitful because of Israel’s unfaithfulness in bringing the sacrifices:

<sup>8</sup> Will a man rob God? Yet you are robbing Me! But you say, ‘How have we robbed You?’ In tithes and offerings. <sup>9</sup> You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing Me, the whole nation of you! <sup>10</sup> Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in My house, and test Me now in this,’ says the LORD of hosts, ‘if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you a blessing until it overflows. <sup>11</sup> Then I will rebuke the devourer for you, so that it will not destroy the fruits of the ground; nor will your vine in the field cast its grapes,’ says the LORD of hosts. <sup>12</sup> All the nations will call you blessed, for you shall be a delightful land,’ says the LORD of hosts. (Malachi 3:8 – 12)

What should be demonstrable here is that the animal sacrifices really did effect an atonement of sorts. To be sure, the sacrifices did not and could not cause the final and full atonement that reconciled human nature to God through the physical body of Jesus, as the letter to the Hebrews discusses. But it was a preliminary form of atonement that partially reconciled Israel’s existence to God in the physical space of the Promised Land. Seen in this light, the

sacrificial system was God's gift to Israel to help them enjoy an existence that recalled the original Garden of Eden. Just because the letter to the Hebrews does not stress this real function of the sacrificial system does not mean it did not exist. I consider it poor form to invoke Psalm 40:6 and Hosea 6:6 – statements that relativize the sacrifices in comparison with moral obedience – to simply negate the significance of Malachi, which many scholars, in effect, do by ignoring Malachi. The sacrifices enacted at the Tabernacle/Temple provided a real – and not merely symbolic – function and benefit for Israel. If it did not serve a real and actual purpose in itself, albeit limited, then it surely could not have served its symbolic purpose of pointing to Jesus as the ultimate sacrifice, the ultimate priest, and the ultimate Temple. And the meaning of blood and the animal sacrifices take on a different meaning from the one penal substitution advocates tend to describe.

This fact suggests that the sacrifices played another role in God's partnership with Israel, a role which could encompass specific instances of God's anger against specific instances of Israel's sin but went beyond that. Rather, the broader pattern is this: The life in the blood of the animals allowed God to overcome the separation caused by Adam and Eve between Himself, humanity, *and the land*. The animals' uncorrupted life blood allowed God to mitigate the consequences of the curse, that is to say positively, to amplify the agricultural vitality of the land upon which Israel settled, thereby creating the conditions for a partial restoration of the garden of Eden for Israel. The shedding or sprinkling of innocent blood played a life-giving role. At least in this instance in Malachi, it did not cleanse the Israelite worshiper, nor did it appease God's wrath for Israel's moral failure of the Sinai Law, but provided an additional measure of 'life' to the land itself, as a gift from God to Israel. Whether one of these ideas undergird the others and are more fundamental, or whether we must view these threads as equal and interrelated cords in a larger literary tapestry, I will continue to examine.

I agree with penal substitution advocates that the death of the animals and the sprinkling of blood are obviously connected *at times* with God's anger against Israel *on some occasions* in the biblical story. But not always, and not here in Malachi. If God provided the animal sacrifices to appease His own anger over Israel's moral failures, then it is difficult to explain why He became angry with Israel for not performing the sacrifices themselves. If the distinction between moral and ceremonial law is an appropriate distinction to use, then why in Malachi does the ceremonial law seem to be a moral responsibility? And why does Malachi tie the sacrifices to the agricultural vitality of the Promised Land? Moses did the same in Deuteronomy 11 – 12. Furthermore, whether Malachi's call to sacrifice is logically connected to the occasion of God being angry with Israel for moral failings, or whether it is one theme we must literarily and theologically incorporate into various others is another question. I believe the latter. The sacrificial system sits at the nexus of many themes that are developed throughout the biblical narrative, and that all those themes need to be considered for an overall theory of the atonement, and I will substantiate that in the next two sections.

Leviticus, the very book that emphasizes Israel's relationship to the land, presses this issue of blood. In order for Israel to settle in the Promised Land, God must provide a system of sacrifices. For human blood is corrupted; human occupation of God's blessed garden land must be cleansed by innocent animal blood (Lev.1 – 7). Whereas Moses and Aaron initially could not enter the Tent of Meeting where God appeared in glory (Ex.40:35), after blood had been shed in the sacrifices, they were able to go in (Lev.8:1 – 9:24). Likewise, in order to be settled in the land as a people peculiar in the world, Israel had to sacrifice innocent blood, lest the nation also experience the curse on the land of Adam and Eve's disobedience. Thus, the Levitical sacrifices prepared Israel to enter the land, once again linking atoning sacrifice and rest in the land. Any settling absolutely required the shedding of innocent blood (as Israel was to do) or the cursing of sons (like Cain implicitly did). Interestingly enough, Leviticus deals with the topics of the sacrificial bloodshed (Lev.1 – 9) *and* narrates a cursing of Aaron's priestly sons, Nadab and Abihu (Lev.10), suggesting that with Israel both were required because Israel existed in tension, as a nation experiencing both the blessings of God and yet vulnerable to the curses that came with deviation from God's way of maintaining their livelihood on the land. The contamination of human blood due to sin, in particular the contamination of Israel's blood while they lived in the garden land, had ramifications which were ultimately dependent on the Day of Atonement ritual, which is suggested by the fact that the impurity laws of Leviticus 11 – 15 are sandwiched between the instructions about animal sacrifice (Lev.1 – 10) and the Day of Atonement (Lev.16 – 17). Then, mishandling sexual relations was understood to be mishandling blood relations and would result in the land vomiting Israel out (Lev.18 – 20). Blood relations established a certain responsibility for a kinsman-redeemer to help a near relative recover land (Lev.25); I assume kinship relations through adoption also qualified.

The thematic link between land, blood, sons, and cities continued in Israel's settlement in the land and found thematic union in the Levites. After being delivered from imperial Egyptian bondage and overthrowing the feudal city-state structure of Canaanite society, Israel settled in the promised land with a decidedly anti-urban disposition. God gave directives for their rural life and frowned upon urbanization; the anti-urban polemic Kikawada and Quinn find in Genesis 1 – 11 was the beginning of Israel's Torah. The Mosaic ordinances

demonstrate a cautious and negative attitude towards cities. For example, whereas land reverted back to its ancestral owners in the jubilee under any and all circumstances,

<sup>29</sup> Likewise, if a man sells a dwelling house in a walled city, then his redemption right remains valid until a full year from its sale; his right of redemption lasts a full year. <sup>30</sup> But if it is not bought back for him within the space of a full year, then the house that is in the walled city passes permanently to its purchaser throughout his generations; it does not revert in the jubilee. <sup>31</sup> The houses of the villages, however, which have no surrounding wall shall be considered as open fields; they have redemption rights and revert in the jubilee. <sup>32</sup> As for cities of the Levites, the Levites have a permanent right of redemption for the houses of the cities which are their possession. <sup>33</sup> What, therefore, belongs to the Levites may be redeemed and a house sale in the city of this possession reverts in the jubilee, for the houses of the cities of the Levites are their possession among the sons of Israel. <sup>34</sup> But pasture fields of their cities shall not be sold, for that is their perpetual possession. (Leviticus 25:29 – 34)

Whereas all Israel's land was viewed as belonging to God and not to any one particular person, this was not true with houses in cities. A non-Levite Israelite living in a walled city did not have full recourse to the jubilee protection. This condition provided a way for enterprising and greedy Israelites in a city to acquire more property at the expense of others. Urban problems and relations were expected to be problematic from the beginning of Israel's covenant charter because God did not claim to own the city like He did the land. Perhaps God was giving disincentives for Israelites to live in cities. Perhaps He was communicating how transitional and insecure life in the city would be. Perhaps He was communicating how the Sabbath does not truly penetrate the city. Regardless, the city was a place where Israel could seemingly hide from certain claims of God. But in exchange, a negative situation would clearly arise: There would be no true rest and security in the city.

The Levites were the only legitimate city-dwellers from God's perspective. Their houses alone returned to them in the jubilee year. Their residences were considered to be their own possession, qualified by their underlying alien and pilgrim status with the rest of the nation, of course. But the Levitical position was very peculiar. The links between settling in the land and shedding blood, building cities and cursing sons intersected in the Levites. Originating in the Exodus, the Levites were the priestly clan which was Israel's firstborn, sacrificed to God as a Passover offering so that the rest of the nation could escape death (Ex.13:1 – 2, 11 – 16, Num.13:13, 41). In essence, the Levites were the firstborn sons who were in a sense already dead. God claimed them. Corresponding to this was their adoption of the curse associated with the attempt to settle in the land, expressed by cities and bloodshed. The Levites could live in cities – in fact, God mandated that they live in cities – because they bore the unceasing burden of service in bloodshed. Caretakers of the Tabernacle apparatus, the Levites labored endlessly so that the remainder of the nation could experience rest. From their numbers were drawn the priests, who reminded the people that innocent blood needed to be offered constantly for the nation to dwell in the land. Even on the holy days where the Sabbath was in effect, the priests had to labor. If they failed in their duties, Israel failed to receive the blessings of the land. They were the ongoing reminder to the entire nation that Israel's possession of the land was somehow not complete, in fact, not even totally appropriate. Within Israel's land-based society, the city-dwelling Levites were the exceptions to the rule; but within the wider pattern of the world outside Israel, their position fit the rule. Their way of life in Israel was an absolute necessity because someone in the chosen family needed to labor constantly to provide the remainder of the community with rest and material provision, just like Enoch probably labored for his father Cain. Who would it be? The firstborn, in some sense: the Levites. They dwelled in cities precisely because they trafficked in blood, which violated the land. No one who sheds blood can have an inheritance in God's land. Bloodshed is what originally disqualified Simeon and Levi and their whole tribes from land ownership (Gen.34:25 – 31; 49:5 – 7), and only the zealous bloodshed of Phineas restored the Levites to a position of respectability in Israel (Num.25:6 – 13). But Phineas still could not undo what his forefather Levi had done before. The curse of the firstborn and the curse of bloodshed still fell on them; the Levites bore the burden for Israel settling in the land. The link between the Levites and the city shows that the inner logic of the city was operating within Israel, but God subverted that inner logic so as to benefit Israel and to bear witness to the priesthood of Jesus Christ.

