

# The Curses of Azazel

. . . Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goat, in this fashion: his right hand upon his left. He shall confess over it all the iniquities of the children of Israel and all their rebellions, whatever their sins; he shall put them on the head of the goat with a declared and explicit oath by the great and glorious Name.

—*Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* to Leviticus 16:21

## Introduction

The second part of the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, a Jewish pseudepigraphon written in early centuries of the Common Era,<sup>1</sup> deals with the ascent of the eponymous hero to the heavenly Holy of Holies. On this celestial journey, Abraham and his angelic companion Yahoel encounter a strange demonic creature, namely, the fallen angel Azazel, who attempts to interfere, warning the patriarch about the grave dangers that a mortal might encounter upon ascending to the abode of the Deity. In response to Azazel's challenge, Yahoel rebukes and curses the fallen angel. The curses imposed on the fallen angel are often seen as having cultic significance.<sup>2</sup> In the sacerdotal framework of the Slavonic apocalypse, which is permeated with the dynamics of the Yom Kippur ritual,<sup>3</sup> the cursing formulae delivered by the angel Yahoel, whom the text depicts as the celestial cultic servant,<sup>4</sup> appear reminiscent of those curses bestowed on the scapegoat by the high priest on the Day of Atonement.<sup>5</sup> Thus some have argued that the fallen angel bearing the conspicuous name Azazel<sup>6</sup> is depicted here as the celestial scapegoat predestined to take upon itself the sins and transgressions of Abraham in order to carry them into the realm of his exile. This chapter will

explore Azazel's curses and their role in the sacerdotal framework of the Slavonic apocalypse.

## The Cursing of Azazel in the Apocalypse of Abraham 13 and 14

Preliminary analysis of the relevant passages in the *Apocalypse of Abraham* reveals that the curses on the celestial scapegoat in the text can be divided in two major groups: (1) curses bestowed on Azazel directly by Yahoel in chapter 13 and (2) the reaffirmation of these sacerdotal actions taking place when the angel instructs Abraham in chapter 14.

### *Chapter 13: Curses bestowed by Yahoel*

In *Apocalypse of Abraham* 13:7–14, the following mysterious encounter between the heavenly high priest Yahoel and the celestial scapegoat Azazel takes place:

. . . Reproach is on you, Azazel! Since Abraham's portion is in heaven, and yours is on earth, since you have chosen it and desired it to be the dwelling place of your impurity.<sup>7</sup> Therefore the Eternal Lord, the Mighty One, has made you a dweller on earth. And because of you [there is] the wholly-evil spirit of the lie, and because of you [there are] wrath and trials on the generations of impious men.

Since the Eternal Mighty God did not send the righteous, in their bodies, to be in your hand, in order to affirm through them the righteous life and the destruction of impiety. . . . Hear, adviser! Be shamed by me, since you have been appointed to tempt not all the righteous!

Depart from this man! You cannot deceive him, because he is the enemy of you and of those who follow you and who love what you desire. For behold, the garment which in heaven was formerly yours has been set aside for him, and the corruption which was on him has gone over to you.<sup>8</sup>

In view of the aforementioned sacerdotal affiliations of Yahoel, it is possible that his address to the fallen angel bearing the name

of the scapegoat has cultic significance, since it appears reminiscent of some of the actions performed by the high priest on the Day of Atonement. Similarly, some of the technical terminology found in this passage may be related to terminology associated with Yom Kippur.<sup>9</sup> The most crucial aspect of the text is that Yahoel's address contains utterances that are reminiscent of curses bestowed on the scapegoat during the great atoning rite. One of these pronouncements is found in *Apocalypse of Abraham* 13:12–14 (quoted above), where the transference of the patriarch's sin onto the celestial scapegoat coincides with the command to depart. Scholars note that this address is reminiscent of the earlier form of the scapegoat's curse imposed on the animal by his handlers during the Yom Kippur celebration.<sup>10</sup> *M. Yoma* 6:4 reads:

. . . And they made a causeway for it because of the Babylonians who used to pull its hair, crying to it, "Bear [our sins] and be gone! Bear [our sins] and be gone!"<sup>11</sup>

This mishnaic passage includes two cultic elements: (1) a bestowal of sins ("bear [our sins]") and (2) a command of departure ("be gone").<sup>12</sup> The *Apocalypse of Abraham* exhibits a very similar constellation of motifs, as the transference of the sins on Azazel<sup>13</sup> ("the corruption which was on him has gone over to you") appears simultaneously with the command to depart ("depart from this man"). It is noteworthy, however, that, in contrast to the mishnaic tradition, the Slavonic apocalypse situates the departing formula not after the action of the sins' transference but before.

Further details related to the bestowal of curses onto the scapegoat are found in *Apocalypse of Abraham* 13:7–14 and 13:11, 15 which describe Yahoel's reproach and shaming of Azazel. Moreover, his utterances may be related to the ritual curses bestowed upon the scapegoat. The language of cursing or "shame" found in verse 11 is especially significant because it precedes the similar formulations within mishnaic traditions.

