

READING LEVITICUS 9:7–24
FROM A *IFOGA* PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

This thesis will investigate the purification and sin offering in Leviticus 9:7–24 in order to articulate the theological truth and implications of forgiveness and reconciliation in relation to the Samoan ritual of *ifoga* perspective.

It also argues that the biblical material can throw a light on the meaning and purpose of the *ifoga*, given the significance of the Bible in the Samoan society. This thesis therefore promotes the relevant connection between the world of the text (Leviticus) and the world in front of the text (Samoa). This attempt is aided by plausible analogies drawn from the Samoan ritual of *ifoga* and the understanding of offerings and sacrifices being made for sin in Leviticus 9.

DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP OF THESIS

I, **Kapeni Pene Matatia**

hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge, it contains no material previously published or written by another person nor material which to a substantial extent has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at Malua Theological College or any other educational institution, except where due acknowledgement is made in thesis. Any contribution made to the research by colleagues with whom I have worked at Malua Theological College or elsewhere during my candidature is fully acknowledged.

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List of Abbreviations

Dt	-	Deuteronomy
EFKS	-	Ekalesia Faapotopotoga Kerisiano Samoa
Ex	-	Exodus
Jer	-	Jeremiah
Lev	-	Leviticus
MTC	-	Malua Theological College
NRSV	-	New Revised Standard Version of the Bible
Num	-	Numbers
Ps	-	Psalms

Introduction

1.0 Context of the study

As a student of biblical literature, I am interested in learning about “sin-offering” in the book of Leviticus. It is a sacrifice that could ritualize the transition from a state of sin to a state of purity. A sacrificial offering made in order to assure communion with God. On the one hand, it justifies the souls of the people or person offering sin for peace but of course devoting to the Lord in all things, spontaneously engaging in acts of praises and exercises of fellowship. On the other hand, atonement goes together with sin offerings, as a token to reconcile with God. Therefore, Aaron took up the peoples’ offering, a process of obedience and humility and total submission before God. Then later, God accepted their sacrifice.

Another crucial element of sin offerings is that they often involved the death of a victim. This would suggest the costly nature of the offerings. The people would have experienced some loss as they deliberately gave up what belonged to them. When we think of offerings or sacrifices today, this is generally what we have in mind. Something valuable is given up for the benefit of others. But in the Old Testament especially in Priestly texts (or better Holiness Code) such as Leviticus, sacrifices meant more than giving away something valuable. It is a religious activity when someone offers something to God. The Hebrew word for “offering” (קָרְבַּן) is the general term for gifts and offerings made to God. It is related to the verb “to bring near” or “to reproach” (קָרַב).¹ So these offerings are to bring near to God. That means sacrifice was ordained

¹ Francis Brown, et al. *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Massachusetts: Hendrikson, 2007), 896-97.

to provide access to God and to remove sin so that fellowship with God could be maintained.

The principle is the same when we come to think of the *ifoga* in the Samoan context. In my opinion, *ifoga* and the sin-offering as being done by Aaron in Leviticus 9, are different in practice, but they serve a similar purpose as to why it is/was done. Literarily, *ifoga* comes from the root word *ifo*. According to Pratt and Milner, *ifo* means “to bow down” on your knees and your eyes facing the earth or lowering your head to pay respect.²

In the Samoan context, warriors and chiefs (*alii*) usually *ifo* (bow down) to prevent hostility and to surrender to the opposition in war. From this, Stair notes “*ifoga* is the usual mode adopted by a conquered people on submitting to their conquerors.” This is where the Samoan proverb, “*ole malolo a le tamalii*” (the lowering of a chief) originated.”³ So the word *ifoga* refers to a public act of self-humiliation in the Samoan context. It currently means a “ceremonial request for forgiveness” made by an offender or a guilty party/family to those injured or offended party.⁴ In short, *ifoga* is the Samoan practice of seeking forgiveness for criminal behaviour.

In saying that, I was present at an *ifoga* which was performed by my wife’s family before we came to *Malua*. It was an accident involving one of her cousins, who was being blamed for the death of his brother in-law or his wife’s brother. Because of that incident, the family of the culprit had to go through a Samoan traditional *ifoga* in order to earn the deceased’s family forgiveness. In short, the *ifoga* was accepted, but it took a while for a member of the deceased family to come out. It is very difficult to accept an

² George Pratts, *Grammar Dictionary and Samoan Language* (Apia: Malua Printing Press, 1977), 49.

³ Cited by Sanele Faasua Lavatai, "The Ifoga Ritual in Samoa in Anthropological and in Biblical Perspectives" PhD Diss., Studies on Intercultural Theology at the Mission Academy, 2018.

⁴ George Bertram Milner, *A Dictionary of the Samoan Language* (London: Oxford University Press, 1976), 82–83. Refer to chapter one for full information about the meaning and purpose of *ifoga*.

ifoga especially when someone dies. However, the father of the deceased pulled out the fine mat and welcomed the chiefs who represented the *ifoga* into their home. Even though the *ifoga* was accepted, the father of the deceased has still not forgiven and accepted his son in-law into their family to date.

1.1 Research Problem

In this thesis, I will investigate the purification and sin offering in Lev 9:7–24 in order to articulate the theological truth and implications of forgiveness and reconciliation in relation to the Samoan ritual of *ifoga*.

In the chosen passage, another way to interpret the passage as Leviticus 9:7–24, is taking the sin-offering (or the purification offering חטאת) service as a ritual. It is just a form of worship that the Israelites offer to their God. I have thought of sin offerings as a ritual or another way to worship God. There are also questions arising from this passage: for instance,

What is the primary purpose behind the cultic practices in Leviticus like sacrifices and offerings? What does the blood being dashed against all sides of the alter symbolize?

What were Moses and Aaron doing in the house of meeting, as in Leviticus 9:23?⁵ Why did the people fall on their faces and shout when they saw fire come out from the Lord (vs 24); and was the fire really from the Lord? Has it been confirmed?

These questions become the driving force behind my hypothesis. According to a number of scholars, the primary concern behind sin offerings and sacrifices in Leviticus reflects the notion of atonement, forgiveness and restitution with regards to the

⁵ Lev 9:23 “Moses and Aaron entered the tent of meeting, and then came out and blessed the people...”

relationship between God and his people.⁶ If that is so, was the sacrifice to be brought to Aaron or to the Lord (as in Lev 5:15)? Why did Aaron lift his hands toward the people as in verse 22 and what does it mean?