A second example weaving together the themes of blood, land, city, and sons is Israel's cities of refuge, numbering six in total (Num.35:9 – 34, Dt.19:1 – 10, Josh.20). They were ordained by God to be a place of refuge to a person that was guilty of what we would call manslaughter, but not murder: an accidental killer. If the killer could make it safely to the gates of the city of refuge, he would be safe from anyone seeking to retaliate. A peculiar series of instructions follow. The killer is safe as long as he stays in the city of refuge. He must remain in the city until the death of the high priest of Israel, at which time he is free to go and protected from vendettas. The kinsman of the deceased appointed to be 'avenger of blood' and seeking his life had to desist. The guilty man, while guilty,

was less guilty than Cain, who murdered his brother Abel and polluted the land with Abel's blood. Thus, the man could resume life in Israel's garden land. This is the only occasion where the death of the high priest has meaning. A vicarious sacrifice! We cannot help but see the direct parallel of the city of refuge to Jesus Christ, who offers us a place of hiding in exile from our crimes, who is always available to us, who is very accessible, who shelters us from condemnation, and who sets us free in grace because he is also the high priest whose death cleanses us. This actual death of the high priest has ramifications for how we interpret the symbolic death of the high priest in the holy of holies on the Day of Atonement through the goat sacrifices (Lev.16).

In his final song before Israel, Moses looked far into the future and sang that God 'will atone for His land and His people' (Dt.32:43). Israel could enter the Promised Land only through the sacrifice of innocent blood, continuing in, but inverting the relation between, bloodshed and land, cities and sons. This time, the chosen people would shed the innocent blood of animals instead of the blood of human beings. And God designed this chosen people to be a people of peace, who would not commit violence against each other nor shed one another's blood. That, at least, was God's intent. Thus, we have both positive and negative appraisals, not of the land itself, but of Israel's claim to own the land. The very act of settling created tensions for Israel. Mosaic Israel was a community of faith echoing God's original true humanity, but it was also a human civilization claiming some level of permanence on a land affected by the original curse of Adam's fall, which prevented the people of Israel from *truly* settling.

Hence, when Jesus came, he resolved this tension. He disinherited himself of any claim on Jewish family land, called his followers to do the same, and adopted a pilgrim posture reminiscent of Abraham and Sarah's pilgrimage. God's people would no longer settle permanently on the land, or any land. They would continue to benefit from the earth and God's provision, to be sure. But they would wait and yearn for God's new heavens and new earth.

#### **Theme #8: The Day of Atonement and the Renewal of the Covenant**

All the interwoven biblical patterns involving blood and land, sons and cities, sacrifice and eating now meet at the Day of Atonement ritual of Leviticus 16. Penal substitution advocates assume that the sacrifice of any animal represents *the worshiper per se*. By contrast, as I have explained above, I think animal sacrifice carries or represents *the sinful corruption within the worshiper*. The sacrifice is akin to circumcision, and I have explored the textual links between circumcision and Passover, and circumcision and sacrifice. Something is cut off from the person to symbolize the cutting away of an internal uncleanness. Blood is shed. Reproduction or fertility is deliberately curtailed and then affirmed again by trust in God, signifying death and resurrection. The covenant is enacted and, in some cases, entered. The connection between circumcision and sacrifice must be given considerable weight.

Penal substitution defenders Jeffery, Ovey, and Sachs argue that the encounter between God and Israel at Mount Sinai exemplifies a permanent and abiding opposition between God's holiness and Israel's sinfulness. They say, 'The sinfulness of God's people renders his closeness problematic, even dangerous. Limits are to be put around Mount Sinai so that the people do not draw too close to the Lord (Exod.19:12, 23). If they do, they will 'perish' (v.21), for the Lord will 'break out against them' (v.24).' I agree with the three authors that there is a relational and ontological problem between God and humanity, but it is not manifested in the way they suggest. The problem with Jeffery, Ovey, and Sachs' *exegesis* of Exodus 19 is that they do not see God's real command and invitation that Israel come up the mountain to meet Him there (Ex.19:13, 17). In the narrative, God *wanted to meet*. Israel, however, *did not*. Israel was the party initially afraid of the encounter, just as Adam and Eve were afraid of meeting God in their fallen state (Gen.3:8 – 13):

<sup>10</sup> The LORD also said to Moses, 'Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their garments; <sup>11</sup> and let them be ready for the third day, for on the third day the LORD will come down on Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people. <sup>12</sup> You shall set bounds for the people all around, saying, 'Beware that you do not go up on the mountain or touch the border of it; whoever touches the mountain shall surely be put to death. <sup>13</sup> No hand shall touch him, but he shall surely be stoned or shot through; whether beast or man, he shall not live.' When the ram's horn sounds a long blast, they shall come up to [literally, 'on'] the mountain. <sup>14</sup> So Moses went down from the mountain to the people and consecrated the people, and they washed their garments. <sup>15</sup> He said to the people, 'Be ready for the third day; do not go near a woman.' <sup>16</sup> So it came about on the third day, when it was morning, that there were thunder and lightning flashes and a thick cloud upon the mountain and a very loud trumpet sound, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled. <sup>17</sup> And Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. <sup>18</sup> Now Mount Sinai was all in smoke because the LORD descended upon it in fire; and its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked violently. <sup>19</sup> When the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke and God

answered him with thunder. <sup>20</sup> The LORD came down on Mount Sinai, to the top of the mountain; and the LORD called Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up. (Exodus 19:10 – 20)

As I mentioned earlier, John Sailhamer translates v.13, ‘they shall come up *on* the mountain.’ Sailhamer acknowledges that English translations of that verse do not always reflect this thought of Israel coming up ‘on the mountain.’ But the same view is offered by Exodus 3:12 when it says ‘you shall worship God *on* this mountain.’ The New Jewish Publication Society translation reads ‘on’ the mountain. Moses later says to Israel, ‘The LORD spoke to you face to face at the mountain from the midst of the fire, while I was standing between the LORD and you at that time, to declare to you the word of the LORD; for you were afraid because of the fire and *did not go up the mountain.*’ (Dt.5:4 – 5) Moses’ words show that God expected Israel to come up Mount Sinai. Sailhamer gives a thorough explanation and discussion of this issue, extensively citing both Jewish and Christian scholars.<sup>53</sup> If Eden was a mountain of sorts, which is suggested by the fact that the spring of water separated into four major rivers, thus requiring either elevation or supernatural division or both (since rivers naturally converge, not diverge), then God’s desire with Israel was to repeat a pattern that He had set before, with Adam and Eve.

The narrative development, and as I perceive it, the chiasmic structure of the Pentateuch story, adds even more weight to this. For *Moses* undoubtedly went up ‘on’ the mountain to meet with God face to face. If the chasm between God’s holiness and human sinfulness is so great and so constant, then why did God not destroy Moses, here in Exodus 19 or in Exodus 34 for being so close to Him? Why did God permit Moses, and then Aaron (Ex.19:24), and then Nadab and Abihu and seventy of the elders of Israel (Ex.24:1), to approach Him on the mountain? Then, Joshua as Moses’ assistant stayed in the tent of meeting with God and Moses; in fact, he ‘would not depart from the tent’ (Ex.33:11). It is more logical to see the fault being Israel’s, collectively, for lacking the faith, courage, and desire to meet with God when the ram’s horn sounded like a trumpet and called them forward on the third day.

Only *after* the people fail to go up on the mountain does God warn them not to ‘break through to gaze’ lest they ‘perish’ (Ex.19:21). Something about their initial negative response to God determined their ability to go any further with God or not, much like their initial negative response to God’s command to enter the Promised Land (Num.13:1 – 14:45). Prior to Exodus 19:21, however, I question whether we should see God as hostile to being approached in the right manner. God had wanted to be approached; Moses alone had faith; the rest of the people did not. God then veiled Himself in the Tabernacle, prompting Moses to veil his face. The symmetry is again significant. Later, when Moses’ face shone with glory because of his face-to-face encounters with God, he veiled his face in judgment so Israel would understand that they missed an opportunity to do as he had done. God hid His glory from the people, even though God clearly wanted a deeper relationship with each of them (e.g. Num.11:24 – 29). Even if one is not inclined to translate the verse in this particular way, against the compelling textual evidence, then the fact still remains that God seemed pleased to meet with certain key Israelite leaders, that Moses seemed to speak for God when he wished that God’s Spirit rest on every Israelite (Num.11:29), and that Moses also seemed to speak for God when he refused to let God send His people off without God Himself going with them personally.

