LEVITICUS 16:
ITS LITERARY STRUCTURE

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To the memory of Gerhard F. Hasel, a former professor, an excellent Christian, a respected scholar, and a supportive friend.

Scholarly work on Lev 16 has been mainly interested in the redactional history of the materials present in the chapter, and consequently little interest has been shown in the literary structure of this important passage. Questions related to the form and purpose of the supposedly original and independent rituals that are now embedded in the biblical text, as well as to the date for the creation or formulation of the day of atonement, are still lacking final answers.[1] It is not our purpose to look into those issues, but rather to explore the literary structure of Lev 16 in an attempt to illuminate the way in which its diverse sections constitute a single unity.[2]

It is no longer possible to argue, without introducing serious modifications to the statement, that "It is evident at the first glance that the chapter [Lev 16] is in its present form the result of a probably fairly long previous history that has left its traces in a strange lack of continuity and unity about the whole."[3] Some scholars have found evidence of literary structures and beauty in Lev 16 which suggests a definite attempt on the part of the writer to integrate it into a whole. For instance, John E. Hartley speaks of the "remarkable tapestry" of the chapter, pointing particularly to the balance and unity created by the

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[1] On these and related issues, see A. Bertholet, *Leviticus* (Tubingen: Mohr, 1901), 50-53; and more recently, K. Ellinger, *Leviticus* (Tubingen: Mohr, 1966), 200-201; Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16* (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 1061-1065; John E. Hartley, *Leviticus* (Dallas: Word, 1992), 217-220; David P. Wright, "Day of Atonement," *ABD* 2:72-76; and Rene Peter-Contesse, *Levitique 1-16* (Geneve: Labor et Fides, 1993),245-248.

[2] I would like to thank William Shea for going over the first draft of the literary structure proposed here and for his comments.

[3] Martin Noth, *Leviticus: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977), 117.

constant reference to the sacrifices of the high priest and the congregation and the objects of expiation (priests, people, and parts of the sanctuary). He even finds a chiastic structure in Lev 16 based on the general content of the passage rather than on linguistic parallels.[5] Some scholars have found small chiasms within the chapter,[6] but as far as I know, none of them has attempted to carefully explore the literary structure of the whole chapter.

Literary Structure of Each Section of Lev 16

A literary analysis of Lev 16 indicates that chiasms and synonymous, antithetic, and synthetic parallelisms, complete and incomplete, are found throughout. It is now well known in the study of biblical texts that repetitions do have specific functions and purpose. This is also the case in Lev 16, which is formed by legal materials artistically constructed. Our reading of the chapter indicates that it can be divided into five main sections, each one well structured. In order to assist the reader, we will provide first the result of our study, followed by comments and interpretations of the proposed findings.

Lev 16:1-2: HISTORICAL SETTING
"The Lord spoke to Moses. . . 'Tell Aaron. . . or he will die.'"
Lev 16:3-5: INTRODUCTION
A Aaron's Bull for a Sin-offering 16:3
      B Aaron's Ram for a Burnt-offering 16:3
            C Priestly Vestment and Ritual Bath 16:4
A' People's Male Goats for Sin-offering 16:5
      B People s Ram for Burnt-offermg 16:5
Lev 16:6-10: FIRST DEVELOPMENT
A Aaron Brings Near Bull for Sin-offering 16:6
      B Makes Atonement for Himself and His House 16:6
            C Places the Two Goats Before Yahweh 16:7
                  D Casts Lot for Yahweh 16:8
                      E Casts Lot for Azazel 16:8
                  D' Lot for Yahweh - Sin-offering 16:9

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[4] Hartley, 31-32. Frank H. Gonnan, Jr., speaks of the importance of recognizing in the study of Lev 16 "the dynamics of the text as a self-contained unit of meaning" (*The Idelogy of Ritual: Space, Time and Status in the Priestly Theology* [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990D, 67.

[5] He suggested the following structure: A narrative and introduction (vv. 1-2); B calendrical agenda (vv. .3-10); C liturgical regulations (vv. 11-28); B' calendrical instructions (vv. 29-34a); A compliance report (v. 34b) (Ibid., 232).

[6] E.G. Wright finds one in 16:29-31 (73), and Milgrom identifies another one in 16:14 (1033).

 E' Lot for Azazel 16:10

 C' Places Goat Before Yahweh 16:10

 B' To Make Atonement for/on It 16:10

A' To Send It to the Wilderness 16:10

Lev 16:11-22: SECOND DEVELOPMENT

A Aaron's Bull: Sin-offering for Himself and His House 16:11-14

 A1 Slaughtered 16:11

 A2 Bring Incense behind the Veil: Not to Die 16:12-13

 A3 Blood Manipulation 16:14

 B Community's Goat for Yahweh: A Sin-offering 16:15

 B1 Slaughtered 16:15

 B2 Bring blood Behind the Veil 16:15

 B3 Blood Manipulation 16:15

 C Atonement for the Sanctuary, Tent of Meeting, the Priesthood, the
 Congregation of Israel, and the Altar 16:16-19

 C1 Atonement for Sanctuary and Tent of Meeting 16:16

 C2 Atonement for Priesthood and Assembly 16:17

 C3 Atonement for the Altar 16:18-19

 C' Atonement Finished for the Sanctuary, the Tent of Meeting
 and the Altar 16:20