To answer these questions (and more), I want to use the Samoan tradition of *ifoga* to read Lev 9:7–24 with the aid of commentaries and scholarship. My hermeneutical question is; Does Leviticus 9:7-24 highlights forgiveness when read from an *ifoga* perspective?

In the Samoan tradition of *ifoga*, once the *ifoga* is done, a crime is forgiven, between the person or culprit who caused it and the family involved. However, the mentioned statement above is no longer correct; it is true that the *ifoga* was accepted by the family involved, based on the Samoan culture. But to this day, the father whose son was killed does not accept the person (his son-in-law), who was accused of the death of his son.

1.2 Aim & Methodology

One aim of this work is to examine Lev 9:7–24 in the context of ancient cultic practices of Israelites in the pre-exilic period. A second aim of this study argues that the biblical material can throw light on the meaning/purpose of some Samoan ritual services (e.g., *ifoga*), given the significance of the Bible in Samoan society.⁷ Hence this study will examine the relevant connection between the world of the text (Leviticus) and the world in front of the text (Samoa).

⁶ I refer here to the list of scholars mentioned in section 1.4 down below.

⁷ This does not mean that a Samoan reading could be ignored in favour of a biblical reading of Leviticus. Using postcolonial reading with the aid of the word “analogies” in this thesis, it should be a two-way influence. The use of Leviticus 9 to shed light on Samoan issues and alternatively, I am using my Samoan background to shed light on Leviticus text.

This study will therefore employ the Hans-Georg Gadamer's model of 'fusion of horizons' for the art of interpretation.⁸ The amalgamation of the two horizons will be evaluated by using the postcolonial reading of the proposed text (Lev 9:7–24) from the Samoan perspective.⁹ In other words, I will be using postcolonialism as a kind of reading that promises to fuse the traditional and modern approaches to interpreting text and social context, while allowing "perspicuous contrasts" between the two.¹⁰ This will inform a cross-cultural hermeneutic specifically for the Samoan context. Hence, employing *ifoga* as my hermeneutical methodology will attend to cultural hybridity both in the biblical text and the Samoan context.

To appreciate the two worlds mentioned above, one needs to understand both contexts: my own context as a reader and that represented by the text. But rather than placing my emphasis on oppressive inclinations that has been upheld by the postcolonial reading, the use of my *ifoga* approach has placed my emphasis on the value of my cultural perspective. Such a perspective poses serious moral questions for the benefit of my local community. In particular, the Samoan hermeneutic (in any biblical interpretation) rests much on the belief that culture and Christianity go hand in hand.

⁸ Hans Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1975) 271-73.

⁹ Postcolonial discourses from Samoan perspective have been widely used by, to mention some, Peniamina Leota, "Ethnic Tensions in Persian Period Yehud: A Samoan Postcolonial Hermeneutic," PhD diss., Melbourne College of Divinity, 2005; Vaitusi Nofoaiga, "Towards a Samoan Postcolonial Reading of Discipleship in the Matthean Gospel," PhD diss., University of Auckland, 2014; Samasoni Moleli, "Jabez in Context: A Multidimensional Approach to Identity and Landholdings in Chronicles," PhD diss., University of Divinity, 2018. These writings have developed on the understanding of the Postcolonial theory that was firstly coined by some like R.S. Sugirtharajah, ed., *Voices from the Margin: Interpreting the Bible in the Third World* (London:SPCK, 1995); Fernando. F.Segovia and A.M. Tolbert, eds., *Reading from the Place: Social Location and Biblical Interpretation in Global Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996; etc. To stay within the scope of this thesis, I will not go into detail of postcolonial theory. Instead, I will simply utilize the nativist model of postcolonial theory where the Bible after 'is treated as a colonial', reclaiming the indigenous voices and the essence of their culture, by reaching back to the ancient Israelites' voice subsumed within Lev 9 in particular.

¹⁰ Mark G. Brett, "Postcolonial Interpretation: Unequal Terms: A Postcolonial Approach to Isaiah 61," in *Biblical Interpretation and Method: Essays in Honour of John Barton*, ed. Katharine J. Dell & Paul M. Joyce (London: Oxford University Press, 2013), 242-253; Mark G. Brett, *Ethnicity and the Bible* (Boston: Brill, 2002), 6.

There is no doubt that Christianity introduced changes in our culture. Although colonization seems to be over in Samoa, its on-going impacts remain alive and strong.

In a similar manner, the world behind Leviticus 9 reveals that the Israelites were colonized by Egypt. The Lord heard their suffering, then he saved them through Moses. Even though Moses brought and saved them from Egypt, they just could not forget about Egypt, their minds were still being haunted by colonization. Most of the time when they were hungry, thirsty and tired, they always looked back to Egypt. They preferred suffering than moving away. From a postcolonial view, the Egyptians could be marked as the powerful or the oppressor versus the Israelites who could be the powerless or the oppressed. As the book of Exodus tells, the powerful Egyptians have subjugated and exploited the minority Israelites for the sake of establishing control, dominance and their welfare. In this thesis, I will argue that the public ritual of offerings and sacrifices in Lev 9 provides a ground for a kind of counter-testimony or resistance that could serve as a hermeneutical resource for reading, promoting peace and reconciliation.

1.3 Significance of the Study

From the viewpoint of postcolonial theory, forgiveness and reconciliation is appropriate to the context of Lev 9 and beyond. The intention of the priesthood was the liberation of the oppressed and the sinners. Victims of oppression can be found throughout history: from slavery in Egypt and the journey in the wilderness, to the Samoan struggle to find peace and harmony in times of disputes between families. The book of Leviticus is God's revelation to his newly established people at the tent of meeting that was erected at Sinai (Lev 27:34). The main purpose of this revelation is to ensure the enduring presence of Yhwh within the community and to nurture the

covenant relationship established with God.¹¹ As is known, Leviticus begins with the gifts of sacrifice, which is the heart of public worship.¹² But Leviticus 9 reveals not only the forgiveness and the acceptance of the Israelites by God but also a showcase of Yhwh's holiness. His presence and acceptance of the offering was shown and revealed in a form of fire. God's forgiveness is a product of his grace. He has been gracious to forgive his people.