The problem with Jeffery, Ovey, and Sachs’ *theology* in general, and not just their exegesis of Exodus 19 in particular, is that they imply Israel was (and by extension, humanity is) ever and always *eager* to meet God, but God was (and by extension, is) ever and always *wrathful* by the idea of such a meeting. On the contrary, God always seems *initially more willing* than his human partners to meet, say with Adam and Eve (Gen.3:8 – 14), Cain (Gen.4:13 – 16), and Jacob (Gen.28:10 – 22; 32:24 – 32). Or, at the very least, on other occasions when the human partner was not particularly skittish, God clearly *initiated* such a meeting, say with Abraham (Gen.18), Moses (Ex.3:1 – 6), and Israel as a whole (Ex.3:7 – 8), without expressing any reservation about human corruption and sinfulness. The portrayal of God being eager to meet *while humans show resistance* comes about at crucial junctures in each human being’s story. God wanted to meet with people *just after they sinned*: after Adam and Eve fell (Gen.3:8 – 13), after Cain murdered Abel (Gen.4:9 – 12), after Abram lied about Sarai (Gen.13:1 – 4), after Jacob deceived his father and his brother (Gen.28:10 – 22), after Jacob succumbed to his carnal, sexual appetite for Rachel and then grossly favored her over her unloved sister Leah (Gen.31:11 – 13), after Moses committed murder (Ex.3:1ff.), and after Israel complained in the wilderness, which as we learn later, was in the midst of their habitual idol-worship (Ex.16 – 19). What justifies the implication of Jeffery, Ovey, and Sach that God is the one who is ever provoked to wrath, and humans are the ones who ever want to meet with God and gain His acceptance? The books of Genesis and Exodus contain more narrative material to imply the very opposite. And of course, the question of *who* wants to meet and *when* is quite important to our understanding of the biblical story. For the next question we would ask, *why*, shapes our understanding of the sacrifices. For Jeffery, Ovey, and Sach, the answer to their *why* question is incorrect because their starting question is incorrect.

---

<sup>53</sup> Sailhamer, 1992, p.51 – 59

These authors read in a permanent reluctance on God's part to have people near Him. Unfortunately, this mistake consistently affects their understanding of the sacrifices: 'The book of Leviticus teaches that the relationship between a holy God and a sinful people (or in terminology more characteristic of Leviticus, an unclean people) can be maintained by sacrifice.'<sup>54</sup> Once again, I agree that there is a clear tension between God's presence and Israel's ontological human state, which has not changed from the time God diagnosed the human heart in Gen.6:5 – 6 and 8:21. However, the tension as I understand it is not the way they interpret it.

Jeffery et. al. explore the meaning of the Hebrew verb *kippur*, which is translated 'to make atonement.' The word appears sixteen times in Leviticus 16 alone. Based on their observations and research, they say, 'There are four possible meanings for *kippur*, none of which necessarily exclude the others.'<sup>55</sup> The verb *kippur* means: (1) *to forgive*, where God is the subject; (2) *to cleanse*, both people and physical objects like the altar and the tabernacle itself (Lev.16:16, 19); (3) *to ransom*, in conjunction with money (Ex.30:15 – 16; Num.31:50) or the life of an animal (Lev.17:11); and (4) *to turn aside God's wrath*, as when Phineas turned God's anger away from the Israelites (Num.25:10) and 'made atonement [*kippur*]' for the Israelites' (Num.25:13). After surveying these usages of *kippur*, the three authors ask, 'Which of these meanings are in view in Leviticus 16?' Later, I will make some important qualifications to these four aspects of the word *kippur*, but for now I will accept that all four meanings are present and must be integrated together.

Jeffery et. al. critique John Goldingay, and rightly so in my opinion, for asserting that the fourth meaning is not present in the basic meaning of the word *kippur*. Goldingay claims 'the question of propitiating God's wrath...has little place in Leviticus itself. The word anger hardly appears. The languages of atonement-propitiation-expiation and of anger do not come together...Sacrifice does not directly relate to anger.'<sup>56</sup> Not only is the word 'hardly' appropriate for Goldingay to sweepingly discount the connection between sacrifice and God's wrath, but the legislation of the sanctuary is precisely what prevents more incidences of God's wrath. I agree with the three authors that the incidents cited in Leviticus 16:1 serve as context-setting for the rest of the Yom Kippur legislation. Leviticus 16:1 refers to the deaths of Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu in Leviticus 10:1 – 2 because they offered 'strange fire' to God, occasioning His wrath and requiring Aaron's other sons Eleazar and Ithamar to take up priestly duties properly lest God be angry with the whole congregation (Lev.10:6). The fact that this incident is recalled at the start of the procedural specifics for how to conduct the Day of Atonement rites means that turning aside God's wrath is part of the overall definition of why the rites are important. The penal substitution advocates also aptly point out that inappropriately eating sacrificial offerings led to excommunication from the people (Lev.7:20 – 21), which is a severe consequence. Despite the fact that the terms for anger and wrath are not present there, the nature of the consequence strongly suggests that God's wrath is behind the practice of being 'cut off from the people.' Hence, Goldingay's attempt to distance the fourth meaning – to turn aside God's wrath – from the cluster of meanings connected to *kippur* is inappropriate. Jeffery, Ovey, and Sach are correct in maintaining, contra Goldingay, that all four meanings must be held together.

However, the three authors then commit *the very same mistake* they deplore in Goldingay. They neglect the second meaning – *to cleanse* – and fail to find a place for it in their definition of the overall picture of atonement. Instead, they make three assertions that draw our attention to the usage of the fourth meaning. First, the goat that dies in the atonement rite dies the death of a penal substitute in the presence of God, instead of the high priest. I affirm that substitution is in view because the high priest would otherwise die and the goat would otherwise live. But whether the goat represents the person of the high priest, or the corruption within the humanity of the high priest, and/or those categories for Israel as a whole represented by the high priest, must be examined very carefully. This impacts what we say dies in the wrath of God, and whether penal substitution or ontological substitution is the appropriate framework for understanding the work of Christ. Second, they argue that the scapegoat that is sent out into 'a solitary place,' which is also called, as they note, 'a land of cutting off.' The goat is surely sent there to die, cut off from the people and from God. This type of exclusion, exile, banishment, and death is connected to God's punishment for sin (e.g. Lev.7:20 – 27; 17:4, 9 – 14; 19:8; 20:3, 5 – 6, 17 – 18; 22:3; 23:29). But once again, I argue that this is a type of substitution that is not penal. And third, the authors argue that the semantic connection with another Hebrew phrase that involves punishment (Gen.4:13; Lev.5:17; 24:14 – 16; Num.5:31; 14:34; Lam.5:7) requires us to interpret the scapegoat bearing 'the punishment due to the people on account of their sin. Thus the

---

<sup>54</sup> Steve Jeffery, Michael Ovey, Andrew Sach, *Pierced for Our Transgressions: Rediscovering the Glory of Penal Substitution* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007), p.43

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p.44, emphasis mine; they also note David Petersen, 'Atonement in the Old Testament, in David Petersen (editor), *Where Wrath and Mercy Meet: Proclaiming the Atonement Today* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2001), p. 1 – 25 (esp. p.9 – 12) and Leon Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross* (London: Tyndale, 1955), p.160 – 178

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p.47, quoting John Goldingay, 'Your Iniquities Have Made a Separation Between You and Your God', in John Goldingay (editor), *Atonement Today* (London: SPCK, 1995), p.39 – 53

scapegoat is depicted in Leviticus as bearing the sin, guilt, and punishment of the people, and being condemned to death in their place.<sup>57</sup>

The problem that Jeffery, Ovey, and Sach are overlooking throughout their discussion is the *uncleanness* of human beings, that is, our sinful *being* and not just our sinful *actions*. Their oversight becomes curiously evident in the fact that they do not say that the scapegoat bears the ‘uncleanness’ of the people or the high priest. Suddenly, the second meaning present in the verb *kippur* recedes from view, without any explanation. This vanishing act occurs despite the fact that the authors have gestured towards it throughout their essay. Their thesis statement equates sinfulness with *uncleanness*, because Leviticus itself requires us to do so: ‘The book of Leviticus teaches that the relationship between a holy God and a sinful people (or in terminology more characteristic of Leviticus, an *unclean* people) can be maintained by sacrifice.’<sup>58</sup> That is right, though not in the sense that they mean it. How is the uncleanness – the fundamental, ontological condition of human beings who have been corrupted from the fall into self-centeredness – to be reconciled with this holy, other-centered God? Jeffery et. al. interpret the atonement as God dealing with the legal punishment He supposedly wants to pour out on human beings, but not as cleansing the underlying root cause of our relational resistance to God in the first place. Does God atone for past actions only? Is He not atoning for the diseased condition, too?

Moreover, when Jeffery, Ovey, and Sach elaborate on the second meaning of the Hebrew verb *kippur*, they fully acknowledge this deeper problem, which is not legal-judicial but ontological. They acknowledge that physical objects like the altar and the tabernacle need to be *cleansed* (not forgiven, for non-moral objects cannot be forgiven) because of their proximity to fallen human beings. They write, ‘The underlying point could be rather that uncleanness is an intrinsic problem for fallen human beings; simply as we exist, experiencing nothing more than is common to everyday human life, we find ourselves unable to approach a holy God.’<sup>59</sup> Now that they are speaking in the idiom of Leviticus – *uncleanness* – they subtly shift to speak of the corruption within human nature. For one cannot avoid that, especially when the text of Leviticus 16 states that the purpose of the atonement rite is to cleanse Israel: ‘It is on this day that atonement shall be made for you to cleanse you; you will be clean from all your sins before the LORD.’ (Lev.16:30).

