

# Time and Eternity in Jewish Mysticism

*That Which is Before and That Which is After*

*Edited by*

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**PART 4**

*Historical Time*





# The Ritualization of Messianic Time in Early Jewish Mysticism: The *Apocalypse of Abraham* as a Test Case

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## Abstract

This essay explores a messianic passage found in chapter 29 of the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, in which the messiah is envisioned as a scapegoat. The study argues that in the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, messianic time becomes “ritualized” when the story’s eschatological characters become reinterpreted as celebrants of the apocalyptic Yom Kippur ceremony.

Before proceeding to the narrower subject of my paper, I would like to say a couple words about the *Apocalypse of Abraham* and its importance for the history of early Jewish mysticism, considered broadly. First, it is important to recognize that scholarly consensus now affirms the significance of this work for the history of early Jewish mystical developments. More specifically, researchers see this enigmatic writing as a manifestation of an important paradigm shift, considering it to be a conceptual bridge between the worlds of Jewish apocalypticism and early Jewish mysticism.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, this obscure Abrahamic

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1 Thus, for example, Michael Stone notes that the *Apocalypse of Abraham* “is... particularly significant as providing a link between the apocalypses and the Merkabah mystical books.” M. E. Stone, “Apocalyptic Literature,” in *Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period: Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, Qumran Sectarian Writings, Philo, Josephus* (ed. M. E. Stone; CRINT, 2.2; Assen: Van Gorcum, 1984), 418. Similarly, Mary Dean-Otting believes that “... in the *Apocalypse of Abraham* is found a text which bridges the gap between the biblically-rooted, earlier heavenly journeys, such as *1 Enoch*, *Testament of Levi* and *3 Baruch*, and the later esoteric texts of the Hekhalot literature.” M. Dean-Otting, *Heavenly Journeys: A Study of the Motif in Hellenistic Jewish Literature* (JU, 8; Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1984), 255. Recently, Alexander Kulik affirms these earlier insights, arguing that the *Apocalypse of Abraham* can be seen as “representative of a missing link between early apocalyptic and medieval Hekhalot traditions.” Kulik, *Retroverting Slavonic Pseudepigrapha: Toward the Original of the Apocalypse of Abraham* (TCS, 3; Atlanta: Scholars, 2004), 1.

text opens before our eyes an impressive cluster of the unique motifs that were formative to the symbolic universe of early Jewish mysticism. The intensity and scope of this arcane lore is truly breathtaking, to the point that some scholars envision the *Apocalypse of Abraham* as an esoteric manual, which attempts, through the unfolding story of the famous hero of the faith, to describe the stages of initiation into mystical praxis. As Gershom Scholem once suggested:

[I]n the *Apocalypse of Abraham*... Abraham is... the prototype of the novice who is initiated into the mysteries of the *Merkavah*, just as in the *Sefer Yetzirah* he is allowed to penetrate into the secrets of the cosmogonic speculations.<sup>2</sup>

Scholem's emphasis on the role of the *Apocalypse of Abraham* as a manual of mystical initiation formative to the development of early Jewish mysticism is significant. Yet it is also important to underline that this initiation takes the form of cultic instruction by means of which the seer becomes not merely a mystical adept, but a high priestly figure. In this respect, the Slavonic apocalypse can also be seen as a textbook of sacerdotal initiation, through which the practitioner is able to learn, and then to re-enact, the actions of the high priest in crucial liturgical ceremonies. Such rites include, for instance, the central feast of the Jewish tradition, which is known to us as Yom Kippur. This cultic flavor also affects realities of eschatological time. We see this, specifically, when the messianic figures are reformulated as the celebrants of the apocalyptic version of the Yom Kippur ritual.