#### *Chapter 14: Curses in Yahoel's Instruction to Abraham*

After Yahoel bestows the curses in Chapter 13, the great angel explains both the handling of the scapegoat to Abraham and the ritual curses. Several details must be considered with respect to the peculiar

sacerdotal settings of this portion of the text. Scholars have proposed that in the *Apocalypse of Abraham* Yahoel appears to function as a senior cultic celebrant explaining and demonstrating rituals to a junior sacerdotal servant, namely, Abraham.<sup>16</sup> This parallelism between the instructions of the teacher and the actions of the apprentice is already clear in the beginning of the apocalyptic section of the text, where the patriarch faithfully follows the orders of his angelic guide to prepare the sacrifices.<sup>17</sup> The same pattern of sacerdotal instruction, in which the orders of the master are followed by the disciple's performance, is also discernible in the depiction of the ritual of dispatching the scapegoat. *Apocalypse of Abraham* 14:1–8 describes how, after Yahoel's own "handling" of Azazel, the angel verbally instructs Abraham about dealing with the scapegoat:

And the angel said to me, "Abraham!" And I said, "Here am I, your servant." And he said, "Know by this that the Eternal One whom you have loved has chosen you. Be bold and have power, as I order you, over him who reviles justice, or else I shall not be able to revile him who scattered about the earth the secrets of heaven and who conspired against the Mighty One.

Say to him, "May you be the fire brand of the furnace of the earth! Go, Azazel, into the untrodden parts of the earth. Since your inheritance are those who are with you, with men born with the stars and clouds. And their portion is you, and they come into being through your being. And justice is your enmity. Therefore, through your own destruction vanish from before me!" And I said the words as the angel had taught me.<sup>18</sup>

This address again contains elements intended to further denigrate and humiliate the fallen angel bearing the name of the scapegoat, depicting him as an enemy of justice and a damned celestial creature predestined for destruction in the lower abode.

It is also important that in this narrative we again encounter the formulas of departure that constitute the crucial element in the previously mentioned mishnaic curse. Moreover, these commands of departure appear to be even more decisive and forceful than in the pas-

sage from chapter 13, as it now includes such commands as “Go” (Slav. *иди*)<sup>19</sup> and “Vanish from before me” (Slav. *буди от мене исчезлъ*).<sup>20</sup>

The description of the handling of the scapegoat recorded in *m. Yoma* 4:2 reveals that the high priest was to place the scapegoat in the direction of his future exile, likely to indicate its destination. Thus, *m. Yoma* 4:2 reads: “He bound a thread of crimson wool on the head of the scapegoat and he turned it towards the way by which it was to be sent out. . . .”<sup>21</sup> This tradition of showing the scapegoat the place of his banishment appears to be reflected in the Slavonic apocalypse when the celestial high priest Yahoel informs Azazel about his future destination: “Go, Azazel, into the untrodden parts of the earth.” The word “untrodden” (Slav. *беспроходна*, lit. “impassable”)<sup>22</sup> is significant because it designates a place uninhabitable to human beings, reminiscent of the language of Leviticus 16, where the scapegoat is dispatched “to the solitary place” (אל ארץ גזרה) “in the wilderness” (במדבר).<sup>23</sup> Commenting on this terminology, Jacob Milgrom observes that “the purpose of dispatching the goat to the wilderness is to remove it from human habitation.”<sup>24</sup> Later exegetical traditions, too, often emphasize this “removing” aspect of the scapegoat rite.<sup>25</sup> For example, in his *De Spec. Leg.* I.188, Philo explains that the goat was sent “. . . into a trackless and desolate wilderness bearing on its back the curses which had lain upon the transgressors who have now been purified by conversion to the better life and through their new obedience have washed away their old disobedience to the law.”<sup>26</sup>

Abraham’s repetition of the words he received from Yahoel in the concluding phrase of the passage from chapter 14 seems to align with our earlier suggestion that Abraham is depicted in this text as a type of priestly apprentice receiving instructions from his great master, and then applying this knowledge in dispatching the scapegoat.<sup>27</sup>

### The Scarlet Band of the Scapegoat and Azazel’s Garment

As mentioned above, the *Apocalypse of Abraham* reinterprets many features of the scapegoat rite with complicated eschatological imagery, translating earthly attributes of the cultic animal into a new apocalyptic dimension.<sup>28</sup> This profound paradigm shift affects several distinctive features of the scapegoat ritual, including the crimson band that, according

to some traditions, was placed on the head of the cultic animal during the Yom Kippur celebration. In the intricate web of apocalyptic reformulations which took place in the Slavonic pseudepigraphon, this animal's emblematic headgear becomes his garment of sins.<sup>29</sup>