Most tellingly, when they need to draw upon an analogy to rebut Goldingay and explain why the sanctuary system, including the Day of Atonement rite, possesses some effectiveness at averting the wrath of God, these authors draw upon a non-legal analogy. Surprisingly, they use the metaphor of a water purification system. They say:

‘Most of the time it is perfectly safe to drink, but it would be wrong to infer from this that dirty water could never be a problem. On the contrary, our tap water is drinkable only because the purification systems are working properly. If pranksters were to break into the treatment plant and turn off some of the crucial machinery, or perhaps fool around with some dangerous chemicals, then not only would poison be on its way to our taps, but the intruders themselves would be in great peril. In summary, it is evident that in Leviticus 16 the Hebrew verb *kippur*, normally translated ‘he made atonement’, refers to the propitiation of God’s wrath through the offering of a substitutionary animal sacrifice, *which cleansed the people from their sin*.’<sup>60</sup>

I was quite happy but very puzzled to find this analogy here because nowhere do the authors explain how the sanctuary symbolism works to achieve it. How do the authors picture God cleansing people from the fundamental internal condition we now find ourselves possessing: the corruption of the heart (Gen.6:5 – 6; 8:21)? How is *cleansing* or *purifying* communicated by the sacrifices? For a death sentence punishes a criminal, but cannot be said to cure, cleanse, or purify him from the underlying inclinations that influenced his decision to commit the crime. So focused are they at defending the idea that the sacrificial system is a *punishment* system, they never bother to explain how the symbolism works as a *purification* system. Can the two be reconciled?

This is one of the selective gaps in Jeffery, Ovey, and Sach’s thesis. Not only do they fail to explain (1) why non-moral objects like the altar, furniture, and tabernacle itself need *atonement as cleansing*, they fail to account for (2) how the slain goat offered as a sin offering relates to the second goat, the scapegoat; especially (3) why the sin offering is *not* eaten by the priests on this occasion, as compared with Leviticus 6:14 – 18 when God explicitly instructs the priests to eat every sin offering, and Leviticus 10:16 – 20 when Moses becomes angry with

---

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p.49 - 50

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p.43, emphasis mine

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., p.44, emphasis mine

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p.48

Aaron when Aaron does not eat the sin offering as instructed; (4) how the high priest came to acquire, symbolically, all the sin of the people so as to bring it into the sanctuary in the first place; and (5) the relation between the Day of Atonement and the rest of the Pentateuchal narrative. I will offer an explanation for all those elements. In so doing, I believe my explanation better answers all the dimensions of the text.

*(1) Why Do Non-Moral Objects in the Tabernacle Need Cleansing?*

On the first point, the Day of Atonement rite is focused just as much on renewing the physical space of the tabernacle as it is renewing the priests and the high priests who serve there. The Day of Atonement rite begins with reference to the death of Aaron's two sons, not only to thematically link the events, but to suggest that the chronological sequence of Leviticus 11 – 15 and 16 – 17 is not the narrative sequence. 'Now the LORD spoke to Moses after the death of the two sons of Aaron, when they had approached the presence of the LORD and died. The LORD said to Moses: 'Tell your brother Aaron that he shall not enter at any time into the holy place inside the veil...' In other words, Leviticus 11 – 15 serves to *interrupt* Leviticus 1 – 10 and 16 – 17. It would be more natural to read the consecration of the Aaronic priesthood and then read straight on to the instructions for the Day of Atonement rite. I believe the author-redactor of the Pentateuchal narrative makes this insertion in order to offer a narrative explanation for why the tabernacle and its furnishings need to be cleansed annually.

Jewish law established the symbolism of Israelites becoming unclean by touching unclean objects: unclean animals (Lev.11), dead bodies, graves, menstrual blood, etc. (Lev.12). The Israelites' vulnerability to disease, especially diseases that were infectious skin diseases, also reflected a deeper corruption of human nature in which some biological problem contained within the human body surfaced on the skin (Lev.13 – 15). It stands to reason, therefore, on the higher order of worship, that if human beings had some kind of contamination due to sin, that God's sanctuary would become unclean as well because of contact with the Israelites, the priests, and the high priest. Hence, the explanation of physical contamination (Lev.11 – 15) interrupts the discussion of the sacrifices performed in the sanctuary.

The Day of Atonement sought to remedy that situation and, at least, renew the physical sanctuary for ongoing use. The ceremony begins with the high priest entering only at the appointed day (Lev.16:2), with the appropriate animals for sacrifices in the holy place (Lev.16:3), and while in the holy place, bathing and dressing appropriately in linen symbolizing cleanliness (Lev.16:4), with one bull to make atonement for himself and his household (Lev.16:6, 11), and two goats for sacrifices (Lev.16:7 – 10). The sacrificed bull, along with incense on coals, would create a smoke within the tent (Lev.16:11 – 13). This symbolized the cloud of smoke in which Moses mediated before God for Israel on the top of Mount Sinai (Ex.19). Into this cloud of smoke the high priest stepped, representing Moses and reenacting the sacred renewal of the holy covenant, the covenant which Israel kept breaking. The sacred objects and the sanctuary itself needed to be cleansed and atoned for:

<sup>14</sup> Moreover, he shall take some of the blood of the bull and sprinkle it with his finger on *the mercy seat* on the east side; also *in front of the mercy seat* he shall sprinkle some of the blood with his finger seven times.

<sup>15</sup> Then he shall slaughter the goat of the sin offering which is for the people, and bring its blood inside the veil and do with its blood as he did with the blood of the bull, and sprinkle it *on the mercy seat* and *in front of the mercy seat*. <sup>16</sup> He shall make atonement *for the holy place*, because of the impurities of the sons of Israel and because of their transgressions in regard to all their sins; and thus he shall do *for the tent of meeting* which abides with them in the midst of their impurities. <sup>17</sup> When he goes in to make atonement in the holy place, no one shall be in the tent of meeting until he comes out, that he may make atonement for himself and for his household and for all the assembly of Israel. <sup>18</sup> Then he shall go out to *the altar* that is before the LORD and make atonement *for it*, and shall take some of the blood of the bull and of the blood of the goat and put it on *the horns of the altar* on all sides. <sup>19</sup> With his finger he shall sprinkle some of the blood on *it* seven times and cleanse *it*, and from the impurities of the sons of Israel consecrate *it*. <sup>20</sup> When he finishes atoning for *the holy place* and *the tent of meeting* and *the altar*, he shall offer the live goat...<sup>32</sup> So the priest who is anointed and ordained to serve as priest in his father's place shall make atonement: he shall thus put on the linen garments, the holy garments,<sup>33</sup> and make atonement *for the holy sanctuary*, and he shall make atonement *for the tent of meeting* and *for the altar*. He shall also make atonement for the priests and for all the people of the assembly. (Leviticus 16:14 – 20, 32 – 33, emphasis mine)

Leviticus is clear that the slain goat was a sin offering 'for the people' (Lev.16:15); the bull served that purpose 'for the high priest and his household,' perhaps because the bull did physical work and thus represented the high priest and his priestly work. But the very next verse clarifies that it is not merely for the sinful *transgressions* of the Israelites, although that awareness is certainly present, but first and foremost for their *impurities* (Lev.16:16). That is, their *uncleanness*, which the biblical author understands as coming from the corruption of the human heart from

the fall (Gen.6:5 – 6; 8:21); perhaps the author intends the phrase to be synonymous with that reality. It is because God's sanctuary 'abides with them in the midst of their impurities' that it must be cleansed.

(2) *How Are the First and Second Goats Related?*

The second gap of silence in the thesis of Jeffery, Ovey, and Sach is their lack of treatment of the first goat, the goat given to the Lord as a sin offering. This contributes to their apparent inability to integrate the cleansing aspect of the word *kippur* into the aspect of averting the wrath of God. Rather than examine the first goat presented as a sin offering, they immediately proceed to discuss the second goat, the scapegoat. This is a methodological flaw that allows them to separate the two goats in principle, rather than see them as complementary sides of one reality. After preparing himself to enter the sanctuary and bringing one bull and two goats (Lev.16:1 – 13), the high priest then offered the bull as a burnt offering and the first goat as a sin offering. The blood from the burnt bull offering was 'for himself and his household,' allowing him to enter into the sanctuary and continue the rite (Lev.16:14). The blood from the sin offering of the goat was 'for the people' (Lev.16:15). The high priest was to sprinkle the blood on the places where the furnishings of the sanctuary interfaced with the Israelites and God in heaven: the front of the mercy seat where God was 'closest' to the high priest, the priests, and the people (Lev.16:14) the horns of the altar where it was 'closest' to heaven (Lev.16:18), etc.

The atonement rite is clear that the first goat is sacrificed and its blood sprinkled on these places in the sanctuary to 'make atonement for the holy place, because of the impurities of the sons of Israel and because of their transgressions in regard to all their sins; and thus he shall do for the tent of meeting which abides with them in the midst of their impurities' (Lev.16:16). Mention of Israel's 'impurities,' 'transgressions,' 'sins,' and 'impurities' once again are found in this one rather dense verse. Apparently the contamination of the Israelites affects the physical furnishings of the sanctuary. For their blood, like the blood of all humanity, is corrupted. Thus, the contamination needs to be cleansed from the sanctuary by the innocent blood of the first goat. And, at the same time, it needs to be sent away – but to where?