The most important cluster of these cultic reformulations is situated in chapter 29, in which the deity reveals to Abraham one of the most profound eschatological mysteries. The revelation deals with the appearance of a future messianic leader, an ambiguous character, depicted in the text in very obscure terms. *Apoc. Ab.* 29:4–13 reads:

<And I looked> and saw a man going out from the left side of the heathen. Men and women and children, great crowds, went out from the side of the heathen and they worshiped him. <And> while I was still looking, those on the right side went out, and some shamed this man, and some struck him, and some worshiped him. <And> I saw that as they worshiped him, Azazel ran and worshiped, and having kissed his face he turned and stood behind him. And I said, "Eternal Mighty One! Who is this shamed and struck man, worshiped by the heathen with Azazel?"

<sup>2</sup> Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Schocken, 1954), 69.

And he answered and said, “Hear, Abraham, the man whom you saw shamed and struck and again worshiped is the laxity of the heathen for the people who will come from you in the last days, in this twelfth hour of the age of impiety. And in the [same] twelfth period of the close of my age I shall set up the man from your seed which you saw. Everyone from my people will [finally] admit him, while the sayings of him who was as if called by me will be neglected in their minds. And that you saw going out from the left side of the picture and those worshiping him, this [means that] many of the heathen will hope in him. <And> those of your seed you saw on the right side, some shaming and striking him, and some worshiping him, many of them will be misled on his account. And he will tempt those of your seed who have worshiped him.”<sup>3</sup>

This depiction has been viewed by experts as the most puzzling passage of the entire apocalypse.<sup>4</sup> Several interpretations have been offered which discern in these passages either a later Christian interpolation<sup>5</sup> or the original conceptual layer.<sup>6</sup> The vague portrayal of the main characters has also provoked impassioned debates about whether they display features of Jewish or Christian messiahs. These scholarly polemics, however, have not adequately considered the overall conceptual framework of the text, especially its cultic setting. More

3 Kulik, *Retroverting Slavonic Pseudepigrapha*, 32–33.

4 Alexander Kulik conveys this consensus by affirming that “chapter 29, where a messianic (or anti-messianic) figure is introduced, is the most enigmatic in the entire writing.” Kulik, *Retroverting Slavonic Pseudepigrapha*, 51.

5 See M. J. Lagrange, “Notes sur le Messianisme au temps de Jesus,” *RB* 14 (1905): 513; G. H. Box and J. I. Landsman, *The Apocalypse of Abraham. Edited, with a Translation from the Slavonic Text and Notes* (TED, 1.10; London, New York: The Macmillan Company, 1918), 78; P. Riessler, *Altjüdisches Schrifttum ausserhalb der Bibel* (Heidelberg: Kerle, 1927), 1267; Y. Kaufmann, “Abraham-Apokalypse,” in *Encyclopaedia Judaica. Das Judentum in Geschichte und Gegenwart* (eds. J. Klatzkin and I. Elbogen; 10 vols.; Berlin: Eschkol Publikations Gesellschaft, 1928–1934): 1.552–53; J. Licht, “Abraham, Apocalypse of,” in *Encyclopedia Judaica* (16 vols.; ed. C. Roth; Jerusalem: Keter, 1971): 2.127; R. Rubinkiewicz, “La vision de l’histoire dans l’Apocalypse d’Abraham,” *ANRW* 2.19.1 (1979): 137–151 at 143–144; idem, *L’Apocalypse d’Abraham en vieux slave. Introduction, texte critique, traduction et commentaire* (ŽM, 129; Lublin: Towarzystwo Naukowe Katolickiego Uniwersytetu Lubelskiego, 1987), 66, 193; idem, “Apocalypse of Abraham,” *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (ed. J. H. Charlesworth; New York: Doubleday, 1985 [1983]), 1.684; G. S. Oegema, *The Anointed and His People: Messianic Expectations from the Maccabees to Bar Kochba* (JSPSS, 27; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998): 214.