 B' Community's Goat for Azazel 16:20-22

 B1 Live Goat Is Presented 16:20

 B2 Place Both Hands on the Head of the Live Goat 16:21

 B3 Confession of All Iniquities, Rebellions and All Sins 16:21

 B2' Place Them [the Sins] on the Head of the Goat 16:21

 B1' Goat Taken to the Wilderness 16:21

 B2'1 Goat Bears All Iniquities upon Itself to a Barren Land 16:22

 B1" Set Free in the Wilderness 16:22

A' _____

Lev 16:23-28: CONCLUDING RITUAL ACTS

A Priestly Vestments and Ritual Bath 16:23-24

 B Atonement Performed through Burnt-offerings 16:24

 C Disposal of the Fat of the Sin-offering 16:25

A' Vestment and Ritual Bath: Person Handling the Live Goat 16:26

 B' Atonement and the Blood of the Sin-offering 16:27

 C' Disposal of the Flesh, Skin and Dung of the Sin-offering 16:27

A" Vestment and Ritual Bath: Person Handling the Flesh of the Sin offering
 16:28

Lev 16:29-34: INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF THE RITUAL

A Everlasting Statute: Seventh Month, Tenth Day 16:29

 B Deny Yourselves 16:29

 C Do no Work 16:29

 D Atonement to Cleanse from All Sin 16:30

          C' Sabbath Rest 16:31
      B' Deny Yourselves 16:31
A' Everlasting Statute 16:31
                    D Anointed Priest Makes Atonement 16:32
                       E Wears Linen Vestments 16:32
                       E' Holy Vestments 16:32
                    D' Makes Atonement for Sanctuary, Tent, Altar,
                       Priests, and All the Assembly 16:33
A" Everlasting Statute 16:34
                    D To Make Atonement for the People of Israel from All Their
                       Sins 16:34
A'" Once a Year 16:34
Lev 16:34: CONCLUDING REMARK
      "Moses did as the Lord had commanded him."
      (Heb, "Lord/Moses")

          The five main literary units are carefully structured and integrated
into each other through the use of specific terminology and by the flow
of the different ritual acts. But before exploring those units we should
define the function of the **Historical Setting** (vv. 1-2) and the
Concluding Remark (v. 34d). From the literary point of view they
form a literary envelope for the content of the chapter, singling it out
as a unit by itself that can be separated from its immediate context for
literary analysis. At the end of the chapter we are taken back to the
beginning, hence informing us that the unit has come to an end. This
is done in two ways. At the beginning Moses is ordered by the Lord to
do something (*dabber 'el 'ah^{a}ron*/"speak to Aaron"), and at the end we
are told that he did exactly as he was told (*wayya'as k^{,a}ser siwwah
yahweh*/"he did as the Lord commanded"). This "compliance report"[7]
closes the literary unit. In addition, we find in both sections the names
Yahweh and *Moseh* together, something that is not found throughout the
rest of the chapter. We find conceptual and linguistic connections
between these sections.
          "The *Historical Setting* contains additional information that is
useful in determining its purpose. In its canonical form the
institutionalization of the day of atonement is dated to the period of the
Israelite Sinai experience soon after the death of Aaron's sons inside the
sanctuary. The possibility of dying inside the sanctuary was a real one,
even if the sin of Aaron's sons was not repeated. The purpose of the
legislation is to avoid a similar experience in the sanctuary. This could
happen particularly whenever the priest would go into the adytum of

          [7] Hartley, 225. Formulas of compliance are common in Leviticus; see Baruch A.
Levine, *Leviticus* (New York: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 110.

the sanctuary (*yabo' . . . 'el-haqqodes*). The implicit question raised in vv. 1-2 is the one of the proper time for a rite of entrance,[8] but it is not answered until the end of the chapter. In addition we also find in vv. 1-2 terminology that will be used in other sections of the chapter, as, for instance, the verb "to die" (*mot*), the nouns "adytum" (*haqqodes*), *kapporet*, and "cloud" (*anan*), and the phrase "behind the veil" (*mibbet lapparoket*). There is a clear terminological link between this section and the rest of the chapter.

Introduction (16:3-5)

The structure of this section is identified by the use of synthetic parallelism based on the repetition of the terms *hatta't*/"sin-offering" (A//A') and *'olah*/"burnt-offering" (B//B). The parallelism is incomplete because the C element is omitted in the second part and there is no compensation for it. The reason for the omission is obvious: The ritual act under C, the exchange of clothes by the high priest and his ritual bath, takes place only once before the beginning of the activities of the day. But the fact that this ritual is left without a balance in the literary structure serves to emphasize its importance. The high priest should wear this special vestment only in preparation to enter the adytum. This type of vestment is directly related to the rite of entrance during the day of atonement.

It would seem that the, introduction is primarily defining the basic elements needed for Aaron's rite of entrance. In 16:2 we were told that "Aaron should not go into [*yabo'*] the *haqqodes*," but v. 3 begins, "With this Aaron should go in [*yabo'*]." The introduction shows interest not only in the time element but also in the proper preparation for it (*bezo't yabo'*/"with this he shall come in"). The *rite of entrance* requires the use of a special priestly vestment and a specific number of sacrificial offerings. It is important to observe that the burnt-offerings are included in v. 3. The reason for this is that the **Introduction** provides also a listing of the sacrificial victims that are going to be involved, in one way or another, in the activities of the day.