This brings me to the second goat, the scapegoat. I believe that this second goat is present because the complementary image had to be provided by the atonement rite:

<sup>21</sup> Then Aaron shall lay both of his hands on the head of the live goat, and confess over it all the iniquities of the sons of Israel and all their transgressions in regard to all their sins; and he shall lay them on the head of the goat and send it away into the wilderness by the hand of a man who stands in readiness. <sup>22</sup> The goat shall bear on itself all their iniquities to a solitary land; and he shall release the goat in the wilderness. (Leviticus 16:21 – 22)

The three authors are correct, I believe, in seeing that the goat sent off into the 'solitary land' is an image of being cut off from the presence of God in judgment. The suggestion of some, that the meaning of 'solitary land' (*azazel*) is 'a rocky precipice' or 'complete destruction,' might also affect our interpretation slightly. But I will not treat that question here, as it does not seem to be a particularly distinguishing feature for helping us decide between penal substitution and ontological substitution. Jeffery et. al. rightly dismiss the idea that 'azazel' is a goat demon, for acknowledgement of goat demons is specifically condemned in Leviticus 17:10.

Hence, Jeffery et. al. argue that the principle of substitution is unavoidable here.<sup>61</sup> I agree. But what *type* of substitution is being represented? Is it *penal*? Once again, it seems to me that the symbolism of substitution is *medical*. The scapegoat carries away a *disease* to be exterminated, symbolically, much like a virus carrier. It does not carry away the *guilt* of Israel, symbolically, and still less the *personhood* of Israel collectively, to be punished in exile. The second goat represents the sending of Israel's sinful contamination *far away*. But the first goat represents the sending of Israel's sinful contamination *into God Himself*. The two ideas complement each other. Margaret Barker points out that Hebrews 8 – 9 and 13:11 – 12 say that Jesus was the goat sacrificed, while Hebrews 13:13 implies that he was also the scapegoat. The *Epistle of Barnabas*, chapters 5 and 7, compares Jesus to both the slain goat and the scapegoat as well.<sup>62</sup> Hence, the New Testament and the early Christians did not separate the two goats. They saw them as two aspects of one ritual.

---

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p.49 - 50

<sup>62</sup> Margaret Barker, 'Atonement: The Rite of Healing', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 49.1.1994, footnote 30. Barker offers a very compelling, integrated interpretation of the Day of Atonement. However, one problem with her proposal is that she seems to be open to the scapegoat representing both Jesus *and* a demon named Azazel/Asael. She interprets the goat being offered '*as Azazel*' as if God would place human sins on a demon and send it far away. While this is an attractive 'christus victor' atonement theory, ultimately, I doubt that ultimately the scapegoat represents both Jesus *and* a demon. Too, the New Testament does not suggest that God laid human sin on the devil or some other demonic being, meaning that the New Testament does not confirm Barker's thesis, but goes in a different direction. Thus, her critique of L.L. Grabbe in footnote 33, that he did not draw 'the obvious conclusion,' is premature. While the textual support she marshals for this view has some

Not just the sanctuary, but the people had to be symbolically cleansed of their sins and renewed as well. When the covenant was initially ratified, Moses took blood and sprinkled it on all the people (Ex.24:8). But it was no longer possible to do that when Israel became too numerous. Similarly, Eleazar the priest performed the red heifer ceremony providing cleansing ash-water for anyone in the congregation who handled the dead bodies of the first generation of Israelites who died in the wilderness (Num.19), lest they defile the sanctuary (Num.19:20). This red heifer ceremony only needed to be performed for a limited window of time, but anything like that later would also be logistically impossible due to Israel's sheer size. Even the act of sprinkling all the Levites with water so they could serve at the tent of meeting (Num.8:5 – 22), which was possible in the wilderness, would quickly become unmanageable because the Levites would soon become too numerous. The second goat – the scapegoat – seems to be provided in the atonement rite with the first goat as a way to provide the same symbolism as the original covenant sprinkling of the whole congregation. The first goat died to carry the contamination of Israel into God Himself, giving back its clean lifeblood with which to cleanse the sanctuary. The second goat died in the wilderness as a symbol of God separating Israel's sinful contamination from the people themselves. It was therefore a medical substitution. The two goats together serve to remind Israel about the renewal of the covenant.

### *(3) Why is the Sin Offering of the Goat on the Day of Atonement Not Eaten?*

Moreover, very unlike sin offerings on every other occasion, which were eaten by the priests (Lev.6:24 – 30; 10:24 – 26), on the Day of Atonement, the remains of the bull and the first goat were not to be eaten:

<sup>27</sup> But the bull of the sin offering and the goat of the sin offering, whose blood was brought in to make atonement in the holy place, shall be taken outside the camp, and they shall burn their hides, their flesh, and their refuse in the fire. <sup>28</sup> Then the one who burns them shall wash his clothes and bathe his body with water, then afterward he shall come into the camp. (Leviticus 16:27 – 28)

Any valid treatment of the Day of Atonement rite needs to account for this irregularity. Eating the remains of the sin offering would have normally fallen upon the priest. It was a picture of the priest internalizing Israel's sin, storing it up within himself. Those remains were considered to be so holy that, unlike every other occasion when human contact with a dead animal was a bit circumspect, touching the flesh of the sin offering made the person 'consecrated' (Lev.6:27), which means, I presume, *committed* to the eating of the remains. This was a serious matter. Recall also that Moses was angry with Aaron's sons on an occasion when they did not eat the remains of the sin offerings (Lev.10:24 – 26). However, in the case of the Day of Atonement, the ritual law is very clear that absolutely *no one* is to eat the hides, flesh, or refuse of the bull or goat. That is, the sin is *not* to symbolically cycle back into the priests. The purpose and symbolism of the Day of Atonement absolutely requires that God consume all the sin (iniquity and uncleanness) of Israel, putting all of it to death by simultaneously consuming it within Himself by fire, and separating it from the people through the scapegoat.

The laying on of the high priest's hands onto the scapegoat (Lev.16:21) appears to represent a symbolic transfer of some sort. The high priest, by slaying the first goat, was allowing the goat to 'carry' the sinfulness. He then appeared before God in the holy of holies so that God could symbolically put his own uncleanness to death, as well as the stored up uncleanness of the Israelites, eaten by all the priests in the sin offerings. Then the scapegoat running off into the wilderness can be said to represent God separating our *sinfulness* from us as far as the east is from the west, by taking it into Himself, which is the only place for it to go. If this is the case, then the two goats simultaneously represent not the death of Jesus and his forsakenness from the presence of God, but the death of the corruption in his human nature and his sending it far, far away from himself and us.

### *(4) How Did the High Priest Come to Acquire All the Impurity of the People?*

---

significance, Barker does not consider the role of the sanctuary as a whole as a 'plan B' from God's perspective, which Sailhamer does, and on which I build my understanding of the sanctuary, sin and guilt offerings, and the Day of Atonement rite. This leads Barker to elevate rabbinical positive opinion about the sanctuary overmuch (Barker, p.4, 6), seeing the high priest as God Himself and not as the human mediator between God and Israel. She does not consider the biblical writers' qualified and reluctant endorsement of the sanctuary and the priests, with substantial critique, especially the critique given by the Pentateuch itself. Methodologically, Barker rests her case on a substantial amount of extrabiblical literature, especially 1 Enoch, whose value might be illustrative but not determinative, in my mind. Jewish extrabiblical writing tends to be pro-Temple and give unqualified approval to Israel's major institutions, unlike the biblical writings. Thus, I suspect that 'as Azazel' is better understood to not refer to a demon but to sinfulness itself, 'as sin,' although that would need to be proven elsewhere. Moreover, I can accept Barker's suggestion that the slain goat is not merely 'for the Lord' but 'as the Lord.' If this is the proper understanding, then the two goats represent the division wrought by the high priest between Israel and Israel's sin through a divine self-sacrifice (which is admittedly easier for a Christian to argue for, given a commitment to the New Testament). It is the human mediator between God and Israel, in the presence of God, who brings about a separation between Israel's sinfulness and Israel itself, through the double imagery of the goats: one dies 'as the Lord' and the other dies taking Israel's sin far away.

The fourth oversight Jeffery et. al. commit concerns the question of how the high priest symbolically came to acquire all the iniquities, transgressions, and sins of the people in the first place. All of Israel used the sanctuary, directly and indirectly through the mediation of the priests. But while this perhaps explains why the sanctuary needed to be cleansed and why the boundaries between earth and altar need to be sprinkled with the innocent blood of animals, it does not explain why the high priest could present the sin of his people on their behalf in the first place. Certainly in the text of Leviticus 16, atonement for the people does not rest on the scapegoat alone, but on the bull and the slain goat as well, the physical sanctuary, the entire priesthood, and the high priest. But through what conduit did all the pollution of Israel symbolically come to rest on the high priest's shoulders?