What is lacking however, is a link between the sociological context of the Leviticus' community and an application of biblical teaching. This research contends that such a link can be established with the help of a postcolonial approach through the *ifoga* perspective. With regard to the *ifoga*, Samoans believe that once the fine mat has been lifted then that means the problem has been solved and the *ifoga* has been accepted. However, because of what I have noticed and experienced (I refer to the issue I raised in page 4), therefore, I would say that years have passed and changes have been accepted, and so, there will also be a huge difference to the purpose of the *ifoga* back then and now.

1.4 Scholarship Review on Leviticus 9:7–24

Robert Jamieson and Andrew Robert Fausset have addressed the importance of priestly duties which involve Aaron and his sons. They simply explain how Moses, Aaron and his sons act according to God's instructions and commandments. They also describe the miraculous fire from Yhwh at the end (9:24) not only as a sign of Yhwh's presence (omnipresence) but also as a mark of Aaron, the high priest, representing the

¹¹ Samuel Balentine, *Leviticus: Interpretation a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 2002), 81; See also Mark Boda, *A Severe Mercy: Sin and Its Remedy in the Old Testament*, (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2009), 55.

¹² Roy Gane, *Leviticus, Numbers* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 57.

priesthood.¹³ They know who they are and the responsibilities they have, therefore they try to fulfill them and make sure that they do according to their status and their identity as priests.¹⁴ Different from these scholars, Samuel Balentine focuses on the relationship between God and Israel. But Balentine argues that the promise of God's presence to Moses, Aaron, and the priests is not enough to establish the relationship God intends.

Entrusted with stewardship of the holy, the priests must enable, sustain, and extend the relationship with the world that God intends.¹⁵ Thus Balentine seems to emphasize the relationship between Yhwh and the people of Israel. Yhwh does not want to leave his people, no matter how sinful they are.

Like Jamieson and Fausset mentioned above, Radmacher also comments on the priestly blessings and their respect for the holy fire. Not only that, but the people had instant respect for the fire of the presence of the One they served. Elsewhere in Scripture fire signifies things that must be respected, beginning with God.¹⁶

This line of argument about fire is also supported by many scholars.¹⁷ These scholars all agree that the fire itself affirms God's acceptance of the offerings.

But before the affirmation of God's acceptance of the offerings, Carl Friedrich Keil suggested that, Aaron presented the sin-offering in the same manner as the first, i.e., the one offered for himself (vv. 8ff.). Keil reminds once again the order of offering: the sin-offering (v. 16) was also offered "*according to the right*" (as in Lev. 5:10). Then the meat-offering (v. 17), according to the rule in Lev. 2:1, 2; the morning burnt-

¹³ Robert Jamieson and Andrew Robert Fausset, *A Commentary, Critical and Explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments*. (Oak Harbor, WA : Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997).

¹⁴ Five times in verses 1-7, Moses tells Aaron what to do (9:1,2,5,6,7).

¹⁵ Balentine, *Leviticus*, 81.

¹⁶ Earl Radmacher, *Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Commentary* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1999).

¹⁷ William MacDonald and Arthur Farstad, *Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments*. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997, c1995), 24; John Walvoord and Roy Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983-c1985), 188.

offering (Ex. 29:39), the special meat-offering of the priests was associated. Last of all (vv. 18–21) there followed the peace-offering, which was also carried out according to the general rule.¹⁸

Donald Fleming also comments on the ordination period after the seven day when Aaron and his sons began their duties. Although Flemington has a clear description of the order of sacrifices as noted in Lev 9, he has nothing new to introduce. But what Flemington clearly finds is the fact that God showed publicly his approval of the dedication ceremony, and the people responded by showing their humble submission to God. That is when Aaron lifted up his hands over the people and blessed them, he descended after performing the sin offering, burnt offering and wellbeing offering. (22–24).¹⁹

Rene Peter-Contesse stresses the importance of the language to be used during the offerings as it is something that is incorporated with the offerings. For Peter-Contesse, Leviticus deals with a vocabulary that touches much of the culture and the worship life of the community of Israel. Most cases present the word *offering* as a singular form, as given in verse 8 (חטאת).²⁰

Moreover, following the instructions and what has been told is one important thing that should be considered by the presenters of the offerings as mentioned by Mark Rooker.

¹⁸ Carl Friedrich Keil and Franz Delitzsch: *Commentary on the Old Testament*. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002), 551-52; Donald Arthur Carson, *New Bible Commentary 21st Century* (Downers Grove, IL, 1994).

¹⁹ Don Fleming, *Concise Bible Commentary* (Chattanooga, Tennessee: AMG Publishers, 1994).

²⁰ Rene Péter-Contesse and John Ellington, *A Handbook on Leviticus*. (New York: United Bible Societies, 1992), 135.

In the offering for the people Aaron administered the sin, burnt, grain, and fellowship offerings according to the prescribed instructions (9:15–20).²¹ Then Aaron offered the wave or elevation offering before the Lord (9:21). The order of the offerings is once again of importance.²²

Lloyd John Ogilvie and Gary Demarest both stated and discussed the importance of doing exactly as had been told. Though Aaron and his sons are now to begin their priestly functions, Moses is still the commanding figure (v. 1).²³

John Hartley comments on the last verse when the people נָפַל, “bow down,” with their faces toward the ground in the presence of Yahweh. This is a spontaneous and purposeful act of contrition for נָפַל. Besides its meaning “fall,” it may also depict a quick change of posture that is not accidental or forced. According to Hartley, the majority of the occurrences of this word in the Old Testament are in relationship to the worship of Yahweh. This word expresses the joyful quality of Israelite worship.²⁴

1.5 Review on the *Ifoga*

Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese Efi, describes the practice of Samoan *ifoga*. For Efi, “forgiveness by the offended party in an *ifoga* is not forgiveness for its own sake, for it is based on the Samoan concept of harmony. Personal harmony, in as much as nurturing hate and revenge disrupts mental harmony. Family harmony, in as much as forgiveness guarantees family peace by terminating a potential feud. Political harmony, in as much

²¹ The last phrase of v. 17, “in addition to the burnt offering of the morning,” indicates not only that the context of Exodus 29 is assumed here but that the prescribed offerings detailed in Exodus 29:38–42 are already being observed in Israelite worship.