*Early Jewish and Christian Traditions about the Crimson Thread*

The origin of the scarlet band imagery is shrouded in mystery.<sup>30</sup> Rabbinic passages often connect the symbolism of the band with Isa 1:18: “[T]hough your sins are like scarlet, they shall be like snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool.”<sup>31</sup> Their use of the Isaiah passage indicates that the band was intended to manifest the forgiveness of Israel's transgressions by changing it from red to white, an important cultic motif. Several mishnaic passages relate that during the Yom Kippur ceremony, the crimson band—tied either to the rock or to the door of the sanctuary—would turn white as soon as the goat reached the wilderness,<sup>32</sup> fulfilling Isaiah's prophecy.<sup>33</sup>

Although the description of the scapegoat ritual found in the Book of Leviticus does not mention the band of the cultic animal, later Jewish and Christian sources provide a plethora of references to this mysterious item. A number of mishnaic passages, including *m. Yoma* 4:2, 6:6, and 6:8, mention the scarlet ribbon.<sup>34</sup> For instance, *m. Yoma* 4:2 contains the following tradition:

He bound a thread of crimson wool on the head of the scapegoat and he turned it towards the way by which it was to be sent out; and on the he-goat that was to be slaughtered [he bound a thread] about its throat.<sup>35</sup>

This passage portrays the high priest marking two chief cultic animals for the Yom Kippur ordinance by designating one as the goat for YHWH and another as the goat for Azazel, then placing the scapegoat in the direction of his exile, as mentioned previously.

The tradition of the crimson wool is further expanded in *m. Yoma* 6:6, which reads:

What did he do? He divided the thread of crimson wool and tied one half to the rock and the other half between its horns, and he pushed it from behind; and it went rolling down, and before it had reached half the way down the hill

it was broken in pieces. He returned and sat down beneath the last booth until nightfall. And from what time does it render his garments unclean? After he has gone outside the wall of Jerusalem. R. Simeon says: From the moment that he pushes it into the ravine.<sup>36</sup>

While *m. Yoma* 4:2 describes the beginning of the scapegoat ritual where an animal was chosen and then marked with the crimson thread, *m. Yoma* 6:6 deals with the conclusion of this rite, a climactic moment when the scapegoat is pushed down the hill by his handlers. Most notably, before the end of the ritual the scapegoat's band was temporarily removed by his handlers. After the animal's cultic headgear was removed, one half of the band was tied to the rock and the remaining half was returned to the scapegoat's head before his final plunge into the abyss. Some new features of this tradition appear in *m. Yoma* 6:8, which reads:

R. Ishmael says: Had they not another sign also?—a thread of crimson wool was tied to the door of the Sanctuary and when the he-goat reached the wilderness the thread turned white; for it is written, Though your sins be as scarlet they shall be as white as snow.<sup>37</sup>

In contrast to *m. Yoma* 6:6, this passage insists that the crimson thread was to be tied not to the rock but instead to the door of the sanctuary. Furthermore, in this passage, the crimson wool of the scapegoat seems to be understood as the deposit of the human sins carried by the scapegoat into the wilderness. When this burden is safely removed from the human *oikoumene*, the thread changes its color from red to white.

Early Christian exegetes also display their familiarity with this tradition of the cultic band. For instance, the *Epistle of Barnabas* speaks about the crimson thread using very similar terminology to the mishnaic testimonies.<sup>38</sup> *Barnabas* 7:6–11 reads:

Pay attention to what he commands: “Take two fine goats who alike and offer them as a sacrifice; and let the priest take one of them as a whole burnt offering for sins.” But what will they do with the other? “The other,” he says, “is cursed.” Pay attention to how the type of Jesus is revealed.

“And all of you shall spit on it and pierce it and wrap a piece of scarlet wool around its head, and so let it be cast into the wilderness.” When this happens, the one who takes the goat leads it into the wilderness and removes the wool, and places it on a blackberry bush, whose buds we are accustomed to eat when we find it in the countryside. (Thus the fruit of the blackberry bush alone is sweet.) And so, what does this mean? Pay attention: “The one they take to the altar, but the other is cursed,” and the one that is cursed is crowned. For then they will see him in that day wearing a long scarlet robe around his flesh, and they will say, “Is this not the one we once crucified, despising, piercing, and spitting on him? Truly this is the one who was saying at the time that he was himself the Son of God.” For how is he like that one? This is why “the goats are alike, fine, and equal,” that when they see him coming at that time, they may be amazed at how much he is like the goat. See then the type of Jesus who was about to suffer. But why do they place the wool in the midst of the thorns? This is a type of Jesus established for the church, because whoever wishes to remove the scarlet wool must suffer greatly, since the thorn is a fearful thing, and a person can retrieve the wool only by experiencing pain. And so he says: those who wish to see me and touch my kingdom must take hold of me through pain and suffering.<sup>39</sup>

This passage describes a ritual in which the priest wraps a piece of scarlet wool around the scapegoat’s head, followed by the handler of the scapegoat removing the wool and placing it on a blackberry bush.<sup>40</sup> It parallels both *m. Yoma* 4:2, where the celebrant binds a thread of crimson wool on the head of the scapegoat, and *m. Yoma* 6:6, where the handler of the scapegoat divides the thread of crimson wool and ties one half of the cultic band to the rock.