First, as Leviticus 6:24 – 30 and 10:16 – 20 indicate, priests *alone* ate the sin offerings and the meat portions of the guilt offerings. The Israelite worshipers did not eat any portion of the sin offering or guilt offering. This was unusual among the sacrificial offerings, and sin and guilt offerings themselves were associated with the presence of the tabernacle sanctuary and the priesthood established to mediate the covenant. Burnt offerings, grain offerings, and peace offerings existed before the sanctuary was established. Burnt offerings were completely consumed by fire (Lev.1:2 – 3:17; 6:8 – 13), representing God completely consuming the animal. Grain offerings offered by the people, representing the blessing of God from the abundance of the land, were partly consumed in the fire (eaten by God) and partly eaten by the priests (Lev.6:14 – 18), though if a priest offered a grain offering to God on the day of his ordination, God alone consumed it (Lev.6:19 – 23). Peace offerings were a meal shared by the Israelite worshiper, God, and the priest. The fact remains, therefore, that only the priests ate the sin offerings and the meat of the guilt offerings. The priests, by eating these offerings, were then said to 'bear away the guilt of the congregation, to make atonement for them before the LORD' (Lev.10:17). The semantic parallels to the Day of Atonement, where the scapegoat bears away guilt, should be clear.

Then, in all the sanctuary sacrifices, what matters is not just that the animal dies, but who eats it (Lev.6 – 7). Peace offerings are eaten by the Israelites with the priests (Lev.3:11, 16; 7:15 – 16), with some of the animal burned, representing God sharing in and extending a meal. Burnt offerings are eaten by God symbolically through fire (Lev.6:8 – 13) because, as I believe, the ashes of the animal would be scattered over the land, symbolically nourishing it. Sin offerings are eaten by the priests, who were symbolically taking into themselves an uncleanness from their fellow Israelites (Lev.6:24 – 30; 10:16 – 18). So the sanctuary system represents God 'eating' sin and consuming it in Himself – or having his mediators, the priests, do it – and extending back the meal of fellowship.

Hence, I do not agree that 'the sin offering and guilt offering emphasize punishment or retribution for sin.'<sup>63</sup> Calvinist theologian and biblical scholar Vern Poythress, who made that statement in his 1991 work *The Shadow of Christ in the Law of Moses*, acknowledges the eating of the sacrificial meal at the sanctuary as significant for the Israelite and God, but fails to acknowledge the eating of the sin and guilt offerings by the priest as significant for the *process* of atonement. If the death of the animal symbolizes retribution, then there is nothing particularly special about the sin and guilt offerings, because animals die in *all* the offerings, excepting of course the grain offerings. Why then do only sin and guilt offerings emphasize punishment or retribution for sin? And why then did the Pentateuch differentiate between these offerings and others? These questions tend to go unexplained in Calvinist interpretations of the sacrificial system. Nor do Poythress or others discuss the matter of why the sin offering is conspicuously *not* eaten by the priest on the Day of Atonement itself, whereas the priests eat sin offerings on every other occasion. These omissions are typical and are shared by John Stott in his 1986 book *The Cross of Christ*; Brevard S. Childs in his 1992 work *Biblical Theology of Old and New Testaments*, which was rightly critiqued by Margaret Barker for devoting only four pages out of five hundred to the subject of atonement in the Old Testament<sup>64</sup>; Emile Nicole in his 2004 essay 'Atonement in the Pentateuch' in *The Glory of the Atonement*; Thomas Schreiner in his contribution, 'Penal Substitution View,' in the 2006 book *The Nature of the Atonement* comparing four views on the subject; Steve Jeffery, Michael Ovey, and Andrew Sach in 2007 in *Pierced for Our Transgressions: Rediscovering the Glory of Penal Substitution*; and William Barrick in his 2009 article 'Penal Substitution in the Old Testament' in *The Master's Seminary Journal*. This is an omission on their part, an omission that tends to be reproduced by evangelical commentators, and certainly by defenders of penal substitution. A rare exception is Gordon Hugenberger, who maintained in his class on the theology of the Pentateuch that who eats which sacrifice is significant to the overall message of the text. If what physically happened to the animal in its death is so important to atonement theory, it stands to reason that who physically ate it afterwards might also be significant.

The rites of the sin and guilt offerings emphasize the contamination of sin being passed along from the Israelite through the animal to the priest, stored up among the priests, until the high priest could take the accumulated contamination from the Israelites and send it into God on the Day of Atonement. This explains at a stroke why the

---

<sup>63</sup> Vern Poythress, *The Shadow of Christ in the Law of Moses* (P&R Publishing, 1991), ch.3.

<sup>64</sup> Margaret Barker, 'Atonement: The Rite of Healing', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 49.1.1994, p.2

sin and guilt offerings were added to the worship practices of the people of Israel when the sanctuary and the priesthood were established. Sin and guilt offerings are involved in the mediation of the priests and the mediation of the sanctuary. And that mediation is accomplished not judicially using legal-penal symbolism, but medically using physical-ontological symbolism, namely eating. Sin and guilt are passed along physically from the Israelite to the priest, symbolically speaking. The priests bore the sin away from the congregation (Lev.10:17). The sanctuary system, therefore, was God's way of storing up the contamination of Israel's sin. It was consumed physically by the priests, and stored up by them as covenant mediators until the high priest could bring that sin and guilt to God using the symbolism of the two goats on the Day of Atonement. God bore away Israel's sin by eating it Himself.

I wish to incorporate typological insights from both Margaret Barker and Vern Poythress. Barker, drawing on the insights of Mary Douglas, argues that the sanctuary represents the creation,<sup>65</sup> and calls the atonement ritual a creation-stabilizing ritual. The Levites were appointed so that Israel would not face the plague (Num.8:19). The revolt of Korah triggered a plague from God, which Aaron stopped (Num.16:47). And Phineas stopped a plague from God from breaking out among the people by killing the rebellious Israelite and his Midianite wife (Num.25:10 – 13). Phineas, significantly, 'made atonement.' He turned aside God's wrath from Israel as a whole. Barker aptly points out that the plagues represent an undoing of God's creation. Atonement restores the covenant, and thus, the shalom and peace that was threatened by human sin. The covenant God made with Israel involved (or modeled in microcosm) the covenant God has with the creation. God sustained the creation through a system of boundaries and bonds, 'ordering and binding the forces of chaos.'<sup>66</sup> I do not think that Genesis 1 presents us with 'chaos' as a 'force' somehow inherently lurking behind God's creation, as various passages refer to the boundaries God set in creation (Job 38:8 – 10; Jer.5:22; Ps.104:9). But I accept Barker's language insofar as chaos is the result of human sin, and human sin strains the bonds of creation itself. This, too, is attested by the biblical writers. When Israel and humanity disregarded the law of God, creation itself was described as undone, or as being threatened by being undone (Isa.24:5; Jer.4:23). The flood of Noah is best described as a relaxation of boundaries established by God in creation, as with the plagues on Egypt during the exodus. Moreover, the beastly empires seen by Daniel as terrible, bizarre, hybrid animals (Dan.7) broke boundaries established by God in creation, signifying a world gone mad. All this brings us back to atonement rituals being creation-renewing rituals, called so fairly by Barker and Douglas. The atonement rituals, albeit only temporarily and symbolically, repaired the damage done to the creation. The sacrifices done by Abel, Noah, Abraham, and eventually Israel sought to 'cover' or 'repair' the ruptures that always threatened to be exposed by the fall of humanity through disease or natural events that indicated that human beings had done damage to creation and to ourselves.

The Day of Atonement therefore enabled God to co-exist on the same land on which Israel lived, and allowed Israel to experience God's blessing of fruitful land as a place to dwell. Notice that the mediation of the high priest affected Israel on other levels involving blood and land. The actual death of the high priest allowed a man who had accidentally committed manslaughter, presumably shedding another man's blood, to exit the city of refuge and resume life in God's good land (Num.35:9 – 34, Dt.19:1 – 10, Josh.20). This relationship between the high priest and the land is vital to note. If we consider the rite of the bull and two goats on the Day of Atonement in the holy of holies to be a personal cleansing of the high priest, as well as of the priests and the people of Israel through him, then the image fits quite well. If we also consider the Day of Atonement rite to be an archetypal symbol of God's removal of the high priest's sinfulness, as well as a symbolic provision of his cleansed life-blood in return, then the imagery conforms even more closely to a wider pattern in the biblical story.

Poythress additionally makes the case that the high priest *personally represents the sanctuary*. He notes that the priests were cleansed by blood and sacrifices in a similar way that the sanctuary was cleansed by blood and sacrifices (Lev.8). The blood of a ram was placed on the lobe of the right ear, the thumb of the right hand, and the big toe of the right foot (Lev.8:22 – 24). Poythress explains the physical symbolism: 'Since most people are right-handed, the right side is chosen as the principal, representative, "orderly" side. The ear, the upper extremity, is

---

<sup>65</sup> Margaret Barker, 'Atonement: The Rite of Healing', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 49.1.1994, p.6 argues that the most holy place represented heaven, and the holy place represented the garden of Eden. She therefore suggests that the bread of the presence signifies the fruit of Eden and the menorah signifies God's presence. However, the fact that the cherubim mark the threshold of heaven and earth indicate more distance than Barker admits. The most holy place represents already the threshold of heaven and earth, from which God makes His presence known, and the garden of Eden lies behind that threshold. In the holy place, the bread of the presence represents God's provision of manna to Israel (Ex.16), and more broadly, God's provision of bread throughout the fall, because bread is connected thematically with the fall (Gen.3:17 – 19). The golden menorah probably represents the burning bush (Ex.3:2 – 5), and was probably designed originally not in the form in which we now see it in today's menorahs but a more three-dimensional interweaving of metal vines with lit candles at different points, more akin to the lampstand Zechariah saw in a vision (Zec.4:1 – 14). Hence, the approach of the high priest through the holy place, in the smoke of the burnt offering, into the holy of holies is meant to recall the approach of Moses through the wilderness to the top of Mount Horeb, clothed in smoke, to stand in the presence of God and mediate the covenant for Israel (Ex.19:18 – 25; 24:1 – 18; 32:11 – 14). The question, 'Who will mediate the covenant for us like Moses did?' is meant to be answered on the Day of Atonement with the answer, 'The high priest.'