6 R. G. Hall, “The ‘Christian Interpolation’ in the *Apocalypse of Abraham*,” *JBL* 107 (1988): 107–112; D. C. Harlow, “Anti-Christian Polemic in the *Apocalypse of Abraham*: Jesus as a Pseudo-Messiah in *Apoc. Ab.* 29.3–14,” *JSP* 22.3 (2013): 167–183.



specifically, such interpretations have overlooked several features of the passage that hint at the sacerdotal traditions, including references to Azazel and his worship of the messianic figure.

Recent studies on the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, however, point to the importance of cultic motifs in the text. Some have even suggested that a sacerdotal vision permeates the whole fabric of the Slavonic apocalypse. Daniel Harlow, for example, argues that priestly concerns influence the entire text.<sup>7</sup> His research shows that all the main characters of the story are endowed with priestly credentials, and this includes not only positive figures, like Yahoel and Abraham, but also negative ones, such as Azazel, Terah and Nahor. The negative figures are depicted as corrupted sacerdotal servants, polluting the heavenly and earthly sanctuaries.

Many scholars agree that the sacerdotal features of the text are connected with the Yom Kippur ordinance, the central atoning rite in the Jewish tradition, which culminates in two portentous cultic events: the procession of the high priestly figure into the Holy of Holies and the banishment of the scapegoat into the wilderness. Scholars have noted that the peculiar movements of the main characters of the Slavonic apocalypse resemble these sacerdotal events of Yom Kippur. While Yahoel and Abraham ascend to the celestial Holy of Holies, the main antagonist of the story, the fallen angel Azazel, is banished into a supernatural wilderness. In this sacerdotal framework, the main angelic protagonist of the story, the angel Yahoel, represents the heavenly high priest, while the main antagonist, Azazel, represents the eschatological scapegoat. Further, some have noted that, in chapters 13 and 14 of the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, Yahoel seems to perform the climactic action of the Yom Kippur atoning ceremony. This is the enigmatic scapegoat ritual, by which impurity was transferred onto a goat named Azazel and then, through the medium of this animal, was dispatched into the wilderness.

This connection with the main atoning rite of the Jewish tradition and its chief sacerdotal vehicle, the scapegoat Azazel, is important for our study of the messianic passage found in *Apoc. Ab.* 29. In that text, Azazel plays a distinctive role in the course of his interaction with the messianic character, whom he kisses and even worships. The sudden appearance of Azazel, the chief cultic agent of the Yom Kippur ceremony, is not coincidental, since the sacerdotal dynamics of the atoning rite profoundly affect the messianic characters depicted in chapter 29 of the Slavonic apocalypse.

7 D. Harlow, "Idolatry and Alterity: Israel and the Nations in the *Apocalypse of Abraham*," in *The "Other" in Second Temple Judaism. Essays in Honor of John J. Collins* (eds. D. C. Harlow, M. Goff, K. M. Hogan and J. S. Kaminsky; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 302–330 at 302–30.

Many scholars have noted how the messianic figure in chapter 29 is depicted in terms reminiscent of Christian motifs. It specifically seems to recall the traditions about the passion of Jesus and his betrayal by Judas. Indeed, in the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, the messianic figure is described as being ashamed and stricken, as well as being kissed by Azazel. The abuses that the messianic figure endures in *Apoc. Ab.* 29 have often been interpreted as allusions to Jesus' suffering, and Azazel's kiss has been linked to the infamous kiss of Judas in the Garden of Gethsemane. While the allusions to the Gospel accounts of the betrayal and passion of Christ have been noticed, insufficient attention has been given to the connections between the messianic passage and later Christian interpretations. Yet, in the second century CE, when the *Apocalypse of Abraham* was likely composed, Christian materials, including the *Epistle of Barnabas*, as well as the works of Justin Martyr and Tertullian,<sup>8</sup> had sought to interpret Jesus' passion and betrayal against the background of the scapegoat rite. In these Christian re-appraisals, Jesus was viewed as the scapegoat of the atoning ritual who, through his suffering and humiliation, took upon himself the sins of the world. These Christian elaborations often draw on some extra-biblical Yom Kippur traditions, similar to those found, for instance, in *Yoma* 6:4, which describes ritual humiliation and abuse visited upon the scapegoat. Although scholars have noted the similarities in the depictions of the messiah in chapter 29 and certain Jesus traditions, they have often been reluctant to address these second-century developments, in which the Christian messiah's suffering and humiliation received a striking cultic significance.