Another early Christian author, Tertullian, is also familiar with the tradition that the scapegoat was bound with scarlet thread.<sup>41</sup> In *Against Marcion* 3:7, he writes:

If also I am to submit an interpretation of the two goats which were offered at the Fast, are not these also figures of



Christ's two activities? They are indeed of the same age and appearance because the Lord's is one and the same aspect: because he will return in no other form, seeing he has to be recognized by those of whom he has suffered injury. One of them however, surrounded with scarlet, cursed and spit upon and pulled about and pierced, was by the people driven out of the city into perdition, marked with manifest tokens of our Lord's passion: while the other, made an offering for sins, and given as food to the priests of the temple, marked the tokens of his second manifestation, at which, when all sins have been done away, the priests of the spiritual temple, which is the Church, were to enjoy, as it were, a feast of our Lord's grace, while the rest remain without a taste of salvation.<sup>42</sup>

Both *Epistle of Barnabas* and Tertullian use the symbolism of the crimson band, the same imagery that receives new meaning in the *Apocalypse of Abraham's* reinterpretation of the atoning rite.

Hippolytus of Rome is also cognizant of the traditions of the scarlet wool of the scapegoat. A fragment of his *Catena on Proverbs* reads:

And a goat as leader of the flock  
 Since, it says, this is  
 Who was slaughtered for the sins of the world  
 And offered as a sacrifice  
 And send away to the Gentiles as in the desert  
 And crowned with scarlet wool (κόκκινον ἔριον) on the  
     head by the unbelievers  
 And made to be ransom for the humans  
 And manifested as life for all.<sup>43</sup>

The scarlet band is, thus, for the early Christians, envisioned as the crown of Christ, receiving novel messianic and liturgical significance.

#### *The Crimson Thread and Human Sins*

As one can see, early Christian authors sometimes attempted to link the symbolism of the crimson thread with the cultic or messianic accouterment of Christ by describing it as either his robe or his crown.

This Christian understanding of the thread as a part of the cultic vestment or even as the vestment itself is remarkably similar to the Slavonic apocalypse, where the crimson band appears to be understood as a garment. More precisely, in the *Apocalypse of Abraham* (see chapter 12), it is the garment of the patriarch's transgressions, the deposit of human sins, placed upon Azazel by Yahoel.<sup>44</sup> The arrangement and details of this narrative are evocative of the scapegoat ritual, as all actors of the eschatological drama appear to be endowed with the peculiar cultic roles of the atoning rite.

Earlier it was noted that the text from *Apocalypse of Abraham* seems to portray Yahoel as the heavenly high priest handling the angelic scapegoat. Scholars have also suggested that the second apocalyptic portion of the text envisions Abraham as the second cultic animal of the Yom Kippur ordinance, namely, the goat for YHWH.<sup>45</sup> Moreover, the Slavonic apocalypse might envision the ascent of Abraham with his angelic companion into heaven as the entrance of the celestial high priest into the upper Holy of Holies, with the soul of the immolated goat, represented by his blood.<sup>46</sup> If such an understanding of these cultic actions is present in the Slavonic apocalypse, and Abraham is indeed imagined in *Apocalypse of Abraham* 12 as the goat for YHWH, then the setting of the whole scene is reminiscent of the depiction found in the aforementioned passage from *m. Yoma* 4:2, where the high priest, standing between two cultic animals, places the deposit of the sins, symbolized by the crimson thread, on the head of the scapegoat.

The tradition of Azazel's garment found in the *Apocalypse of Abraham* may provide additional insights into the "clothing nature" of the cultic band, which is the only known material that the scapegoat wore during the atoning rite. Moreover, if it is assumed that the crimson-dyed wool on the horns of the scapegoat represents a "garment," the mishnaic passage, then, seems to indicate that the immolated goat receives its own "garment," namely, a piece of wool tied around its neck.<sup>47</sup> Consequently, in the reinterpretation of the Yom Kippur ritual found in *Apocalypse of Abraham* 12, both "goats" receive "garments" when Azazel is endowed with the garment of sins and Abraham receives the garment stripped from the former celestial citizen.