²² Mark Rooker, *Leviticus, The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2001), 152.

²³ Gary Demarest and Lloyd John Ogilvie, *The Preacher's Commentary Series, Volume 3: Leviticus* (Nashville, Tennessee : Thomas Nelson Inc, 1990), 87.

²⁴ John Hartley, *Word Biblical Commentary: Leviticus* (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 124.

as redeeming the sense of self-worth of a family and village contributes to harmony at a village and national level”.²⁵ Efi understood *ifoga* as purifying the community from its violated taboos. It is an act of *faamaualaloga* or showing remorse out of love for the victims of what has happened. *Faamaualalo* means seeking for acceptance, yearning for peace and searching for *leleiga* or reconciliation. The *ifoga* ritual is the foremost approach people will resort to when they try to heal divisions and tensions in both social and sacred boundaries. It is the most respected and effective way of maintaining *va-fealoai* or mutual respect and curbing anger.

Lotofaga Lima argues that *ifoga* is a *taulaga* (sacrifice) referring to high chiefs sacrificing their honorific status for the sake of bringing things back to order.²⁶ For Lima, this is an essential part of *ifoga* which reflects a symbol of atonement.

However, Faala Sam Amosa mentioned that “the Catholic Church in Samoa has incorporated the *ifoga* in the church service, as a form of a formal apology to God for transgressions”²⁷. This view is supported by Lavatai, arguing that one of the most vital elements in the *ifoga* ritual is the expression of love for the victim by lowering one’s self shamefully like an animal in the field. *Ifo* (bowing down) is not only for a public apology, but it is also “a ceremonial request for forgiveness”²⁸

²⁵ Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese Taisi Efi, *Su'esu'e Manogi in Search of Fragrance* (Wellington, Aotearoa New Zealand: Hua Publishers, 2018).

²⁶ Lotofaga Lima is one of the popular Samoan chiefs who was interviewed by Sanele Faasua Lavatai, September 14, 2012.

²⁷ Faala Sam Amosa. “A theological interrogation of the Motto: Faavae i le Atua Samoa.” MTh, Charles Sturt University, 2014, 90.

²⁸ Lavatai, “The *Ifoga* ritual in Samoa.”

La'auli Filoialii and Lyle Knowles named the fine mats used in *ifoga* as “The cover of Life.”²⁹ This refers to a fine mat as a protection of the culprit from any harm, and in this way the culprit can be redeemed.

Latu Latai talks about the importance and the significance of the word ‘feagaiga’ that was given a sister and any Samoan woman. As the traditional sacred valuation of Samoan women as *feagaiga* gives them important power and influence. They receive equal respect to that of the family chief. They (women) as *feagaiga* held important status that gave them superior power and an encompassing role over their brothers. Their status as *feagaiga* played a central role in maintaining a state of aptness and harmony within Samoan society both within the family and in the village as a whole.³⁰

Cluny, and La'avasa Macpherson talk more on how the *ifoga* is performed, the appropriate time for it to take place and more reasons for this Samoan traditional apology to take place.³¹

1.6 Overview of Study

This thesis will basically look at and study Leviticus 9:7–24, and whether it highlights forgiveness when read from a *ifoga* perspective. We will look at the Samoan

²⁹ Laauli Filoialii and Lyle Knowles, “*The Ifoga: The Samoan Practice of Seeking Forgiveness for Criminal Behaviour*” (Oceania, Vol 53, 1983), 384–388; “According to Samoan myth in ancient times the king of Tonga island suspected that his son had been killed by the daughter of king Tui Manu’a of Manu’a island. In punishment the accused woman was sentenced by the Tongan king to be burned at the stake. As the final request, she asked that her woven mat that she had brought with her from Manu’a island be brought to her. She wrapped herself in it. As a result of the recollection, the king of Tonga freed the daughter of King Tui Manu’a and allowed her to return to Samoa. She believed that her escape had something to do with the mat, and she named it *pulou o le ola or the cover of life*. Samoans use fine mats when seeking forgiveness”.

³⁰ Latu Latai. "Covenant Keepers: A History of Samoan (LMS) Missionary Wives in the Western Pacific from 1839 to 1979." PhD Diss., The Australian National University, 2016.

³¹ Cluny Macpherson and La'avasa Macpherson. "The *Ifoga*: The Exchange Value of Social Honour in Samoa." *Journal of the Polynesian Society* 114 (2005).

Context of the study as it defines what *ifoga* is and its purpose. Based on what I had seen and witnessed in one special case, the *ifoga* was only accepted at that particular time, but the reality of the event till now, it has not been truly accepted or forgiven. This one event could be a theoretical situation but most of *ifoga* cases were accepted. Leviticus will be more challenging reading than many other portions of Scripture because the things it describes are so unfamiliar to us in modern society.

1.7 Chapter Outline

This thesis is divided into four chapters, apart from the Introduction at the beginning of the thesis. Within the introduction, it indicates and emphasizes what the thesis will focus on, especially its purposes. The issue of *ifoga* also introduces here. Chapter one opens with my Samoan context. Here, I explain the practice of *ifoga* from the beginning, its purpose and importance in Samoan culture, and why the fine mat is used during this practice when there are other Samoan heritage items and traditional belongings that could have been used instead. Another view is to observe and experience the practice of *ifoga* at this time, as if a different emphasis is placed on it. In the last part of chapter one, I will give an example of this practice which was held at the village of Afega, when two victims were killed by an elderly man. All of the people involved in this incident are from the same village, Afega.

Chapter two focuses on my selected text: Lev 9:7–24. This chapter seeks to clarify and understand the true meaning of the text and why the various sacrifices and offerings were prepared and made by the people of Israel. However, it is an important message and lesson that can be conveyed, in connection with the practice of *ifoga* in the Samoan culture. Throughout this chapter, some of the sacrifices mentioned in Lev 9:7–24 are clarified, such as Sin Offering, Guilt Offering, Offering for the Priest, Offering for the People, and the meaning of atonement.