First Development (16:6-10)

This segment is formed by a chiasm within a chiasm. The beginning and end of the chiasm (A//A') is framed by two opposite ideas, a case of antithetic parallelism. At the beginning we find the expression "bring near the bull"/*wehiqrib 'et-par*, and at the end "send it [the goat] to Azazel to the wilderness"/*lesallah 'oto la^aza'zel hammidbarah*. One is

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[8] On rites of entrance, see Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), 24-25; he suggested that they belong to the general category of rites of passsage.

approaching the Lord, while the other is distancing or, better, being separated permanently from the Lord. The B lines in both sections of the chiasm contain the verb *kipper*. The meaning of the verb and the preposition in the case of the goat for Azazel is unclear, although it is recognized that the goat is not related to the cleansing of the sanctuary.[9] Be that as it may, what is significant for us is that there is a parallelism between these sections. With respect to lines C, the parallelism is suggested by the use of the same verb, *'amad*/"to station," and the phrase *lipne Yahweh*/"before the Lord" in both cases.

Lines D and E are located at the pinnacle of the chiasm but in inverted position, creating, as indicated above, a chiasm within a larger chiasm. One would have expected D//D' instead of D//E. The parallelism is indicated by the term lots" (*goral*), used twice in association with Yahweh and twice in association with Azazel. The two goats that were introduced as a unit in 16:5 are now separated, and a specific function is assigned to each of them. The one for Yahweh is

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[9] The usage of the phrase *kipper 'al* in 16:10 is indeed unexpected and difficult to interpret. The phrase usually means "to make atonement for/on behalf of" someone or something. Obviously, this meaning does not fit the context of that passage, even though it has been supported by C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary of the OT*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), 683. It is true that in Israel purging rituals were performed on objects but never on animals, and this case does not seem to be the exception. In searching for a solution some scholars have suggested, without providing any supporting evidence, that the use of kipper 'al here is a scribal error or mistake (Noth, 121; Elliger, 201; Bernd Janowski, *Suhne als Heilsgeschehen* [Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1983], 185). Others have argued that the preposition *'al* means, in this particular case, "in proximity to," which is linguistically possible (Baruch A. Levine, *In the Presence of the Lord* [Leiden: Brill, 1974], 80; Gerhard F. Hasel, "Studies in Biblical Atonement II: The Day of Atonement," in *The Sanctuary and the Atonement: Biblical, Historical, and Theological Studies*, ed. A. V. Wallenkampf and W.R. Lesher [Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1981], 121). Another has suggested that in this phrase the preposition *'al* means "for/on behalf of" only when the object is human, but when it is inanimate means "on, upon"; it is then argued that the goat for Azazel is treated as an inanimate object (Milgrom, 1023). Whether the distinction in the use of the preposition *'al* is valid or not, it is quite clear that in Lev 16 the goat for Azazel is not treated as an inanimate object, but on the contrary it is called several times "the living goat" (vv. 10, 20, 21). The preposition has been also interpreted to mean "by means of," and *kipper 'al* has been understood to mean that atonement is performed through it by sending it away to the wilderness loaded with the sins of the Israelites (Peter-Contesse, 253-254). But in that case one would have expected the verb to take the preposition b^e, which is used with the verb *kipper* to express instrumentality, rather than *'al*. Another group of scholars have looked for a solution in the antecedent of the third person singular pronominal suffix attached to the preposition (*'alakyw*, "for it"). One has suggested that it refers to Aaron (N. Kiuchi, *The Purification Offering in the Priestly Literature: Its Meaning and Function* ([Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1987], 150-152); and another that it could be referring to the congregation (Hartley, 237); in both cases the syntax of the sentence makes the solution very unlikely. Finally, it has been suggested, based on the history of tradition and (redaction criticism, that what we find in 16:10 "is an attempt to assimilate an alien rite to the dominant priestly sacrificial practice and theology of expiation" (J. R. Porter, *Leviticus: A Commentary* [New York: Cambridge, 1976], 127-128). This is hardly a solution.

made a sin-offering (*asahu hatta't*). Originally either one of them could have been offered as a *hatta't*, but through the lot the one for Yahweh becomes the *hatta't*.[10] Since DE//D'E' are located at the center of the chiasm, we have to conclude that the elements listed there are being emphasized. The separation of the goats for different roles is an important aspect of the day of atonement because of their mutually exclusive roles. In the **First Development** the most important element is precisely the casting of lots to select the goat for Yahweh and the one for Azazel.

At the center of the chiasm we also find for the first time Yahweh and Azazel mentioned together. The parallelism suggests that they are both personal beings. They move in different spheres, which seem to be opposite to each other. Yahweh dwells with his people, but Azazel is located away from the Israelite camp, in the wilderness. Nothing more is said about the enigmatic figure of Azazel, but one senses that it is a negative power.

In the **First Development** two additional rites are introduced. We are told for the first time in the chapter that Aaron's bull will be part of a *cleansing rite*; it will be used to make atonement for himself and for his house (*kipper ba'ad*). The second rite is associated with Azazel. The second goat is "to be sent to the wilderness," an expression that implies the performance of an elimination rite. Both rites will be developed in more detail throughout the rest of the chapter.