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p.4 – 5

touched first because it is the extremity nearest heaven. Then those extremities are touched that are involved in manipulating the sacrifices and walking on the ground of the tabernacle. Thus the priests' relations to all the holy things around them are cleansed from defilement.' The priests were then dressed in garments of the same material and color of the tabernacle: gold, blue, and scarlet. On the head of the high priest was a turban with a gold plate inscribed with the phrase, 'Holy to the Lord' (Ex.28:36). Poythress suggests that the high priest himself is a kind of human tabernacle: his feet touch the earth. His hands handle the blood that mediates between heaven and earth, and in particular God and Israel. He is clothed with the same material as God's dwelling place. His head, being closest to heaven, is akin to the most holy place.<sup>67</sup> Conversely, Poythress provocatively suggests that the design of the sanctuary represents a person.<sup>68</sup> While I personally find Poythress' argument persuasive, the point I am making here is simply that there is a symbolic relationship between the high priest and the tabernacle. If the relationship is reciprocal between the high priest and the tabernacle, the argument is that much stronger. Elsewhere, in a related thought, Poythress says:

'Thus the high priest is a kind of minitabernacle. Since the whole of Israel is a nation of priests (Exod. 19:5-6), each Israelite reflects the pattern of the high priest at a subordinate level. Moreover, Israelites were told to wear tassels on their clothes as a reminder of "all the commandments of the LORD" (Num. 15:37-40). These tassels are naturally associated not only with the holiness of the commandments but also with the blue of the tassel-like pomegranates attached to the hem of the high priest's robe (Exod. 28:33-34). Thus each Israelite is depicted as a subordinate priest.'<sup>69</sup>

I support Poythress' argument because it is based on explicit literary connections made within the Pentateuch. The idea that the high priest and the tabernacle are mirror images of the other also finds support in the New Testament Gospels, which sees Jesus as the true tabernacle, and the letter to the Hebrews, which sees him as the true high priest and the true tabernacle and the true sacrifice all rolled together into one. To recognize that the Pentateuch itself saw the high priest and the tabernacle as parallel to each other makes it much easier to understand why Jesus called himself the true temple of God (Mt.11:25 – 12:6; Jn.2:19 – 22; 8:12; 14:1 – 17:26) and taught his apostles to do so as well, incorporating themselves into the image using various metaphors as 'living stones' or as a corporate 'light of the world' or 'city on a hill' (Mt.5:13 – 16; 1 Pet.2:4 – 8; Eph.2:11 – 22; 1 Cor.3:9 – 17; 6:18 – 20).

I value Poythress' observations as a biblical scholar, but am uncertain how he integrated this idea into his own Calvinist conviction about penal substitution. It appears to me that he has not. For if the high priest represented the sanctuary, then was he not cleansing *himself*, in some sense? Would not the high priest himself have been struck by the symmetry between his own circumcision, in which blood was shed by cutting something away from him and casting it away, and the atonement rite over which he presided, where blood was shed by cutting one goat and casting another away? Surely so, for he was cleansing the physical sanctuary on Israel's behalf in the Day of Atonement rite, but if the sanctuary is polluted by contact with the ontologically unclean and ethically sinful Israelites, then what can we suggest about the high priest himself, who is also ontologically unclean and ethically sinful? Is there not some typological relation that pertains to the high priest on the Day of Atonement? Or is Poythress avoiding the implications of his own observation? The symbolism might be taken to indicate some kind of God-ordained 'cleansing' of one's self by receiving the instruction and presence of God, mirroring by some distant relation the fundamental rite of Abraham, circumcision. In that sense, the Day of Atonement rite, for the high priest, is most decidedly a cleansing, in response to, in partnership with, and in submission to God.

Poythress' observations fit seamlessly into the ontological substitution atonement theory for which I am arguing. Israel was called upon to personally identify with the high priest, who was renewing the covenant on their behalf. Israel was called upon to identify with and participate in his act of renewal. This is what mediation meant. Moses' mediation for Israel on their behalf shaped the high priest's subsequent mediation on Israel's behalf. God identified Israel with Moses; Israel identified with Moses; and Moses identified himself with Israel and with God. This double mediation happened repeatedly in the Pentateuch. But Moses' own sin and mortality pointed to the need for another mediator to rise up after Moses and stabilize the covenant. That is precisely what the Pentateuch in its literary form raises as a question. The priests continued to falter. The high priest surely would one day falter as well and, at the very least, be unable to go beyond his own frail human strength and sinfulness. Ultimately, this is why the Pentateuch points beyond itself and to the Messianic king who will come from the tribe of Judah, not Levi, who will be the seed of the woman. But within the immediacy of Israel's history from the point after Moses' mediation, the

---

<sup>67</sup> Vern Poythress, *The Shadow of Christ in the Law of Moses* (Brentwood, TN: Wolgemuth & Hyatt, 1991), p.53 – 54

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p.59 – 63

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p.32

high priest was the one who stood as the one who mediated for Israel. The high priest alone ministered in the sanctuary on the Day of Atonement. Thus, forgiveness can be explained in terms of identification with a representative mediator, and a new identity found in relation to that mediator, not merely in terms of judicial transactions that happen over one's head.

Because of these thematic, literary, and typological connections between blood and land, I believe that the blood of the goat represented the symbolically cleansed blood of the high priest as the mediator of God's covenant with Israel. The symbolic death and cleansing of the high priest through the bull and two goats on the Day of Atonement allowed the high priest, in a type of resurrection cleansing, to continue standing before God in the holy of holies. The rite evinces the wonder that a man can stand before God in the same physical space of land, and not die. Or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that he can die and rise again, cleansed, in the presence of God. This had tremendous import within the biblical story. For only in the holy of holies did the one true creator God stand at the threshold of heaven and earth, between the cherubim on the lid of the mercy seat that represented the cherubim guarding the original tree of life. The action of the high priest on Yom Kippur cleansed the rest of the sanctuary and allowed the priests to continue serving in the sanctuary. The goat that was killed provided the innocent animal life-blood that cleansed the sanctuary area so that the sanctuary could continue in operation. And the high priest's action allowed Israel to continue life in the land. For if the sanctuary continued in operation by the priests, then by direct implication, Israel could continue living in a state of God's special blessing in the garden land (Dt.11 – 12). Furthermore, the declaration of the 'jubilee' on the Day of Atonement (Lev.25:9) now makes perfect sense. The land reverted to its original family boundaries and indentured people displaced from their land inheritance were freed to return to their ancestral portion on this very day. Debts must be cancelled. Or rather, people were *cleansed* of their debts to return to their land. If possible, a blood relative provided this cancellation and cleansing of debt, but if that was not possible, the person was cleansed of debt anyway (Lev.25:25 – 28). Close blood relationship served as the basis for an obligation to restore a relative to God's blessed land. This is the far-reaching significance of the Day of Atonement in the life of Israel.

The ripple effect of the Day of Atonement, starting from the high priest in the holy of holies in the presence of God is geographically and thematically similar to the original commission God gave to Adam and Eve in creation. In the creation, God commanded Adam and Eve to spread the garden life from Eden to the rest of the creation. After the fall of humanity, the corruption of human blood, and the cursing of the ground, God commanded His people to spread life again. But in this case, the life was not the simple, straightforward life of humans living out their *imago dei* identity in creation. Instead, the life was the innocent life of animal blood given as gift back to humanity by God. The uncorrupted blood of animals was an institution God provided for His people, and probably also the rest of humanity who were not in covenant relationship with God, to continue living on the whole earth whether they recognized their indebtedness to God or not.

This parallelism is not a coincidence, and the parallel was not lost upon Israel. Later biblical writers like Isaiah and Micah saw a new ripple effect beginning from Jerusalem – already seen as the new Eden – as the reign of the Messiah advanced over the earth. The law would go forth from Zion, the nations would beat their swords into plowshares (Isa.2:1 – 4; Mic.4:1 – 5), and the Messiah will end the shedding of human blood – a powerful claim because human blood is both the corrupted source and the visible effect of humanity's sinful actions. I strongly suspect that Isaiah's model for the atonement and the reign of the Messiah, inaugurated through his own blood (Isa.52:13 – 53:12), was a chain reference to earlier ripples of life which God instituted in His creation through His people. Isaiah saw the ripple effect of innocent life from the holy of holies on Yom Kippur, which was itself already layered on top of the intended ripple of garden life from Eden. For example, the 'suffering servant' would 'sprinkle many nations' (Isa.52:15). The sprinkling image is connected to cleansing through blood, the purified blood of the Messiah.