Chapter three is an attempt to link both practices (*ifoga* and Leviticus offerings). This attempt is aided by plausible analogies drawn from the Samoan ritual of *ifoga* and the understanding of offerings and sacrifices being made for sin in Leviticus 9. Despite the differences in contexts, cultures and traditions, times and places, this research seeks to convey a close correlation between forgiveness in the *ifoga* ritual and the concept of atonement in Leviticus. This approach may well be entertained within the analogical mode of fusing the horizons of the Leviticus text and my Samoan context.

Then it concludes with chapter four, which summarizes all the points, and answers the question posed at the beginning of this thesis, “Does Leviticus 9:7–24 highlight forgiveness when read from an *ifoga* perspective?”

Chapter 1

The Samoan Context: *Ifoga* as a Public Ritual

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to highlight the significance of *ifoga* in the past compared to the understanding of *ifoga* in contemporary Samoa. I would like to start with one of the Samoan proverbs that goes: “O Samoa o le atunuu tofi, o le i’a iviivia, ua o se i’a lava e ta’a i le moana ae ua uma ona ā’isa.” This saying can be interpreted simply to mean, Samoan hierarchical system had been finalized and settled. Each and everyone knows their status and where abouts in the system they fit. For example, the children cannot go to where the *matai* (chiefs) are. No one can overstep or go beyond it, as the roles and responsibilities of each person have been identified and known based on our culture and our structure. In other words, the ancient Samoan society was well set. The people did not believe in rebellious behavior. The Samoan way of life was so simple as everyone simply wanted to live in peace and harmony, maintaining a cultural environment that was as free as possible from violence.¹

However, if an incident ever occurred in a village, the leaders or *matai* of that village were responsible for keeping peace and maintaining the tradition of reconciliation. One of these reconciling traditions was *ifoga*. The practice of *ifoga* as briefly defined above can be interpreted as the traditional practice of seeking forgiveness and reconciliation in the Samoan context. *Ifoga* is therefore considered as a formal apology resulting from a serious event involving physical injury or even death. Such a hostile event can be done by one individual to another individual; one family to

¹ Michael J. Field, *Mau: Samoa’s struggle against New Zealand oppression* (Auckland: Reed, 1984), 20. Field’s description of the essence of Samoa based on its culture in 3000 years long before concepts of nationalism introduced into Samoa by the Europeans.

another family; the village council to a family; and so forth. The presence of one *matai* or chiefs or more senior representatives of the offending family/individual signifies the collective responsibility for the act of an individual member. In my opinion, this is an essential part of *ifoga* which reflects the *ifoga* as a symbol of atonement and a public ritual.

Thus our traditional *ifoga* is the most sacred tradition considering the value of the *ietoga* (fine mat) which is the most priced *measina* a Samoa.² The sinners or guilty parties *pulou* (cover) themselves with the *ietoga* (fine mat) and wait in front of the victim's family, until the family of the victim agree to pardon them, then they come outside and remove the *ietoga*.

The family with a matai leading the *ifoga* would sit outside the residence of the matai of the injured person's family with fine mats over their heads offering themselves as objects for venting anger and revenge by the victim's family. In doing so the matai and his aiga humble themselves to the mercy of the aggrieved family and are exposed to serious harm and even death. When and if the victim's family accepts the *ifoga*, speeches of reconciliation are made accompanied by presentation of fine mats and food as offerings of amends (Va'ai 1999:51).³

Thus, there is a waiting period of uncertainty if the guilty party/family will be pardoned or not. If an offended family is not a forgiving family then there might be a fight or disputes between the offended and the offending families or between the villages from which the families come. However, *ifoga* is normally successful in resolving tensions and disputes between families and villages. This could be the reason why this Samoan traditional apology is one of the sacred ceremonies in our Samoan culture. It reflects the depth in the thoughts of our ancestors as this was based on. Therefore, because of this practice and the way the ceremony was done, it can be described as a religion, to

² Samoan fine mats or *ietoga* are considered as "Samoan gold" or "exchange medium" in the system of reciprocity like *ifoga*.

³ Cited by Cluny Macpherson and La'avasa Macpherson. "The *Ifoga*: The Exchange Value of Social Honour in Samoa." *Journal of the Polynesian Society* 114 (2005): 109–134.

maintain peace and harmony as individuals or as a family. However, in the current context of the *ifoga* it is done as an offering. That means, *ifo* means worshipping God with all human respect in a religious context.

Not only does *ifoga* allow for internal practice to be made, but the choice also reflects humility. It is also seen inside a church during a sermon, when someone walks in between the congregation during the sermon, they walk with their head being bowed down, showing their respect to people worshipping. It is also being said by some preacher or church minister before the prayer, to the congregation to bow down their heads and come together as one in spirit to pray to God (“tatou ifo ma tatalo i le Atua”). Then everyone is worthy to worship, with their heads bowed and eyes closed.

Another meaning of the word “bow” is known and being heard, when someone is in a high places, such as a person climbing a tree. When it is time to come down again, the word "come down or go down" is being translated in Samoan as “alu i lalo” or “alu ifo.” It means coming from the available space, to the low space. Such scene can be also referred and said to a very high minded person, to come down to where the others are. Meaning, to lower yourself and your being to fit in with the others.

Hence, the practice of *ifoga* in the Samoan context, I argue, may reflect the practice of offerings and sacrifices described in the book of Leviticus. It is a public ritual in which one individual or family submits to a ritual and public humiliation in return for the forgiveness by a victim’s family. It is also a costly practice initiated by a guilty member/family providing *ietoga* and gifts (money and food) in order to acknowledge and admit the sin or damage done to the victim’s family. By all means, *ifoga* appears to be a public offering or sacrifice, humbly seeking for forgiveness in order to establish a warm relationship between the offender and the offended ones. Hence, *ifoga* was and is an integral part of *faa-Samoa* or the Samoan way of life.

2.1 Reason and Purpose of *Ifoga* in the Past

The idea of *ifoga* is originated from the Samoan ancient myths. From these myths, *ifoga* is believed to be instigated within the relationship between the *augafaapae* (sister) and the *tama tane* (male). In the Samoan household, the relationship between the brother and his sister is known as the '*feagaiga*' or 'covenant.' This covenant can be also applied to the relationship between the parents and the children, or between the housewife and the husband at different level.⁴

Within such family settings, there was a stick called the *to'otū*⁵ which was used to hold a basket of leftover food. The *to'otū* hung from the roof of the house where the sister lived. The brother was always forbidden to enter the house while his sister was sleeping inside. He would access the leftover food from the basket on the *to'otū*. This gesture was another act of the *feagaiga* (covenant). After the family has eaten and left some leftovers, the brother will take whatever is left and reheat for his meal.