## 1 The Messianic Duo

The aforementioned 2nd and 3rd-century Christian interpretations of the messianic figure often utilize the imagery of both goats used during the Yom Kippur festival: the scapegoat and the goat for YHWH. In these accounts, Jesus imitates features of both cultic animals. Sometimes the imagery of the scapegoat is associated with Jesus' first coming and death, while the imagery of the goat for YHWH is linked to his second glorious *parousia*. Yet, more often, these early Christian interpretations paradoxically mix functions and attributes of the two goats, and apply this conceptual amalgam to Jesus. It is possible that the *Apocalypse of Abraham* employs a similar interpretive strategy, in which the scapegoat imagery is enhanced with features of the immolated goat. Moreover, given our hypothesis that the scapegoat's symbolism takes on distinctive

8 Cf. *Barn.* 7:6–11; Justin Martyr's *Dial.* 40; Tertullian's *Marc.* 3:7 and *Adv. Jud.* 14:9.

messianic overtones in the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, the two emblematic animals of the atoning rite might receive there the form of the messianic duo.

A close reading of chapter 29 of the Slavonic apocalypse shows that its narrative is portraying not one but two messianic figures, the features of which represent a puzzling mix. In verses 4–8 we are told that the messiah will come from the side of the Gentiles, while verses 9 and 10 speak of the messiah as coming from the seed of Abraham.<sup>9</sup> In view of this apparent contradiction, scholars have suggested that the text may be speaking about not one but two messianic characters—the first coming from the left lot, the portion associated with the Gentiles, and the second from the right, the portion of Abraham and God. Alexander Kulik proposes that “the eschatological scenario of *Apoc. Ab.* 29 might have the well-known Jewish eschatological duo-messianic structure<sup>10</sup> (in this case: anti-Messiah vs. true Messiah).”<sup>11</sup> There is no textual contradiction if we assume that 29:4–8 speaks of an anti-Messiah who is “going out from the left side of the heathen” and is “worshiped by the heathen with Azazel.”<sup>12</sup> This hypothesis is promising for resolving the apparent contradiction of our text. The tradition of the messianic pair, in which each agent has distinctive eschatological roles and functions, is a recurrent motif in Jewish lore.<sup>13</sup> An early example is found in the Dead Sea Scrolls materials, in which the messiahs of Aaron and Israel<sup>14</sup> fulfill unique eschatological functions, one

9 Kulik, *Retroverting Slavonic Pseudepigrapha*, 51–52.

10 Kulik’s strong belief in the messianic duo is also reflected in the title of the messianic section (*Apoc. Ab.* 29:4–13) of his English translation of the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, namely, “False and True Messiahs.” Cf. Kulik, *Retroverting Slavonic Pseudepigrapha*, 32.

11 Kulik, *Retroverting Slavonic Pseudepigrapha*, 51.

12 Kulik, *Retroverting Slavonic Pseudepigrapha*, 51.

13 Concerning the concept of the two messiahs in Jewish lore, see C. C. Torrey, “The Messiah Son of Ephraim” *JBL* 66.3 (1947): 253–277; R. E. Brown, “The Messianism of Qumran,” *CBQ* 19 (1957): 53–82; P. J. Kobelski, *Melchizedek and Melchireša<sup>c</sup>* (CBQMS, 10; Washington: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1981), 70–71; J. J. Collins, *The Scepter and the Star: The Messiahs of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Other Ancient Literature* (N.Y.: Doubleday, 1995), 74–95; H. Lenowitz, *The Jewish Messiahs: From the Galilee to Crown Heights* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 31ff.