Second Development (16:6-22)

This is the central section of Lev 16, in which the ritual for the day of atonement is described in detail and is, therefore, a full development of what was stated in the previous verses under **First Development**. The structure of the whole section is basically chiastic, with one of its members missing; there is probably a theological reason for the omission. The pattern is ABC//C' B', without a corresponding A'

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[10] Some have concluded that the two goats together constitute the *hatta't* (e.g., N.H. Snaith, *Leviticus and Numbers* [London: Oliphants, 1977], p. 112). We have argued that, according to v. 8, only the goat for Yahweh is selected to be a *hatta't* (A.M. Rodriguez, *Substitution in the Hebrew Cultus* [Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1979], p. 113; see also Gorman, p. 97). Kiuchi, pp. 148-149, has rejected our suggestion, arguing that since the two goats were destined for a *hatta't* in v. 5, none of them could later on cease to be a *hatta't* (see also Baruch J. Schwartz, "The Bearing of Sin in the Priestly Literature," in *Pomegranates and Golden Bells*, David P. Wright, David Noel Freedman, and Avi Hurvitz, eds. [Winona Lakes, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1995], p. 18). Yet that is precisely what v. 8 indicates when unpacking the statement made in v. 5. Besides, he is unable to explain in a convincing way how the goat for Azazel functions as a *hatta't*, except by suggesting that its being sent away corresponds with the burning of the flesh of the *hatta't* One seems to be going beyond the evidence when applying the term "sacrifice," in the Levitical sense, to the goat for Azazel. This is not a cleansing rite but an elimination rite.

parallel at the end of the structure. Under *A* we find three main activities: *A1*--Slaughtering Aaron's bull for a sin-offering, *A2*--Going behind the veil with incense, and *A3*-Blood manipulation. A takes us back to v. 6, repeating it almost verbatim but adding a new element: "And he shall slaughter his bull for a sin-offering" (v. 11). The addition is significant in that it describes the performance of the second step in the procedure followed when sacrificing a sin-offering, the slaughtering (*sahat*) of the sacrificial victim (Lev 4:1-12).

The offering of incense is somewhat unexpected, but the text justifies it by associating it directly with the rite of entrance. We should look first at the structure of this activity. Its literary form is abcd//a' b'c'd'e'

> a Censer Full of Live Coals of Fire 16:12
>> b From Altar Before the Lord 16:12
>>> c Hands Full of Incense 16:12
>>>> d Brought inside the Curtain 16:12
> a' Place Incense on Fire 16:13
>> b' Before the Lord 16:13
>>> c' Cloud of Incense 16: 13
>>>> d' The Kapporet 16:13
>>>>> e' "And he will not die" 16: 13

The parallelism is developmental or synthetic. The a//a' lines mention fire (*'es*), which is placed in the censer and used to burn incense. Lines b//b' use the same expression, "before the Lord"/*lipne* Yahweh, while lines c//c' use the term "incense" /*q^{e}toret*. The d//d' parallel is synonymous: "inside the curtain"/*mibbet lapparoket* is obviously the place where the *kapporet* is located. This last element is the most important one in the rite of entrance because it invades the most holy space to which the high priest could ever have access. Here the *rite of entrance*, reaches its highest point, its intended goal. It should not surprise us to find an extra element, line e', in the second set of lines in the structure: *welo' yamut*/"that he may not die." This is exactly the same expression found in the **Historical Setting** (v. 2), when the rite of entrance was introduced for the first time. The extra line e' (16:13) brings the rite to its climax and indicates that it can be successfully accomplished by using incense when approaching the awesome presence of the Lord.

The literary structure of the blood manipulation of Aaron's bull (A3) is clearly a chiasm:

> a Some Blood of the Bull
>> b Sprinkle with Finger
>>> c On the Front of the *Kapporet*

            c' And Before the Kapporet
        b' Sprinkle Seven Times
    a' Some of the Blood

By opening and closing the chiasm with the term *dam*, "blood," the significance of this element in the *cleansing rite* is stressed. At the center of the chiasm is located the *kapporet* (c//c'), the place where the Lord manifests his presence (v. 2). It deserves to be at the center because it is, in terms of significance, the very center of the sanctuary and of the Israelite camp, and especially because it is against God, who manifests his presence there, that the Israelites sin.

The first B line follows in general the structural pattern of A, but this time the sacrificial animal is one of the goats of the people. This line will develop the thought contained m 16:9, under **First Development**, where the goat for Yahweh was designated as a sin-offering and parallels the development of Al-A3. Bl states that it is to be slaughtered (*sahat*), and B2 introduces the idea of going "behind the veil"/*mibbet lapparoket*, an expression found also under A2. In this case the main emphasis falls on the blood manipulation of the sacrificial victim and the *kapporet*. This *hatta't* is part of the cleansing ritual performed during the day of atonement,[11] and its blood is also taken to the adytum, behind the veil. The blood manipulation, Bl, is not structured, as in A3, in a chiastic form, because according to the text a summary of the procedure is being provided. Yet, one can detect an ab//a'b' pattern based on the fact that the verb *hizzah*, "sprinkle," seems to have a double-duty function.

        a Sprinkling
            b upon the *Kapporet*
        a' [Sprinkling]
            b' before the *Kapporet*