It is from this Samoan family setting where *ifoga* is firstly practiced when there are disputes among family members especially between brother-sister relationships. The fine mat used is woven by the sister or the village maiden. Whenever the sister is involved (whether within family or village settings) something serious has happened that has breached such *feagaiga*. As a result, she would bring the fine mat she has woven to cover the brother's or guilty family member. The presence of the sister or the *feagaiga* will usually resolve the disputes and the *ifoga* will be easily accepted and

⁴ Taii Oli Gisa, interview by Kapeni Pene Matatia, 8th January, 2021.

⁵ The *to'otū* is a stick with a y-shaped end, designated to hold a basket of food outside the house.

pardoned. The fine mat is also counted as an important part of the *ifoga*, not necessarily because of its size or its quality but because it is woven by the sister or village maiden.⁶

This is how *ifoga* has come about, because of the *vā* (relational space) of the *feagaiga*, between the brother-sister relationship and between the parents and the children. The offenders will be covered by the fine mats that are woven by the sister or village maiden, so that the brother may live. The following are some of the personal, social, and economic benefits earned from this early act of *ifoga*:

- It reflects the level of care in the family, so that there is harmony and forgiveness. The brother takes care of his sister or his covenant. His service is to have no defect at all. When problems arise in families, it is the responsibility of the sister to do whatever she can to redeem her brother.
- The brother's relationship with his sister is not easy in the sense of their covenant. In order to fulfill the brother's side of the covenant to his sister, his eyes are to be burnt in the kitchen as he prepares and cooks his sister's food. He protects and makes sure that men from other families and other villages do not lay a hand or come close to his sister. Because if such happens and evil doing is in place then it becomes a means of embarrassing his family.
- Latai states "the sister carries the *mamalu* or honour of the family which she has to maintain by keeping her virginity. In ancient Samoa, this was perhaps her most serious responsibility as failure to do so would bring shame to her brothers and the rest of the family".⁷
- This sacred relationship (*va tapuia*) is also reflected between *alii* (high chiefs) and extended families. It is the duty of the extended family, to serve and care for

⁶ Gisa, "*Ifoga*."

⁷ Latai, "Covenant Keepers," 47.

their chief. This is in line with one of the national Samoan mottos, “o le ala ile pule o le tautua” (“serving is the path to mastery or becoming the ruler”). The word “ruler” refers to the high chief, who is the ruler of the extended family. Whatever happens within the family, the chief of the family is in control of the situation to ensure that it has been resolved. Whenever problems arose in the village, and family members are involved, the *matai* or alii and his family will be disgraced and of course the family name will be mocked by other families within the village.

In summary, the cultural point of view highlights the fact that it is not the fine mat that matters. Rather, the most important aspect is the person who weaves the fine mat. This is because the cloth is made and stored in the sister’s house for purposes such as the *ifoga*. The sister might well know that at some stage her brother will be in trouble, so it is good to be prepared.

The “*to’otū*” is used during the *ifoga*. It is held in the hand of the person bowing and being covered with a fine mat. A “*to’otū*” can be known as a twig or a stick, which is very common during the *ifoga*, as it helps the person bowing to lean on, as the duration of the *ifoga* is unknown, depending on the acceptance or rejection by the victim’s family. Overall, the motivation behind *ifoga* in the past is guilt and the need to confess guilt. This is central in Samoan society even today.

2.2 Why the *Ietoga* (Fine mat)

Since the gospel hit the shores of Samoa, the mats woven by the sister have become more significant. The cultural resemblance with the act of salvation Jesus Christ has done through death and resurrection; the atonement for the sins of the world. This is why some call the fine mat the “*Pulou o le ola*” or literally “the cover of life” or “the

atonement, “The fine mats as a ‘cover of life’ find their roots in Samoan traditions.”⁸ That means the fine mat covers the person to be pardoned, which itself is an act of salvation and atonement for the offender.

Another name for the same mat is “*Tasi ae Afe* (One but many)”, which means one mat, but it is very useful and important for many reasons. This is also the reason why fine mats (*ietoga*) are used in *ifoga*, but not other Samoan *measina* (traditional wear), such as a *papa laufala* or *fala ninii* (other kind of mats), or a piece of *siapo* (tapa cloth). *Papa laufala* and *Fala ninii*, are used by Samoans to sleep on, and cover the floors of their *fale* (house/homes), for family gatherings and when visitors arrive.

2.3 *Ifoga* in the Present

Different changes have been observed in the course of *ifoga* practice in contemporary Samoa. It is no longer seen in the internal affairs of a family, between a brother and a sister, between parents and children, or in the extended family with the matai of the family. But it is seen between one family to another family, to one village to another village as they reinforce it whenever wrongdoings are made, especially in terms of murdering and other serious criminal matters, such as trespass in a chief’s house (*solitofaga*); manslaughter; or to act against someone’s honour like adultery; etc.

As described in the introductory part of this paper, the practice of *ifoga* nowadays, is for an extended family, or village to prepare in the event of a riot and an accident that results in the death of a member of another family or village.

If a crime occurs in that setting, the family of the offender gathers to talk, and arranges a day for them to visit the afflicted family, to perform their *ifoga*. The courtesy

⁸ Refer to Review of the *Ifoga*.

of the guilty family is provided, if the *ifoga* is accepted then the Samoan custom and culture is implemented through courtesy.

The *ifoga* is often practiced in the early hours of the morning while the victim's family are still asleep. The afflicted family will wake up, to the culprit's family being covered with a huge traditional fine mat known as the *ietoga or pulou ole ola* and await the dawn. This is done silently and usually under cover of darkness. The silent and pre-dawn approach on the one hand reduces the likelihood of a sudden attack by members of the aggrieved family and uncontrolled violence. On the other hand, it increases the prospect of successful reconciliation. It is not the whole family that is being covered with the fine mat, but maybe a senior *matai* or some senior members within the family or otherwise an elder or a church minister within the family.