The aforementioned analysis hints at a potential connection between the tradition of the scarlet band as the deposit of the human iniquities and the garment of sins given to the fallen angel Azazel

in the Slavonic apocalypse. It is possible that the mishnaic accounts understand the scarlet band as a sort of a garment of sins carried by the scapegoat into the uninhabited realm where, according to some mishnaic testimonies, he was then “disrobed” by his handlers and his ominous headgear was either fully or partially removed.<sup>48</sup>

An important connection to the *Apocalypse of Abraham* here is that both the garment of Azazel in the Slavonic pseudepigraphon and the crimson band of the mishnaic testimonies are understood as a fabric that symbolizes the deposit of human sins. For instance, *m. Yoma* 6:8<sup>49</sup> and *m. Shabbat* 9:3<sup>50</sup> connect the tradition of the crimson band to a passage from Isaiah that speaks about the forgiveness of the sins. Elsewhere, a connection was made between the scarlet thread and human sins, as Jewish lore often associated the color red with sin and white with forgiveness. The *Book of Zohar* II.20a-b neatly summarizes this understanding of the color symbolism:

Sin is red, as it says, “Though your sins be as scarlet”; man puts the sacrificial animal on fire, which is also red; the priest sprinkles the red blood round the altar, but the smoke ascending to heaven is white. Thus the red is turned to white: the attribute of Justice is turned into the attribute of Mercy.

A very similar appropriation of the color imagery also appears to be reflected in the scapegoat ritual. The band’s transformation from red to white,<sup>51</sup> signaling the forgiveness of Israel’s sins, strengthens the association of the red coloration with sin.<sup>52</sup> Numerous mishnaic and talmudic passages attest to the whitening of the band<sup>53</sup> during the scapegoat ritual in which it signifies the removal of sins.<sup>54</sup>

Loosing the crimson band at the end of the scapegoat rite might also signify the forgiveness of sins. Indeed, some scholars point out the semantic overlap between formulae of loosing and forgiving in Semitic languages, stressing the fact that “there is a semi-technical use of language of loosing (שרי) in the Palestinian Aramaic of the Targums to mean forgiving.”<sup>55</sup>

Moreover, the close ties between the scarlet band and human sins can be further illuminated by referring to another significant procedure during the Yom Kippur celebration, the ritual during which the high priest transferred Israel’s iniquities by placing his hands on the head of the scapegoat. For instance, Leviticus 16:21 describes the chief

cultic celebrant placing his hands upon the head of the scapegoat and confessing over him all the sins of the people of Israel.<sup>56</sup>

The connection between the placement of the scarlet band on the head of the scapegoat and the placement of sins on the head as well by hand-leaning should be explored further. Jacob Milgrom suggests that the hand-leaning rite acts as the ritual of the transference of human sins. He notes:

[T]he fact that the text stresses that the hand-leaning rite is executed with both hands is the key to understanding the function of Azazel's goat. It is not a sacrifice, else the hand-leaning would have been performed with one hand. The two-handed ceremonial instead serves a transference function: to convey, by confession, the sins of Israel onto the head of the goat.<sup>57</sup>

David Wright, likewise, argues that the two-handed rite identifies the scapegoat as the recipient of the sins. He notes:

[T]wo-handed handling is distinct in form and meaning from the one-handed handling found in sacrifice (cf. Lev 1:4; 3:2, 8, 13: 4:4, 24, 29, 33). The two-handed rite identifies the scapegoat as the recipient of the ritual action (in this case, as the recipient of the sins, cf. Lev 24:14; Num 27:18, 23) while the one-handed rite in sacrifice identifies the animal as belonging to the offerer. . . .<sup>58</sup>

It is of great importance that both the sins and the crimson band are placed *on the head* of the animal, once again strengthening the connection between the band of the cultic animal and the transgressions it is intended to bear.

### *Crimson Band and Clothing Metaphors*

Distinguished students of Jewish ritual have pointed out that the imagery of sacred vestments plays a pivotal role in the Yom Kippur ordinance. They underline the transformational thrust of the atoning rite in which all celebrants were predestined to undergo the dramatic breach of their former limits, shepherding them into novel ontological conditions. The anthropological significance of such transforma-

tions is especially noticeable in the chief sacerdotal celebrant of the Yom Kippur rite, the high priest, whose recloting during the ritual proleptically anticipates the transition from the garments of skin to the garments of light, signifying the return of humanity to its original state—that is to say, the prelapsarian condition of the protoplast.

Later apocalyptic reinterpretations of the atoning rite, like the *Apocalypse of Abraham* and other Jewish visionary accounts, make the transformation signaled by the change of garments a privilege not only for the high priestly figure but also his ominous cultic counterpart. In the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, for example, the celestial scapegoat Azazel receives an unclean garment of sins from Yahoeel.<sup>59</sup>

In attempting to reconstruct the possible roots of this clothing metaphor, it should be noted that the earliest nonbiblical accounts of the scapegoat ritual juxtapose the imagery of the crimson wool with the symbolism of the unclean garments. Thus, *m. Yoma* 6:6 reveals that handling the scapegoat and its crimson band renders the garments of the handler unclean; again, it reads:

. . . He divided the thread of crimson wool and tied one half to the rock and the other half between its horns, and he pushed it from behind; and it went rolling down, and before it had reached half the way down the hill it was broken in pieces. He returned and sat down beneath the last booth until nightfall. And from what time does it render his garments unclean?<sup>60</sup>