Line C is at the center of the chiasm of the whole section. This is to be expected, because here we find an interpretation of the meaning of the rituals performed through the blood manipulation of the bull of Aaron and the goat of the people. This is the most important element in the instructions and deserves the center not only of this section but of the chapter itself. A word count of the chapter shows 229 words in

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[11] Roy Edwin Gane, *Ritual Dynamic Structures: System Theory and Ritual Syntax Applied to Selected Ancient Israelite, Babylonian and Hittite Festival Days* (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of California at Berkeley, 1992), has correctly argued that the rituals performed with Aaron's bull and the people's goat form "a ritual complex unit" (p. 211). He bases his conclusion on the fact that both of them are called the purification offering of purgations" (16:25), that the rituals "are interwoven with each other, i.e. the second ritual begins before the first ritual is completed and similar activities belonging to the two rituals alternate" (p. 210), and that the rituals are actually merged when the blood is applied to the altar (p. 211).

vv. 1-15 and 237 in vv. 20b-34; the exact center of the chapter is in vv. 17-18.[12] We are indeed dealing here with the heart of the rituals performed during the day of atonement. The emphasis of this section is on the comprehensiveness of the *kipper*-acts performed that day.

Line C can be subdivided into three main sections (Cl, C2, C3), each one carefully constructed. Cl discusses the purgation of *haqqodes* and the *'ohel mo'ed*. The cleansing of these two apartments is described in parallel lines following the abc//a' b'c'.

    a Thus He Shall Make Atonement
        b for the Sanctuary
            c because of the Uncleanness of the People
    a' So He Shall Do [Make Atonement]
        b' for the Tent of Meeting
            c' in the Midst of Their Uncleanness

Lines a//a' are related to each other by the use of the verb *kipper*, which is clearly implicit in the parallel line. The next lines, b//b', refer to *haqqodes* and the *'ohel mo'ed* respectively. In c//c' the term "uncleanness"/*tum'h*, is used. The emphasis of the structure is placed on the reason for the purgation act: It is necessary because of the uncleanness of the people of Israel. It is not stated how the uncleanness got there; neither is the uncleanness limited to certain types of cultic or moral failures; purgation is called for because of all the sins of the people.

C2 deals with the cleansing of the priesthood and the assembly. In fact, v. 17 is phrased as a regulation forbidding anybody, except the high priest, to be inside the tent when the purgation rites are being performed. But while doing that, the cleansing of the people is also addressed. The structure of the regulation is a very simple one, ab//a' b'.

    a Aaron Goes In
        b to Make Atonement in the Sanctuary
    a' Aaron Comes Out '
        b' Having Made Atonement for the
           Priesthood and the Assembly of Israel

The a//a' lines describe Aaron going in (*bo'*) and coming out (*yasa'*), making the parallelism antithetic. The parallelism in lines b//b' is, on the other hand, synthetic. Aaron goes in to perform a cleansing rite in the sanctuary. The verb is *kipper + b^e*, stating the space where the purgation rite is performed. The interesting thing were is that the *kipper*-act inside the sanctuary is at the same time a *kipper*-act on behalf of cad) Aaron, his house, and all the assembly of Israel. What takes place

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[12] I consistently counted words united by a *makkeph* as two words. But even if we count them as one word, 16:18 would continue to be the center of the chapter.

inside the sanctuary is for the benefit of all the people of Israel, thus
making the cleansing of the sanctuary in its totality directly related to
the cleansing of the people. This element the structure of *C2* seems to
emphasize.

In 16:18-19, line *C3*, we find the regulation regarding the purgation
of the altar. Its content is in some ways very similar to CI. Both begin
with the verb kipper, and at the end we find the phrase "from the
uncleanness [*tum'ah*] of the children of Israel." But the significant
difference is found in the description of the blood manipulation for the
cleansing of the altar. *C3* is structured, like *A3*, in a chiastic form:
abc//c'b'a'

> a Make Atonement for the Altar
>> b Some Blood of the Bull and Goat
>>> c Placed on the Horns
>>> c' Sprinkled on the Altar
>> b' Some Blood
> a' Cleanse and Sanctify It from Uncleanness

Line *a'* explains the meaning of the purgation rite for the altar in terms
of cleansing and sanctifying it from the uncleanness of the Israelites.
The phrase "some blood"/*middam*, characterizes lines *b//b'*. Lines *c//c'*
describe the blood application to the altar using the verb "to put"/*natan*
and "to sprinkle"/*hizzah*. They are parallel actions performed on the
altar. Lines *c//c'* are the center of the chiasm, making the blood
application the most important element in the cleansing and sanctifying
of the altar. Undoubtedly, blood is of extreme importance in Lev 16.

The parallel line C' is brief and covers only half of v. 2, which is
a transitional verse summarizing what was said before and introducing
a new development. We place under C' the statement, "When he has
finished atoning for the most holy place, the tent of meeting, and the
altar." This is precisely what was described under the previous Cline
in vv. 16-19, which was interpreted as making atonement for the
priesthood and the people. Since line C' is a summary, there is no need
to develop its content, and that is exactly what has taken place.