14 Cf. 1QS 9:9–11: “They should not depart from any counsel of the law in order to walk in complete stubbornness of their heart, but instead shall be ruled by the first directives which the men of the Community began to be taught until the prophet comes, and the Messiahs of Aaron and Israel.” *The Dead Sea Scrolls Study Edition* (eds. F. García Martínez and E. Tigchelaar; Leiden: Brill, 1997), 91–93. *CD* 12:22–13:1: “And this is the rule of the assembly of the cam[ps]. Those who walk in them, in the time of wickedness until there arises the ‘messiah’ of Aaron and Israel. . . .” García Martínez and Tigchelaar, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Study Edition*, 571. *CD* 14:19: “. . . [until there arises the messia]h of Aaron and Israel.

cultic and the other royal.<sup>15</sup> Later Jewish materials are also aware of the concept of the two messiahs, one suffering and dying and the other victorious. For example, later Jewish sources often speak about the Messiah, the son of Joseph (or Ephraim),<sup>16</sup> who will endure suffering to atone for the sins of the Israelites, as well as the Messiah, the son of David,<sup>17</sup> who is predestined to be a glorious ruler.

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- And their iniquity will be atoned [through meal and sin-offerings]...” García Martínez and Tigchelaar, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Study Edition*, 575. CD 19:10: “These shall escape in the age of the visitation; but those that remain shall be delivered up to the sword when there comes the messiah of Aaron and Israel.” García Martínez and Tigchelaar, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Study Edition*, 577. CD 20:1: “... until there arises the messiah out of Aaron and Israel...” García Martínez and Tigchelaar, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Study Edition*, 579.
- 15 Scholars point out that this notion of two Messiahs, one priestly and the other royal, is present also in *Testament of Simeon* 7:2. Regarding this tradition, see J. Charlesworth, “From Jewish Messianology to Christian Christology,” in *Judaisms and Their Messiahs at the Turn of the Christian Era* (eds. J. Neusner et al.; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 231.
- 16 There are several opinions concerning the provenance of this messianic figure. John Collins suggests that “while the origin of this figure (Messiah the son of Joseph) is obscure, he most probably reflects in some way the defeat and death of Bar Kokhba, whom Rabbi Akiba had hailed as messiah.” Collins, *The Scepter and the Star*, 126. Yet, Israel Jacob Yuval argues that the Messiah b. Joseph is best understood as a reflection of Jesus. I. J. Yuval, *Two Nations in Your Womb: Perceptions of Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages* (trans. B. Harshav and J. Chipman; Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 33–38.
- 17 Thus, for example, BT *Sukk.* 52a unveils the tradition of two messiahs: “Our Rabbis taught, The Holy One, blessed be He, will say to the Messiah, the son of David (May he reveal himself speedily in our days!), ‘Ask of me anything, and I will give it to thee’, as it is said, I will tell of the decree etc. this day have I begotten thee, ask of me and I will give the nations for thy inheritance. But when he will see that the Messiah the son of Joseph is slain, he will say to Him, ‘Lord of the Universe, I ask of Thee only the gift of life’. ‘As to life’, He would answer him, ‘Your father David has already prophesied this concerning you’, as it is said, He asked life of thee, thou gavest it him, [even length of days for ever and ever].” I. Epstein, *The Babylonian Talmud. Sukkah* (London: Soncino, 1935–1952) 52a. Cf. also BT *Sukk.* 52b: “And the Lord showed me four craftsmen. Who are these ‘four craftsmen’?—R. Hana b. Bizna citing R. Simeon Hasida replied: The Messiah the son of David, the Messiah the son of Joseph, Elijah and the Righteous Priest. R. Shesheth objected, If so, was it correct to write, These are the horns which scattered Judah, seeing that they came to turn [them] back?—The other answered him, Go to the end of the verse: These then are come to frighten them, to cast down the horns of the nations, which lifted up their horns against the Land of Judah, to scatter it etc. Why, said R. Shesheth to him, should I argue with Hana in Aggada?” Epstein, *The Babylonian Talmud. Sukkah*, 52b.