The person that committed the wrongdoing which resulted in the death of a member of the afflicted family, cannot ever be part of this traditional apology. For some reason, there is no peace when the bereaved family finds out. As a result, tensions will be increased. The culprits' family tends to bow for forgiveness because of the severe punishment their family member has caused. But the bereaved family might face retribution. This is why I argue that the *ifoga* is a sacrificial offering, because it is voluntarily. And if the people being covered with fine mats end up dying, it is a result of the risk of seeking forgiveness and it happens because of their humble effort to keep the peace between the people, families, or villages.

Acceptance and non-acceptance of *ifoga* is up to the afflicted family to decide. Whether it takes up the whole day for the culprits' family to be covered, until the bereaved family agrees to accept or not to accept. The sign of *ifoga's* acceptance is when a member of the afflicted family approaches, removes the mat that covers the members of the *ifo* or guilty family, and accepts and welcomes them into their home. At

that moment, the guilty family rises, and pays tribute to the bereaved family. The main purpose of these tributes (*faaaloaloga*), from the guilty family is to help the afflicted family with the funeral preparation. This reconciling part of *ifoga* is deeply moving.

2.3.1. How serious are the sins covered in *ifoga*?

Traditionally, *ifoga* is an act performed by families and villages when serious incidents happen or the death of someone. As mentioned by Cluny Macpherson,

In cases of murder or adultery, the common mode of making compensation to the injured party or their relatives was by ifonga [sic], or bowing down, accompanied with a totongi [sic] or payment of a fine. In case the offending party thought it prudent to tender this satisfaction, he collected some valuable mats, in number and quality according to the nature of the offence, and with his friends prepared to make his submission.⁹

Furthermore,

the form of the *ifoga* has not changed markedly, the circumstances of its performance may have. Gilson (1970:49) reported that, “the *ifoga* could be performed in respect of any dispute, but it was particularly effective in small scale disputes between villages, which in the nineteenth century were very numerous.

The *ifoga* could also be performed to prevent wars (Gilson 1970:48).

during the early years of the mission, many disputes and incidents threatened to culminate in warfare, but in every case the peace was preserved with differences sometimes being settled once and for all by the offering of formal apologies or *ifoga*, or the payment of compensation (Gilson 1970:119)

So, if the incident occurred within the same community, then the *ifoga* was performed between families. However, if trouble arose between one village and another, *ifoga* was performed between the villages. Therefore, when troubles and incidents occur, then there is a necessity to perform the *ifoga* so that there may again be hope for

⁹ Cluny Macpherson, and La'avasa Macpherson. "The *Ifoga*: The Exchange Value of Social Honour in Samoa," *Journal of the Polynesian Society* 114 (2005):109–134.

reconciliation and good settlement between these people, and especially how God views the habitation of his children.

2.3.2. Was every *ifoga* successful?

During the early years of the mission, *ifoga* was also performed to prevent war; especially wars between the districts. Then, some *ifoga* were rejected and not successful. For instance;

some new circumstances, such as the presence of Europeans and of central administration, have appeared however. In 1856, the trader William Fox, who traded in Sala'ilua, Savai'i, was shot and killed after offending a young man named Sailusi from the village of Salega by accusing him of theft (Gilson1970:213). Meleisea noted that, [I]n Samoan eyes the offence was between districts, not between individuals. Accordingly, Sagone (the district of the killer) made an *ifoga* to the nu'u [village] and district in which Fox operated his business. This was refused and the 'umaga [body of untitled men] of Sala'ilua killed a matai of Sagone to settle the score.¹⁰

However, as Cluny Macpherson and La'avasa Macpherson say '*ifoga* are normally successful in resolving tensions because few benefit, and many may suffer, from unmanaged tension within either families or villages'.¹¹ It was also experienced through the interviews and *ifoga* that were performed and heard because of the tragedies that took place, despite the severity and impact of these tragedies, this was not a reason to reject an *ifoga* being done. No matter how serious the incident is, there will always be an act of mercy or the heart to forgive. For example, a case described by Cluny Macpherson and La'avasa Macpherson:

When, in 1999, the Minister of Works, Luagalau Leva'ula Kamu, was fatally shot at a political celebration in Apia, the family of the accused were quick to offer *ifoga* to both the village from which he came and to the district which he represented in Parliament. Taking the Minister's life constituted an affront to the honour of both his family and the district that he represented. While representatives of the 'äiga of the accused were undoubtedly embarrassed by the actions of their

¹⁰ Malama Meleisea, *The Making of Modern Samoa* (Suva: Institute of Pacific Studies of the University of the South Pacific, 1987), 32.

¹¹ Macpherson and La'avasa Macpherson, "The *Ifoga*,"

members, they were also aware of the possibility of retribution by either, or both, relatives and constituents of the Minister. A single family or village has little prospect of successfully defending itself on two fronts, and so they had little option but to accept the necessity of the ultimate humiliation of simultaneous self-abasement to both.¹²

It reflects in this area the wisdom that the Samoan people have through their culture. It reflects the people's acceptance of the coming of the gospel and its teachings as given in the scriptures through the love and compassion of its people. The same reconciliation is reflected between God and his people Israel as found in Leviticus 9, in the Bible.

2.3.3. How to identify whether an *ifoga* is acceptable or not?

When serious problems arise between families or communities, which affect the pastor's family and the church or community, or between parents and children, or the brother and his sister, then *ifoga* is to be performed with the intention to apologize and comfort the affected family. The Church, family, or community leaders take the lead in performing the *ifoga* with the thought behind this performance to be dignified and to see the recognition of the tragedy that has occurred with the grieving family as the adult leaders of the culprits' family move on to perform the *ifoga* and seek forgiveness for what has happened. Despite the tragedy of the incident occurred, the remorseful family will always have the heart and strength to accept the *ifoga*.

In saying that, the acceptance of the *ifoga* does not rely or depend on any conditions or grounds. For example, it does not depend on how big the fine mat is, nor does it rely on the type of people that perform the *ifoga*. But it is the thought, values, the courage, the upbringing and especially the Christian values of the remorseful family. It

¹² Macpherson and La'avasa Macpherson, "The *Ifoga*," 117.

is the effort that most people considered, which reflects the practice of atonement and the sacrifice it brings.

