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SUBSTITUTION IN THE HEBREW CULTUS AND IN CULTIC-RELATED TEXTS

Author: **Angel Manuel Rodriguez**. Th.D., 1979.

Advisor: Gerhard F. Hasel.

(Angel M. Rodriguez is currently academic dean at Colegio Adventista de las Antillas, Mayagüez, Puerto Rico 00708.)

This dissertation attempts to investigate the presence, function, and meaning of the idea of sacrificial substitution in the Hebrew cultus. The interpretation of the OT sacrifices in terms of sacrificial substitution has been questioned and rejected by a great number of scholars. They have argued that such an understanding cannot be supported by the biblical text or by ancient Near Eastern religious practices.

In this study, the ancient Near Eastern texts are first investigated in order to highlight to what degree and where the essential elements of the idea of substitution are present in them. I discuss next the cultic legislation found mainly in the book of Leviticus. Since sacrificial substitution attempts to answer the question of the *how* of expiation, particular emphasis is put on the expiatory sacrifices. The occasions and procedures for these sacrifices are investigated in an effort to uncover their meaning. This is done through a study of the different ritual acts performed in connection with the offering of the expiatory sacrifices. Three cultic-related texts, which have been referred to quite often in the debate over sacrificial substitution, are also investigated (Gen 22:1-19; Exod 12:1-13:16; Isa 52:13-53:12).

A study of the ancient Near Eastern texts reveals that the practice of substitution was known in Sumerian, Assyro-Babylonian, Hittite, and Ugaritic literature. Substitution was connected mainly with rituals involving magic. Its purpose was to preserve the life of the offerer. The individual was identified with his substitute especially through the spoken word. In practically all cases, the substitute was given to the Underworld powers. Among the Hittites, however, a substitute was given to the heavenly gods.

A study of the occasion for the expiatory sacrifices reveals that the sin/impurity left the sinner in a state of guilt, liable to divine punishment. Sin/impurity separated the individual from Yahweh, the only Source of life. The ultimate result of that state would have been death. Expiatory sacrifices remove sin/impurity (guilt) from the offerer.

The procedure followed in offering the expiatory sacrifices makes clear how expiation was achieved. The blood manipulation is understood as a ritual act through which the sin of the offerer is transferred to the sanctuary. The blood, which is being returned to Yahweh, is accepted by him in place of the offerer. The ritual of the eating of flesh is practiced whenever there is no blood sprinkling inside the sanctuary. It is also a means of transferring sin to the presence of the Lord.

The ritual of the laying on of hands in the expiatory sacrifices indicates a transference of sin/impurity from the offerer to the sacrificial victim and the establishment of a relation of substitution between the subject and the object of the ritual. In such a process, the holiness of the victim is not affected. The same significance is also present in the laying on of hands on the peace and burnt offerings. Besides their main function they also serve expiatory purposes.

Concerning the cultic related texts, it is suggested that the idea of substitution is present in all of them. However, only in two of them is sacrificial substitution present (Gen 22:1-19; Isa 52:13-53:12). In the other passage (Exod 12:1-13:16) a substitute is given in order to redeem the individual.

It is concluded that sacrificial substitution is present in the OT cultus. This is interpreted as a divine act of love, and it does not seem to have the purpose of appeasing Yahweh. Sacrificial substitution does not so much presuppose wrath as it does love. It is God's love that moves him to accept in place of the sinner a substitute to which sin and its penalty have been transferred and which dies in the sinner's place. This Israelite concept is something unique in the ancient Near East.