It is significant that one member of the messianic dyad, like the eschatological figure from *Apoc. Ab.* 29, will experience maltreatment and suffering. It is also important for our study to note that in the second century CE, when the *Apocalypse of Abraham* was composed, we find highly elaborate reflections on the concept of the true versus false messiah;<sup>18</sup> this was under the influence of the political situation and Christian messianic developments. Scholars trace the development of the true/false messianic pair to the Bar Kokhba uprising. Thus, Harris Lenowitz suggests:

[T]he events of the Bar Kosiba uprising displayed the new doctrine of two messiahs—if they did not actually create the doctrine—in its most pernicious form . . . In peculiar countermeasure to the two-messiah doctrine, the idea of the false messiah was soon developed as well; it also arose in close interaction with Christian views. During the Galilean rebellions, the term “false” was first applied to a prophet in a messianic context, paving the way for the explicit application of the term to messiahs. But it was the Christian texts that coined the term *pseudochristoi* (Greek for “false messiahs”); Matthew 24:4, 6, 24; Mark 13:5, 21–22; and Luke 21:3 all use the term *pseudochristos* to refer to messianic pretenders. The Jewish tradition follows the Christian; the Greek term is borrowed and translated in the much later Hebrew term *mashiah sheker*, which reshapes and alters the previous Hebrew usage of the term “lying” (*sheker*), in connection with the witness and prophet, so that it means “false witness, false prophecy.”<sup>19</sup>

It has been noted that these conceptual developments “have no need for two authentic messiahs, the first of whom is doomed to die. Instead the false messiah identifies the true one by contrast.”<sup>20</sup>

If Kulik is right that the *Apocalypse of Abraham* 29 presumes two messiahs, then the second messianic figure, like the first, can be understood within

18 An early development of a rudimentary concept of the false messiah, who will serve as an eschatological opponent of the positive messianic figure, is already discernible in the Dead Sea Scrolls. In some Qumran materials (*11QMelch*, *4QAmram*, *4Q280*, etc.), various messianic characters, including Melchisedek, have their negative counterparts who bear conspicuous designations, such as Melchireša<sup>c</sup>, which come from the deformation of the names of their messianic counterparts. In these materials, the messianic traditions are often overlaid with Yom Kippur imagery. Regarding these traditions, see D. Stökl Ben Ezra, *The Impact of Yom Kippur on Early Christianity: The Day of Atonement from Second Temple Judaism to the Fifth Century* (WUNT, 163; Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 2003), 90–91.

19 Lenowitz, *The Jewish Messiahs: From the Galilee to Crown Heights*, 31.

20 Lenowitz, *The Jewish Messiahs: From the Galilee to Crown Heights*, 31.

the context of the Yom Kippur rites. This view is supported by the idea that the second messianic figure, also like the first, is identified with a distinctive eschatological allotment: the right portion, which is often identified in the text as the lot of Abraham and God. Such identification is important for discerning possible links with the Yom Kippur ceremony in which the right lot, associated with God, is also identified with the goat for YHWH.

Another important detail of the messianic passage is that the depictions of the two messianic figures are not clearly demarcated, but rather confused. Such confusion has been taken by many students of the Slavonic apocalypse as proof that the entire messianic passage represents an interpolation. Yet, in the light of aforementioned Christian accounts, in which the characteristics of the two “messianic goats” were often paradoxically mixed and confused, it is possible that the mixing of the features of the positive and negative messianic characters represents a deliberate strategy of the authors of the Slavonic apocalypse.