The people's goat for Azazel, line B', is a development of 16:9-10,
where Azazel was introduced for the first time. The passage is
structured as an elaborate chiasm, which happens to be the same type
of literary structure found in 16:9-10, the **First Development**. A literary
envelope is used to set the limits to the section, using antithetic
parallelism. At the beginning the goat is brought (*hiqrib*) to Aaron, line
B1; but under *B1''* , at the end of the section, it is sent (*salah*) to the
wilderness. The phrase "on the head of the goat" *'al ro's hasa 'ir* is
used in lines *B1//B1'* , and under line *B1''* we find the equivalent, "on

it [thegoat]"/*'alaw* ("on itself"). At the center of the first chiasm is the confessional act standing by itself and, therefore, identified as possibly the most important element in that literary structure. In the second chiasm, which is a development of ideas already contained in the first, the center is occupied by the description of the goat bear iniquity upon itself to a barren land. This is the main idea expressed in that small chiasm. The two chiasms emphasize different but complementary ideas. The first is dominated by *the idea of transfer of sin* to the goat ("iniquities, transgressions, sins," *'awon, psa', hatta't*) through the laying on of hands and the confessional act. The second chiasm puts the emphasis on the removal of sin to the wilderness (*hammidbarah*), to Azazel. These two acts, transfer and removal, belong to the very essence of the elimination rite. Sending the goat to the wilderness brings the elimination rite to a close and signifies that the sins of the people, which had been purged from the sanctuary, are being sent to their source of origin. Sin and impurity are here dissociated completely from Yahweh.

The chiastic structure of the **Second Development** is, as indicated above, incomplete; there is no *A'* in parallel with *A*. The reason is obvious: The cleansing rite for the sanctuary and the people has already come to an end; the circle is closed. It is this element of completeness, finality, that the incomplete chiasm seems to stress through its abrupt end. Therefore, its incompleteness is not suggesting that something is missing, but on the contrary that nothing else needs to be added.

Concluding Ritual Acts (16:23-28)

This section is basically dominated by the ideas of clothes and ritual baths in which the high priest, the person who took the goat to the wilderness, and the one who burned the flesh of the *hatta't* are involved. The structure of the section is built on synthetic parallelism with an ABC/ /A'B'C'/ /A" pattern. Lines A are characterized by the use of the noun *beged*/ "garment, clothes" and by the phrase *werahas 'et-besaro bammayim*/"and he shall bathe his body in water." These are repeated three times, opening and closing the literary structure, creating a literary envelope for it. This does not mean that this unit is totally independent of the rest of the chapter. Rather, it combines elements from the other sections, bringing all the activities of the day to a close. For Instance, *A* closes the circle of the high priest's vestment for the day of atonement, which was introduced in the **Introduction** under line *C* (16:4). Having concluded the rite of entrance, described in the previous section, the high priest changes his vestments to the ones he regularly wears.

The parallelism in lines B is indicated by the use of the verb *kipper*. B' takes us back to the **Introduction**, lines *B//B'*, where the sacrificial victims for the burnt-offerings are introduced. Now we are told that the high priest offers them as expiatory offerings. The circle of the burnt-offering is finally closed. Line B' summarizes the expiatory or cleansing power of the blood of the sin-offerings of the people and Aaron, thus pointing back to the **Second Development**, lines *ABC//C'*. In 16:25 and 27, lines *C//C'*, the procedure for the disposal of the fat, flesh, skin, and dung of the sin-offerings is described. This closes the circle of the *hatta't* which was opened in the **Introduction**, under *A* (16:3).

The section under consideration is well constructed with in itself and at the same time directly related to the Introduction. In fact, one can identify a chiastic structure in the elements listed in 16:3-4 and 16:23-25:

16:3-4	16:23-25
A Bull for Sin-offering	C Vestments and Ritual Bath
B Ram for Burnt-offering	B Burnt-offering
C Vestments and Ritual Bath	ASin-offering

The whole **Introduction** is summarized in 16:23-25 by bringing together the burnt-offerings of Aaron and the people. The reference to the fat of the sin-offering includes the fat of both sin-offerings, i.e., the ram of Aaron and the goat of the people. The items are listed in an inverted parallelism. We can also identify a parallel structure between the **First Development** (16:6-10) and 16:26-28, the second part of the *Concluding Ritual Acts:*

A Bull for the Sin-Offering (16:6-10)
    B Goat for the Sin-Offering
        C Goat for Azazel
        C Goat for Azazel (16:26-18)
    A Bull for the Sin-Offering
B Goat for the Sin-Offering

The listing of the animals creates a chiasm within a chiasm, suggesting that there is a relation between these two sections of the chapter. This seems to be the way the text testifies to its internal unity, pointing to previous acts and at the same time moving onward the activities of the day.

Institutionalization of the Ritual (16:23-28)
This section is nicely constructed and emphasizes two main ideas: the time for the celebration of the day of atonement and its fundamental meaning (cleansing the sanctuary and the people). From a literary point of view this unit is formed by the combination of three

chiasms. There are four *A* lines, all of them dealing with calendric information. The first indicates that the celebration of the day of atonement is an "Everlasting Statute" to be celebrated once a year during the tenth day of the seventh month. Part of this information is used in *A"* ("Everlasting Statute") forming the first chiasm and opening the second one, which closes with the same phrase (line *A"*). *A"* functions as the initial element of the last chiasm, which closes with the phrase "once a year." It is undeniable that the stress is being put on the yearly celebration of the day of atonement and on its permanent character within the Israelite cui tic calendar.