There is thus a peculiar mirroring when the scapegoat's "attire" appears to be paralleled by the garments of his handlers. Moreover, in these accounts another feature can be found, namely, the correspondence between the removal of the scapegoat's crimson band and the subsequent stripping of the unclean garment of the handler.<sup>61</sup> Leviticus 16:26 appears aware of this procedure, as it commands that the animal's handlers must wash their clothes.<sup>62</sup>

Early reinterpretations of the Yom Kippur imagery found in some prophetic accounts also seem to underline the importance of clothing in the scapegoat ritual. One such account is found at Zechariah 3:1–5:

Then he showed me the high priest Joshua standing before the angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him. And the Lord said to Satan, "The Lord rebuke

you, O Satan! The Lord who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you! Is not this man a brand plucked from the fire?" Now Joshua was dressed with filthy clothes as he stood before the angel. The angel said to those who were standing before him, "Take off his filthy clothes." And to him he said, "See, I have taken your guilt away from you, and I will clothe you with festal apparel." And I said, "Let them put a clean turban on his head." So they put a clean turban on his head and clothed him with the apparel; and the angel of the Lord was standing by. (NRSV)

Strikingly, this account depicts the high priest as situated between two creatures, one of whom bears the name of YHWH and the other, the one who is cursed.<sup>63</sup> The whole scene appears to draw on a set of Yom Kippur motifs.<sup>64</sup> Indeed, the account is reminiscent of some depictions of the high priest's actions during the atoning rite dealing with two goats, one of whom was the goat for YHWH, and the other the cursed scapegoat. Similar to the traditions found in the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, both cultic animals are now depicted as spiritual agents, one angelic and the other demonic. This depiction is remarkably similar to the roles of Yahoel and Azazel in the Slavonic apocalypse. In the prophetic account, as in the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, the attire of the human sacerdotal subject is changed from the defiled garments of sin to festal apparel. Although in Zechariah's account, unlike in the Slavonic apocalypse, the human's filthy clothes are not transferred to the demonic creature, the ritual of Satan's cursing might suggest that the antagonist becomes the recipient of the Joshua's vestments of impurity.

These early references to the changing of cultic attire in connection with the scapegoat ritual are important for our study. It is also significant that such parallelism in the removal of garments of the sacerdotal characters affects the high priest, who is the most important celebrant of the rite and is required to be purified and vested into the new, now golden garments after sending the scapegoat away.<sup>65</sup>

### *The Garment of Darkness*

Our previous analysis demonstrated that early biblical and extra-biblical accounts of the scapegoat ritual were filled with a panoply of clothing metaphors. Some mishnaic passages even develop the pecu-

liar parallelism between the crimson band of the scapegoat and the garments of its handlers. Such developments provide an important interpretive framework for understanding the tradition of the garment of Azazel in the *Apocalypse of Abraham*. Yet the fallen angel's attire of sins attested in the Slavonic apocalypse appears to stem not only from biblical and mishnaic testimonies but also from some apocalyptic accounts that reinterpreted the scapegoat rite eschatologically. One of these formative accounts is found in one of the earliest Enochic books, the *Book of the Watchers*, where the fallen angel Asael, as the celestial scapegoat, is depicted as being "clothed" with a dark garment. Thus, in *1 Enoch* 10 the Deity orders one of his angelic executors to throw Asael into the abyss and to cover him with darkness.<sup>66</sup>

Although scholars have previously reflected on features of Asael's punishment in *1 Enoch* 10 that are similar to the scapegoat ritual, they often fail to notice the Yom Kippur motif in the fallen angel's covering with darkness.<sup>67</sup> As in the Jewish atoning rite, this may be correlated to both the placement of the scarlet band on the scapegoat and the transference to it of the sins of the Israelites by the laying of hands, the sacerdotal action that symbolizes the endowment of the cultic animal with the deposit of the human transgressions.<sup>68</sup>

It is also important that in Enochic lore, as in the later *Apocalypse of Abraham*, the antagonist's clothing in darkness inversely correlates with the protagonist's clothing in light. We find one such correlation in *1 Enoch* 10, with a peculiar mention of the fallen angel's face clothed in darkness, which may recall a series of transformational motifs involving God's luminous *Panim* and the shining *panim* of the visionary. This terminology is quite well known in the Jewish apocalyptic literature. Rather than symbolizing the luminous visage or face of the figure, such terminology symbolizes the complete covering of the protagonist or Deity in luminous attire. Reception of the heavenly garment by the human protagonist recalls also the realities of the Yom Kippur rite in which the high priestly celebrant receives white clothes during the atoning ceremony.