Nevertheless, while features of the two messianic figures often appear intertwined and sometimes confused, their respective eschatological functions are nevertheless clearly delineated in the program outlined by the authors. Thus, the first, mistreated messiah appears to be endowed with a rather misleading, yet purifying function. As the scapegoat of the atoning rite, he can be understood as a gatherer and remover of the impurity associated with the Gentiles and with idolatrous Hebrews. In contrast, the second messianic character appears to be playing the more traditional messianic role. This is the role reiterated in *Apoc. Ab.* 31:1, which depicts the *parousia* of the victorious messiah who will come with the sound of the trumpet and with power, in order to gather the elect.<sup>21</sup>

## 2      **Distraction for the Heathen**

The ambiguous, misleading role of the mistreated messiah, who comes at the apex of impiety, cannot fully be grasped without a proper understanding of the multifaceted nature of the scapegoat's place in the Yom Kippur ordinance. Later Jewish interpreters often stress that one of the essential functions of the scapegoat was to distract, or weaken the power of the Other Side during the most important atoning feast of the Jewish liturgical year. For example, in

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21      “Then I shall sound the trumpet from the sky, and I shall send my chosen one, having in him one measure of all my power, and he will summon my people blamed among the heathen. . . .” Kulik, *Retroverting Slavonic Pseudepigrapha*, 34.

the *Zohar*, the scapegoat weakens the power of the Left Side by serving as a distraction. *Zohar* 1.113b–114b reads:

Come and see: Similarly, on the day that judgment appears in the world and the blessed Holy One sits on the Throne of Judgment, Satan appears, accusing and seducing above and below, to destroy the world and seize souls. . . . On Yom Kippur one must pacify and appease him with that goat offered to him, and then he turns into an advocate for Israel. . . .”<sup>22</sup>

Isaiah Tishby offers interesting remarks on the famous parable in the *Zohar* in which a king makes special arrangements for a celebratory feast with his son and friends. He orders a separate meal for ill-wishers and quarrelers so their presence will not spoil the happy occasion.<sup>23</sup> Tishby notes that “according to this parable the purpose of sending a goat to Azazel is to remove *sitra ahra* from the ‘family circle’ of Israel and the Holy One, blessed be He, on the Day of Atonement.”<sup>24</sup>

In view of these traditions, it appears that, in the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, the scapegoat-messiah serves as a distraction or decoy; he is sent to mislead and weaken the heathen of the left lot and to prepare the safe arrival of the true (second) messiah who will come forth from the right lot. One of the crucial pieces of evidence for this is that the scapegoat-messiah is openly

22 D. Matt, *The Zohar: Pritzker Edition* (12 vols.; Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003–) 2.170–173. See also, *Zohar* 1.190a: “This is the impure side, the Other Side, who stands perpetually before the blessed Holy One, bringing accusations of the sins of human beings, and who stands perpetually below, leading humans astray. . . . But the blessed Holy One feels compassion for Israel and has advised them how to save themselves from him. How? With a shofar on Rosh Hashanah, and on Yom Kippur with a goat, given to him so that he will disengage from them and occupy himself with that portion of his, as they have established.” Matt, *The Zohar: Pritzker Edition*, 3.160–161; *Zohar* 11.184b: “Come and see: The goat that Israel sends to the desert is in order to give a portion to that Other Side, with which to be occupied.” Matt, *The Zohar: Pritzker Edition*, 6.37. *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer* 46: “Sammael said before the Holy One, blessed be He: Sovereign of all the universe! Thou hast given me power over all the nations of the world, but over Israel Thou hast not given me power. He answered him, saying: Behold, thou hast power over them on the Day of Atonement if they have any sin, but if not, thou hast no power over them. Therefore they gave him a present on the Day of Atonement, in order that they should not bring their offering, as it is said, ‘One lot for the Lord, and the other lot for Azazel.’” *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer* (ed. G. Friedlander; 2nd ed.; New York: Hermon Press, 1965) 363.

23 I. Tishby, *The Wisdom of the Zohar: An Anthology of Texts* (3 vols.; London: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 1989), 892.