Lines *BC//B'C'* legislate what is expected of the people during this day. Until now the legislation has stressed only the activity of the high priest and of his assistants. Everything that the high priest does during that day is done on behalf of the people. What is required of them is to humble themselves and rest, not doing any work at all. Line *D* is at the center of the chiasm and introduces the idea of atonement. This line summarizes the center of the chiasm under **Second of Development**, lines *C//C'* (16:16-20a): The people are cleansed "from all their sins"/*mikkol hatto'tekem* (16:30). The idea of atonement is so important in the chapter that in this section it is further developed in vv. 32-33. In other words, the center of the chiasm, line *D*, is used to construct the next unit. The anointed priest is the one who performs the kipper-acts mentioned in *D//D'*. This time the all-inclusiveness of the cleansing rite is mentioned: It cleanses the adytum, the tent of meeting, the altar, the priesthood, and all the congregation of Israel. One could develop line *D'* even more, revealing the care with which it was structured:

D He Shall Make Atonement
    E for (*'et*) the Adytum, and
    E' for (*'et*) the Tent of Meeting and the Altar
D' He Shall make Atonement, and
    E" for (*'al*) the Priests and
    E'" for (*'al*) All the People of the Congregation
D" He Shall Make Atonement

The first section in this verse deals with the cleansing of the sanctuary in its totality, specifically the inanimate objects; the second, with animate objects or persons, the priests and the Israelites. The reference is obviously back to 16:16-20a, where the verb *kipper* is used five times; here, in two short verses, it appears four times. The parallelism suggests once more that the purgation of the sanctuary through the cleansing rite of the sin-offerings cannot be separated from the cleansing of the people.

V. 34 contains a small chiasm in which the contents of lines *A* and *D* are combined. The long sentence in v. 29 is broken; between its parts is placed a reference to the *kipper*-act on behalf of the people. This small literary unit serves to summarize the section by bringing together the new development, i.e., the calendar for the celebration of the day of atonement, and the very essence of the meaning of the ritual, "to make atonement for ['*al*] the people of Israel from/because of all their sins [*mikkol-hatto' tam*]."

Chiastic Structure of Lev 16

It is always risky to attempt to identify chiasms on the basis of the general content of a text rather than on linguistic and structural similarities. That approach tends at times to reveal the creativity of the researcher rather than the literary skills of the biblical writer. Although it is not my main interest to demonstrate that Lev 16 is structured chiasticly, after reading it carefully and noticing its many apparent repetitions, I was impressed by the fact that it does seem to be constructed in terms of a chiasm. We are suggesting the following literary structure:

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-----    "And Yahweh said to Moses"
|A   Aaron should not go into most holy place any time he wishes 16:2
|    B   Aaron's sacrificial victims and special vestment 16:3-4
|        C   Sacrificial victims provided by the people 16:5
E            D   Aaron's bull, goat for Yahweh, goat for Azazel 16:6-10
N                E   Aaron sacrifices his bull as a sin-offering 16:11-14
V                    F   Community's goat is sacrificed as a sin-offering 16: 15
E                        G   Make atonement 16:16-19
L                        G'  Atonement is finished 16:20a
O                    F' Community's goat for Azazel sent to the wilderness 16:20b-22
P                E'  Aaron's closing activities 16:23-25
E            D'  Goat for Azazel, Aaron's bull, goat for sin-offering 16:26-28
|        C'  People rest and humble themselves 16:29-31
|    B' Anointed priest officiates wearing special garments 16:32-33
|A' Anointed priest makes atonement once a year 16:34
----- "As the Lord commanded Moses"
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Lines *A//A'* deal with time elements as they relate to the sanctuary and particularly to the entrance of the high priests into the adytum. A general statement at the beginning of the chapter leads at the end to a more a specific one. Line *B* legislates the sacrificial victims and the type of vestments with which Aaron was to approach the Lord. Its parallel line, *B''* states that during the day of atonement the anointed priest was to officiate, wearing a special priestly dress. The involvement of the people in the activities of the day of atonement is mentioned only in

lines *C//C'*. They provided sacrificial victims (*C*) and humbled themselves and rested (*C'*) while the sanctuary was being purged.

In 16:6-10 we find a reference to Aaron's bull for his sin-offering and a description of the casting of lots to select the goat for Yahweh and the goat for Azazel (*D*). In 16:26-28, *D'*, we find its parallel in which the goat for Azazel, the bull of Aaron, and the goat for the sin-offering are mentioned for the last time in the chapter, suggesting that the main activities of the day have come to an end.

There is not an exact parallel for line *E*, because it deals with the sacrifice offered by Aaron to make atonement for himself and for his house, which brings that part of the ritual to an end, making their experience final. But in the overall structure of the chapter there is compensation for it in 16:23-25, line *E'*, where Aaron is mentioned for the last time in the chapter and his last activities for the day are described. Lines *F//F'* describe how each of the goats provided by the people was used during the day of atonement. Lines *G//G'* are located at the center of the chiasm, indicating that this is indeed the most important aspect of the chapter. The chiastic structure combines the main elements of the ritual of the day of atonement with its fundamental purpose, forming a well-structured literary unity.