Isaiah, in describing the 'suffering servant' (Isa.52:13 – 53:12) drew together two images: the Passover and the Day of Atonement. Both Passover and Yom Kippur involved a separation between two of like kind. In Passover, Israel was identified as God's firstborn son, and the Passover lamb corresponded with a firstborn son. The latter was killed and the former went free through the blood of the latter, on the doorposts. In the Day of Atonement, one goat was killed and the other went free. But in this case, the latter bore the sins of Israel into the wilderness, while the former gave its life blood so that Israel could continue to exist on the land. The two holy days are complementary. Passover seems to describe the action of God on Israel. God cut something away from Israel with her voluntary participation (a circumcision) and set her free to be God's servant. The Day of Atonement seems to describe the action of God to maintain Israel's presence in the garden land, and God's presence with Israel. God cuts the accumulated impurity of Israel from Israel, takes it into Himself via the high priest offering one of the goats, which is mirrored in the sending of the second goat far away. The scapegoat probably served as the poetic inspiration for saying, 'As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us' (Ps.103:12), and 'You will cast all their sins into the depths of the sea' (Mic.7:19). Isaiah, discerning the conceptual

links already established in the Pentateuch between the two holy days, described the ‘suffering servant’ using both motifs. The only place to send the corruption of sin that far away is God Himself. And the only way God can do that is by personally acquiring a human nature Himself, purifying the corruption of sin out of it, and joining everyone else to him by the Spirit.

Others have already seen the connection between Jesus, the Day of Atonement, and the Suffering Servant,<sup>70</sup> but to my knowledge, this connection between ontological substitution atonement in the Pentateuch as a whole and in the book of Isaiah as a whole is my own conclusion. The great theologian Karl Barth believed that Isaiah 53 was the only passage in the Bible that could be considered to teach penal substitution. In another essay, I will explore Barth’s reasoning, and why I believe he felt vulnerable to penal substitution, stemming from his limited analysis of the Pentateuch.<sup>71</sup> I will argue that Isaiah 52:13 – 53:12 teaches ontological substitution, and not penal substitution. God was already punishing Israel for her sins, through exile. The Servant enters into Israel’s exile and suffering, and shares in it with them, taking on a punishment undeserved relative to himself. But he emerges on the other side of Israel’s exile, also on Israel’s behalf. In other words, the Servant takes on a punishment that is already being endured by Israel.<sup>72</sup> He does not, in Isaiah 53, seem to take on an additional punishment that Israel did not already suffer, which is what penal substitution requires.

The function of the blood, therefore, becomes clearer, not only here in the Day of Atonement rite, but throughout the Pentateuch. Uncorrupted animal blood is a gift from God. The blood of the animals stands for its life (Lev.17:11), and is linked symbolically to the interconnectedness between God, humanity, and land. The animals’ life-blood becomes available through its death. Since Jewish tradition requires the death of the animal be as painless as possible, as absolutely nothing in the Pentateuch suggests that the animal must suffer pain, close examination of the sacrificial system leans us towards the conviction that Jesus’ *death* is significant, not whatever *Roman torture* or hypothetical *spiritual torment* he suffered along the way. But in this case, the antitype provides more clarity than the typology: It is not the case that Jesus’ physical blood was always pure and needed to be extracted from his body at his death and sprinkled on people. Rather, Jesus spiritually cleansed his own body and blood throughout his life, death, and resurrection, and then become a sacramental meal, available for us to internalize by his word and Spirit (Jn.6:51 – 63). The Eucharistic communion elements of bread and wine thus serve as a reminder that Jesus – who carried the sinful flesh that we have, resisted it, defeated it, and cleansed his humanity of it – is the nourishment from God which we must internalize by the Spirit. One of the meanings contained in that memorial is that Jesus’ blood was cleansed by Jesus and now cleanses us by our participation in him and receiving him into ourselves. The sacrament points to an ontological substitution, not a penal substitution.

By contrast, Emile Nicole’s interpretation of blood in Leviticus 17:11 is completely divorced from all other instances of the word ‘blood.’ Nicole claims to perceive a penal substitutionary logic in the sacrifices. But he fails to consider the rich literary tapestry already woven with the motif of blood. He does not undertake an exploration of the animal skin coverings that God made for Adam and Eve, which demonstrates in an act of *covering* that most, if not all, interpreters agree lies at the root of the word *kippur*, which means *to cover*. He does not explore the relationship between blood and land: from the suggestion that innocent animal blood was provided as a gift from God to ‘cover’ the rupture between corrupted animal blood and the land by providing a measure of life to the intersection between human beings and the land; to the clear implication that Cain shedding Abel’s blood made him unable to settle the land; to the bloodletting of Abrahamic circumcision as a rite designed to stir the confession that human beings need to be cleansed in order to inherit God’s good land and to be in covenant relationship with God; to the idea of covenantal bloodletting done by one’s self or one’s father draws forth, in effect, a confession that human blood is corrupted and the Israelite male must bear the burden of that acknowledgement; to the connections between bloodshed and the Levites as a kind of ‘firstborn’ in Israel; to the use of animal blood in Israel’s sanctuary system that allows them to settle on the land while the Levites lived in cities, not on the land.

Nicole apparently believes none of these connections are significant to understanding Leviticus 17:11. Hence, I believe his treatment of ‘blood’ in Leviticus 17:11 is anemic, pun intended. Blood is not an expression of the animal dying as a *penal* substitute, but as an *ontological* or *medical* substitute. In Israel, animal sacrifices were

---

<sup>70</sup> E.g. Margaret Barker, ‘Atonement: The Rite of Healing’, *Scottish Journal of Theology* 49.1.1994, p.15 – 17

<sup>71</sup> *What Did the Suffering Servant Suffer? Isaiah 53 and Penal Substitution*; <http://nagasawafamily.org/isaiah.53.punishment.pdf>

<sup>72</sup> The Karaite Jewish scholar named Yefeth ben Ali, in the 10th century, said about Isaiah 53: ‘As to myself, I am inclined, with Benjamin of Nehawend, to regard it as alluding to the Messiah, and as opening with a description of *his condition in exile*, from the time of his birth to his accession to the throne: for the prophet begins by speaking of his being seated in a position of great honour, and then goes back to relate all that will happen to him *during the captivity*. He thus gives us to understand two things: In the first instance, that the Messiah will only reach his highest degree of honour after long and severe trials; and secondly, that these trials will be sent upon him as a kind of sign, so that, if he finds himself under the yoke of misfortunes whilst remaining pure in his actions, he may know that he is the desired one....’ (S. R. Driver and A. Neubauer, editors, *The Fifty-third Chapter of Isaiah According to the Jewish Interpreters* (2 volumes; New York: Ktav, 1969), p.19-20; the English translations are taken from volume 2; the original texts are in volume 1; cf. Soloff, p.107 – 109)

done after some sinful activities, true enough. However, animal sacrifices were also performed with medical regularity, much like a person with kidney failure today would need dialysis to cleanse his or her blood of toxins. The animal was a medical or ontological substitute that bore away the unclean part of the worshiper, which was already signified through circumcision as contained in the human being. The animal, however, returned back a life-giving substance: its own blood. Animal blood was important to Israel as a source of life, provided by God in return for their blood (through circumcision) and the implicit confession that their blood was contaminated, as a gift to allow Israel to continue experiencing His blessing on His garden land. Human blood was also understood by Israel as a contaminated substance that needed to be cleansed, especially when murder or manslaughter further aggravated the relationship between God, Israel, and the land. I believe this logic supplies the reason behind the Deuteronomic idea that a man who was especially wicked should be hung on a tree (Dt.21:22 – 23): his blood should be separated from the land, if only for a short while. Meanwhile, Jewish circumcision and other rites of cleansing that were built on top of the idea of circumcision pointed the way forward for Israel to hope that God would one day cleanse their hearts, their inward beings, and their blood, of the contamination that had corrupted their human nature, the original image of God. For Nicole to speak for the Pentateuch and not even link blood to all its other appearances outside the explicit sacrificial animals is a methodological flaw.

In the Day of Atonement rite, the high priest therefore cleansed himself and the sanctuary for ongoing use (Lev.16), for as long as God deigned to use the Tabernacle/Temple as His dwelling place. This ritual with the two goats was a continuation of God using animal skins for Adam and Eve, drawing on innocent animal blood in order to provide more life for the land, because corrupted human blood made human occupation of the land a spiritual problem. The lifeblood of the goat provided a measure of innocent life from God for a cascading set of interwoven patterns to flow outward. The high priest could continue to stand in God's presence; the priests could continue operating the sanctuary; Israel could continue to enjoy God's blessing in the garden land; and perhaps even the whole of humanity could continue to live on God's good earth, the garden planet.

This interpretation of the Day of Atonement brings it into complete alignment with the 'circumcision of the heart' spoken of by Moses (Dt.30:6) and echoed by the other prophets. God must consume something internal to us (Gen.6:5 – 6; 8:21), sending it far away from us by internalizing it Himself, while providing us in return with life-giving blood that renews human occupation of God's good land. That is, God, out of His love for us, must renew His original creation order. He is not just aiming to maintain Israelite occupation of the Promised Land and Levitical occupation of the sanctuary. Rather, He has always sought the restoration of and blessing of all humanity in a new heavens and new earth. But because our corrupted life-blood needed to be supplemented by innocent life-blood, ultimately the true answer to this dilemma could not be an animal sacrifice but the sacrifice of the eternal Word of God who had taken on human flesh, and human blood. Hence, Jesus is the true Temple, the intersection of God and humanity, built by himself as the true king. He is the true Temple served and maintained by himself as the true priest, because he has offered himself as the true sacrifice. He perfected human lifeblood – his own, because of his own faithful obedience, making human blood innocent and cleansed once again within his own body. Thus, the paradigm for understanding the sanctuary and the sacrifices is medical-ontological, not judicial-penal. This corresponds perfectly with the ontological substitution atonement theory.

MORE TO COME