24 Tishby, *The Wisdom of the Zohar*, 892.

labeled as the “weakening” of the Gentiles<sup>25</sup> (Slav. *ослаба*).<sup>26</sup> Like later Jewish reinterpretations of the atoning rite, here the messianic scapegoat is depicted as an eschatological instrument for weakening and distracting the *sitra ahra*, represented by the heathen. The *Apocalypse of Abraham* provides several affirmations of this messianic role, noting that “many of the heathen will have hope in him,” that some people from the right lot “will be misled on his account,” and that “he will tempt those of your [Abraham’s] seed who have worshiped him.”<sup>27</sup>

Since, according to the text, the false messiah will mislead not only Gentiles but also sinful Hebrews, it seems that the Slavonic term *oslaba* has an additional meaning of “liberation,” which would refer to the cathartic purifying release of Israel’s sins to the realm of the Other Side associated with Gentiles, since the messianic figure will take with him the idolatrous portion of Israel.<sup>28</sup> In this respect, the text specifically mentions that the messianic figure will appear at the apex of impiety, defined as the “twelfth hour of the age of impiety,” and that he will release it to the Left Side, represented by Azazel.<sup>29</sup> This context underlines the principal “elimination” aspect of the scapegoat ritual, whereby impurity must be removed from the human *oikoumene* into an uninhabitable realm.

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- 25 “ослаба от языкъ.” Philonenko-Sayar and Philonenko, *L’Apocalypse d’Abraham*, 100.
- 26 Rubinkiewicz translates *oslaba* as “liberation, security, relaxation,” tracing this term to Gk. *adeia*, *anesis*. Cf. Rubinkiewicz, “The Apocalypse of Abraham,” 1.703. Rubinstein also notes that *oslaba* is used in the Slavonic Bible (for *anesis*) in Acts 24:23. A. Rubinstein, “Hebraisms in the Slavonic ‘Apocalypse of Abraham,’” *JJS* 4 (1953) 108–115 at 113.
- 27 Reflecting on the misleading function of the false messiah in chapter 29, Alexander Kulik suggests that the Slavonic term *oslaba* might be connected with the notion of laxity in relation to the weakness in observance of the Torah, which the messianic man will bring to the Hebrews, misleading some of them. He points to some later rabbinic materials in which the false messiah brings neglect or laxity in upholding the Law. Kulik, *Retroverting Slavonic Pseudepigrapha*, 51.
- 28 Rubinkiewicz thinks that the concept of liberation was present in the messianic traditions that constitute the conceptual basis of chapter 29. In his opinion the interpolator used an ancient text, a messianic apocryphal prophecy, which he inserted in the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, after adjusting it in line with Christian convictions. The original text presented the messianic figure as the liberator who would break the yoke of the heathen. Rubinkiewicz, *L’Apocalypse d’Abraham en vieux slave*, 66.
- 29 Robert Hall underlines this aspect arguing that “the man who is worshiped severs the unfaithful Jews from Abraham’s seed and joins them to the Gentiles.” Hall, “The ‘Christian Interpolation’ in the Apocalypse of Abraham,” 108.



### 3 Conclusion

As we can see, in the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, realities of eschatological time become “ritualized” when the story’s messianic characters become envisioned as celebrants of the apocalyptic Yom Kippur. This development is not entirely novel. The roots of such an apocalyptic reformulation of Yom Kippur can be found already in the *Book of the Watchers*, an early Enochic work stemming from the early Second Temple period. In this text, the scapegoat rite is also reformulated eschatologically, incorporating details from the Yom Kippur ritual into the history of its antagonist, the fallen angel Asael. The cosmic tragedy of the angelic servant’s demotion unfolds in the midst of the exaltation of a human seer, namely, the patriarch Enoch. Like the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, the profiles of both characters of this Enochic text are overlaid with liturgical connections, both explicit and implicit. Yet, while similarities are evident, there are also some differences. While the *Book of the Watchers* stands at the beginning of the apocalyptic paradigm, the *Apocalypse of Abraham* manifests the very end of this apocalyptic trajectory. This was a time when apocalyptic sacerdotal imagery was shepherded into a new symbolic dimension of early Jewish mysticism.