General Observations

We have suggested that in Lev 16 we have three rites[13] tightly integrated to create a new ritual complex unit with a very specific purpose. In its present form it is practically impossible to separate each of these rituals from the total activities of the day of atonement without damaging beyond repair the content of the chapter, its structure, and purpose. At the beginning of the chapter we find short summaries that are later on developed in detail, using the same terminology found in the summaries and introducing new elements in the discussion. We move from building block to building block until there is before us a well-structured, all-encompassing ritual complex.

It is interesting to notice how a circle of activity is introduced and then, at a rather slow pace, reaches its closure, taking us through a process in which each one of its parts is very significant. For instance, the circle of the burnt-offerings is initiated in 16:3, 5 and closed in 16:24, without any mention of it in between. The goat for Azazel is introduced in 16:5; the selection of the specific goat is recorded in v. 10. The laying on of hands, the transfer of sin to it, and the act of sending it away to the wilderness are found in 16:20b-22. But perhaps the most significant circle is that of Aaron's sin-offering. It is introduced in 16:3;

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[13] Cf. Walter Kornfeld, *Leuitikus* (Wurzburg: Echter Verlag, 1983), p. 62.

the sacrificial victim is presented in 16:6, slaughtered in 16:11; the blood manipulation is described in 16:14, the burning of the fat in 16:25, and the circle is closed with the disposal of the flesh of the victim in 16:27. We find a similar situation with respect to the people's sin-offering, which is introduced (16:5), then presented to the Lord (16:9), slaughtered, the blood manipulation performed (16:15), its fat burned (16:25), and finally the disposal of the flesh brings the circle to an end (16:27).[14] What was in the regular sin-offering a series of consecutive steps in the sacrificial process (Lev 4) is intentionally separated in the ritual of the day of atonement in order to make room for new details in this sophisticated and complex ritual unit. Thus, the unity of the chapter is emphasized.

In its present form Lev 16 combines, in a very well-balanced conceptual symmetry, the rite of entrance, the cleansing rite performed with the two sin-offerings, and the elimination rite. The rite of entrance makes it possible for Aaron to have access to the adytum in order to perform the cleansing rite through which sins and impurities are removed from the sanctuary on behalf of the priesthood and the people of Israel; finally, through the elimination rite the goat for Azazel takes them away to their place of origin, to the wilderness. The distinction between cleansing the impurities of the sanctuary through the sin-offerings and the sins of the people through the live goat is hardly present in the text of Lev 16 in its present form.[15] The

[14] It is significant that the laying on of hands is not mentioned in the case of the sin-offering of purgations. This omission should not be considered accidental or unimportant but seems rather to be intentional. The ritual was not performed on this occasion except on the goat for Azazel. This intentional omission appears to question the validity of the ownership theory of the ritual supported by some (e.g., David P. Wright, "The Gesture of Hand Placement in the Hebrew Bible and in the Hittite Literature," *JAOS* 106 [1986]:436-439; and Milgrom, pp. 152, 1024), as well as the consecration/dedication and the manumission theories.

[15] Milgrom has suggested that in its present form the cleansing of the sanctuary from its impurities in Lev 16 is performed with the expiatory sacrifices of Aaron and the people, but the sin of the people, the cause of the impurity, is removed through the goat for Azazel (ibid., pp. 1043-1044; also, David P. Wright, *Disposal of /Impurity* [Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1987], pp. 17-21). His most important argument is that in 16:21 the *tum'ah* /impurity was replaced by *'awon*/iniquity, indicating that the goat bears the sins of the people but not their uncleanness. This radical distinction between *tum'ah* and *'awon* does not seem to be valid. In 16:16 *tum'ah* had already been juxtaposed to sin (*hatta't*). This fact led Levine to comment, "Uncleanness is equated with sinfulness; thus, according to the biblical conception, sinfulness was regarded as a kind of impurity" (*Leviticus*, p. 105). does not seem proper to conclude that the concept of *tum'ah* is completely foreign to ʻ*awon* (see Kiuchi, p. 145). The use of three key terms for sin in 16:21 serves the purpose of expressing the idea of totality, that is to say, any kind of sin committed by the people of Israel (Peter-Contesse, p. 257; Hartley, p. 241; R. Knierim, "*Ht'* sich verfehlen," in *Theologisches Handworterbuch zum Alten Testament*, vol. 1, ed. E. Jenm and C. Westerman [Munchen: Kaiser Verlag, 1971], col. 547).

[11] Moreover, the distinction made between impurity and iniquity does not seem to be

sin/impurity placed on the goat for Azazel is the totality of the people's sin/impurity removed from the sanctuary through the *cleansing rite*. There is here a clear and direct connection between the rite of entrance, the *cleansing rite* and the *elimination rite* which contributes to the literary and theological unit of Lev 16.

operative in the regular *hatta't*. There is no mention there of two rituals, one to remove impurity from the sanctuary and the other to remove sin from the sinner. If the sin of the individual was removed from the person in the regular *hatta't* through remorse, as Milgrom has argued, one would have expected that the same would take place during the day of atonement when the people collectively humbled themselves before the Lord. In that case the goat for Azazel would not have been necessary. What we are suggesting is that, according to the present form of Lev 16, the goat for Azazel carried away the sin/impurities of the "sons of Israel," a phrase that includes Aaron and his family and the Israelites (with Milgrom, p. 1044; this fact was overlooked by Levine, *Leviticus*, p. 106). While two sacrificial victims were required for the cleansing rite, the rite of elimination required only one goat because it was not a sacrificial victim.