The parallelism between the demonic garment of darkness and high priestly garment of light returns us again to the Christian testimonies cited earlier, in which the imagery of the crimson band often signifies both the garment of sins that Christ wore on behalf of humankind and his sacerdotal clothes.<sup>69</sup> Thus, Daniel Stökl Ben Ezra notes<sup>70</sup> that in *Barnabas* 9 the scarlet band appears to be the high priestly robe

of Jesus during his second coming.<sup>71</sup> As demonstrated by this tradition of the priestly robe of Christ and its association with the crimson band, the band and the priestly accoutrement were often paired together, a pairing which now must be explored further in our study.<sup>72</sup>

*The Scarlet Band of the Scapegoat and the Front-Plate of the High Priest*

One of the characteristics of the Yom Kippur ordinance previously noted by scholars is the mirroring that takes place between the two main characters in the atoning rite, in which case the actions and attributes of one celebrant are mocked and deconstructed by the actions and attributes of the other. It has been suggested that the Yom Kippur ritual reflects the dynamics of two inversely symmetrical movements, one represented by the progression of the high priestly figure into the Holy of Holies, and the other embodied by the banishment of the scapegoat into the wilderness. Regarding this spatial arrangement, Daniel Stökl Ben Ezra notes that the Yom Kippur ritual

. . . consisted of two antagonistic movements . . . centripetal and centrifugal: the entrance of the High Priest into the Holy of Holies and the expulsion of the scapegoat. As the first movement, the holiest person, the High Priest, entered the most sacred place, the Holy of Holies of the Jerusalem Temple, burned incense, sprinkled blood and prayed in order to achieve atonement and purification for his people and the sacred institutions of the Jewish cult. As a second movement, the scapegoat burdened with the sins of the people was sent with an escort to the desert.<sup>73</sup>

In view of this inverse sacerdotal symmetry of the chief celebrants of the atoning rite, it is possible that the scarlet band of the scapegoat is intended to “mock” and deconstruct some of the attributes of the high priest. Since the clothing metaphors affect both celebrants of the rite—one of which receives the garment of light, and the other the garment of darkness—the scapegoat’s scarlet band was intended possibly to mirror the garment of the high priest.

Later rabbinic accounts of the Yom Kippur ritual often speak about the garments of the high priest, who, for instance, was girded



with a sash of fine linen and wore a turban of fine linen on his head.<sup>74</sup> One particular piece of the high priestly accouterment—which, like the ominous scarlet band of the scapegoat, was put on the head of the cultic servant—deserves special attention.

Both biblical and extrabiblical materials often make reference to the high priest's front-plate (רִצְצָ) worn on the forehead.<sup>75</sup> Made of gold and inscribed with the divine Name, the plate is said to have shone like a rainbow. As a result, Jewish accounts often describe heavenly and earthly priestly figures with the imagery of a rainbow in a cloud. This tradition of “the rainbow in the cloud” is known from several texts, including the description of the high priest Simeon in the *Wisdom of Jesus ben Sira* 50:7:

Greatest of his brothers and the beauty of his people was Simeon the son of Johanan the priest . . . how honorable was he as he gazed forth from the tent, and when he went forth from the house of the curtain; like a star of light from among clouds, and like the full moon in the days of festival; and like the sun shining resplendently on the king's Temple, and like the rainbow which appears in the cloud. . . .<sup>76</sup>

It is important to emphasize that the high priestly front-plate was decorated with the divine Name, that is to say, the Name by which the Deity once created heaven and earth. The portrayal of the רִצְצָ given in one of the later Jewish mystical compendiums, known today as *Sefer Hekhalot*, underlines the demiurgic functions of the divine Name. Chapter 14 of *Sefer Hekhalot* describes the forehead of the heavenly priest Metatron as decorated with the letters by which heaven and earth were created. 3 *Enoch* 12:1–2 reads:

R. Ishmael said: The angel Metatron, Prince of the Divine Presence, the glory of highest heaven, said to me: Out of the abundant love and great compassion wherewith the Holy One, blessed be he, loved and cherished me more than all the denizens of the heights, he wrote with his finger, as with a pen of flame, upon the crown which was on my head, the letters by which heaven and earth were created; the letters by which seas and rivers were created; the letters by which mountains and hills were created; the letters by which stars

and constellations, lightning and wind, thunder and thunderclaps, snow and hail, hurricane and tempest were created; the letters by which all the necessities of the world and all the orders of creation were created. Each letter flashed time after time like lightnings, time after time like torches, time after time like flames, time after time like the rising of the sun, moon, and stars.<sup>77</sup>

The imagery of the  $\gamma\text{ײ}\text{צ}$  also appears in the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, when the angelic high priest Yahoel wears headgear reminiscent of a rainbow in the clouds, recalling similar descriptions given in the *Wisdom of Jesus ben Sira* 50:7 and rabbinic literature. It is also significant that in Jewish accounts, the imagery of the front-plate of the high priest often appears in the context of the Yom Kippur rituals in which the scarlet headgear of the scapegoat is also mentioned. It is thus possible that the scarlet band of the scapegoat is envisioned in the inverse symmetrical patterns of the atoning rite as an ominous counterpart to the front-plate of the high priest.<sup>78</sup>

The first important connection here is that both cultic items are situated on the heads of the sacerdotal agents. Exodus 39:30–31 states that the plate was fastened to the turban of the high priest, a tradition that is reflected in the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, as it also appears on the turban of the great angel. The crimson band is also placed on the head of the scapegoat, as both Jewish and Christian sources suggest: namely, two passages found in *m. Yoma*<sup>79</sup> and the *Epistle of Barnabas*.<sup>80</sup> Moreover, Hippolytus of Rome, likewise, speaks of crowning the scapegoat with scarlet wool.

It is also noteworthy that both the scarlet thread bound around the head of the scapegoat and the  $\gamma\text{ײ}\text{צ}$  of the high priest become peculiar markers of the sin and righteousness of the Israelites. As mentioned earlier, the scarlet band is said to change its color during the atoning ritual in order to signal the forgiveness of the sins of the Israelites and the restoration of righteousness. This metamorphosis acts as a litmus test to indicate the change in moral status of the Israelites. It appears that the front-plate of the high priest served a very similar function. Some Jewish descriptions of the  $\gamma\text{ײ}\text{צ}$  indicate that the front-plate, like the scarlet band, would change its appearance depending on the sinfulness or righteousness of the Israelites who came into contact with the plate.

One of the most extensive descriptions of the unusual qualities of the  $\gamma\text{׳}\text{צ}$  is found in the *Book of Zohar* II.217b; it reads:

He opened saying, *They made  $\gamma\text{׳}\text{צ}$  (tsits), the medallion of, the holy diadem of pure gold . . . (Exodus 39:30). Come and see: Why is it called tsits? Well, looking to see. Since it was intended for human observation, it is called tsits. Whoever looked at that tsits was thereby recognized. In the tsits were letters of the Holy Name, inscribed and engraved. If the one standing before it was virtuous, then those letters engraved in the gold protruded from below upward, rising from that engraving radiantly, and they illumined that person's face—a scintillation sparkled in him and did not sparkle. The first moment that the priest looked at him, he would see the radiance of all the letters in his face; but when he gazed intently he saw nothing but the radiance of his face shining, as if a sparkle of gold were scintillating. However, the priest knew from his first momentary glimpse that the blessed Holy One delighted in that person, and that he was destined for the world that is coming, because this vision issued from above and the blessed Holy One delighted in him. Then when they gazed upon him, they saw nothing, for a vision from above is revealed only for a moment. If a person stood before the tsits and his face did not display momentarily a holy vision, the priest would know that he was brazen-faced, and he would have to plead for mercy on his behalf and seek atonement for him.*<sup>81</sup>

We see, then, according to this text, the front-plate of the high priest served to indicate the righteousness or sinfulness of the person standing before the cultic servant; that is to say, the reflection of the letters of the plate, on the face of the individual, differed according to the moral condition of the person.

Finally, another important parallelism between the front-plate of the high priest and the crimson band of the scapegoat is the connection of each to the divine Name. As suggested earlier, the crimson thread, representing the transgression of Israel, appears to be closely connected to the ritual of laying hands, during which the priest performs the transference rite by laying the sins of the people on the

head of the cultic animal. If both the ritual of hand-laying and the crimson band are indeed interconnected, a tradition found in *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* is helpful for understanding the important conceptual link between the crimson band and the divine Name. *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* to Leviticus 16:21 reads:

Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goat, in this fashion: his right hand upon his left. He shall confess over it all the iniquities of the children of Israel and all their rebellions, whatever their sins; he shall put them on the head of the goat with a declared and explicit oath by the great and glorious Name. . . .<sup>82</sup>

Here, during the rite of the hand-laying, the high priest was not only obliged to transfer to the scapegoat the iniquities of the children of Israel, but also to seal the head of the cultic animal with a great oath containing the divine Name.

#### *The Divine Name and the Curse*

Although mishnaic and early Christian testimonies do not directly associate the imposition of the curses with the figure of the high priest, the Slavonic apocalypse insists on such a function, depicting Yahoel as the one who places curses on Azazel during the transference rite.

It is important for our study that the curses come, not coincidentally, from the angelic cultic servant associated with the divine Name. This motif evokes the association of the high priest with the divine Name, which was worn on the forehead of the sacerdotal agent.

It is possible that the divine Name's inverse counterpart is the crimson band of the scapegoat, depicted by *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* as being sealed with the Name. Furthermore, this connection between the divine Name and the curse might already be present in Zechariah 3's parallelism between the angelic being bearing the divine Name and the antagonistic creature who is rebuked. The tradition of the divine Name found in the *Apocalypse of Abraham* appears to be able to explain further the symmetry of the atoning rite, revealing another link between the divine Name of the high priest and the curse of the scapegoat, described in *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* 16:21 as an "oath"—that is to say, an ominous cultic utterance possibly representing an