2.3.4. When is the most appropriate time to perform the *ifoga*?

The perfect time of day for the *ifoga* to be carried out, is in the early hours of the morning. Many of the forefathers thought that this was a good and proper time for *ifoga*, because of the awakening of people and families to a new day. Their body, mind and souls are being renewed. They have been awakening with new feelings and fresh thoughts for the new day. Therefore, the time for when the *ifoga* is to be taken and carried out was also considered and planned by our forefathers and our ancestors.

2.3.5. Why has the *ifoga* ritual changed from between sister to brother, to between families and villages?

The word '*feagaiga*' or covenant is an important word in the Samoan culture. A word that speaks and marks the relationship between a brother and his sister. It was a relationship in which the brother cherished and cared for his sister. The brother was careful not to affect or destroy his relationship with his sister. This relationship was the main purpose and reason for the *ifoga* to take place. When the covenant between the brother and his sister was affected or destroyed, the brother performed the *ifoga* or the brother bowed to his sister in order to renew their covenant and live in peace. He sought to reconcile with his sister and ask for forgiveness.

However, with the arrival of missionaries bringing the gospel, our ancestors considered the importance of the missionary and the minister who brought the gospel, as well as the acceptance by the Samoan people of the coming of the gospel. Therefore, Samoans gave the title or covenant to the church minister or the pastor. Samoans thought and considered the fact that the church minister or pastor mediates between man

and God. He is the servant of God; therefore it is appropriate to give the title *feagaiga* or covenant to the church minister so he could be cared for as the brother cares for his sister. The *feagaiga* between the sister and the brother still exist and remains, but not as sacred and important as it was, because of the recognition of human rights nowadays.

This is the main reason why nowadays, most of the *ifoga* are being done between one family to another if it is in the same village, except for when an incident happens and families are from different villages then the village *matais* and the whole village might be involved.

So, despite the facts on why and how the *ifoga* originated, its purpose and its practice remains. As *ifoga* is the only cultural practice that can be held accountable for reconciliation when serious conflicts and problems arise between the people. This particular impact of *ifoga* would be illustrated in the following recent case.

2.4 Recent Case Study

This *ifoga* took part at the beginning of this year in the village of *Afega* for families of two men slain in a New Years' shooting.

Held in the early hours of Friday morning some 10 vehicles converged upon the village of *Afega*, bringing families and chiefs to participate in the traditional display of apology and request for forgiveness.



Proceedings were underway in the village at 5am. Family members of one of the alleged perpetrators accused of murdering two others sought forgiveness from the family of the deceased. The victims were covered in fine mats and sought forgiveness from the families of the two deceased men. Led by chiefs of the accused family, two men were covered in a fine mat as close to 100 members of the family sat on the grass in the hopes their request for forgiveness would be accepted.



Within five minutes, one of the deceased parents walked towards the men covered with fine mat in silence and removed the fine mat. The sign that the family had accepted the apology or *ifoga* was met with relief.

Following the acceptance of the *ifoga* or the traditional apology were traditional (*sua*) presentations which included fine mats, \$20,000, cattle and cases of tinned fish to assist the family with funeral preparations.¹³



¹³ Joyetter Feagaimaali'i, "Afega *ifoga* accepted after double shooting" *Samoa Observer*, January 8, 2021).

After the traditional presentations, each family greeted each other, and tears were shed as the families embraced. Especially to the families of the accused, they were thankful that their plea for mercy and forgiveness had been accepted.

2.5 Conclusion

In the context of *ifoga*, it can be seen that *ifoga* was originated within the family, between a brother and his sister. Parents versus their children, as well as the paramount chief or *matai* and his extended family or *auaiga*. It is reflected in this contribution that when problems arise, the *ifoga* is the solution to seek peace in those relationships. But as years and centuries go by, a lot has changed. Nowadays, *ifoga* often takes place or is practiced between families and between villages. Therefore, in saying that, now we question the reality of forgiveness, whether the *ifoga* is really being accepted out of true forgiveness and a pure heart or is it just for public view, but not true forgiveness.

The sister or *augafaapae* weaves the fine mat which is used in *ifoga*, as in ancient times. This is the main reason why the fine mat is used during *ifoga*. As it is believed to be the most important craft being woven and done by the hands of the sister or the *feagaiga*. However, in the current system and the present, family members come together with fine mats, then consult with each other to find the best and most suitable mat for the *ifoga*.

The fact remains and the truth is that the *ifoga* practice and the purpose it serves remains the same. As to maintain peace on both sides and for people to live in harmony with each other. But it is an act that reflects the Samoan culture in its construction, with a lot of wisdom and foresight. We will now turn to the biblical perspective of such wise traditions in creating peace and reconciliation from the context of Leviticus.

Chapter 2

Biblical Perspective: Leviticus 9:7–24

Introduction

The book of Leviticus is the third of the five books written by Moses, according to the traditional understanding (or the so-called the “Torah” or “Pentateuch,” from the Jewish perspective). On a larger scale, we find Leviticus at the centre of the Torah. It is possible therefore that the Torah operates in this way with the intention to draw our attention to its centre. On a small scale, the beginning of Leviticus marks the continuation of the story from the book of Exodus. However, the main issue addressed in the beginning chapters of the book of Leviticus (Lev 1–7) is the various sacrifices made by Israel, and the ordinances are prescribed.¹ These chapters (Lev 1–7) outline the five major offerings: burnt offering, cereal offering, well-being offering, sin offering or purification offering and reparation offering.²

Of these five offerings, this chapter however focuses on the last two offerings which are required because of sin. Such a requirement reflects notions of atonement, forgiveness, and reconciliation which is also mentioned in Lev 9:7–24. These two offerings (sin offering (חטאת) and guilt offering³ (אשם) serve as channels of God for sinners to express their penitence and to plead for divine forgiveness.⁴ Also, these two offerings, presided over by the priest, are presented publicly in the tent of meeting before Yhwh (לפני יהוה). This setting implies that sins, even when committed by an

¹ John Walvoord and Roy Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*. (Wheaton, IL : Victor Books, 1985), 188.

² Donald Arthur Carson, *Concise Bible Commentary* (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Illinois., USA: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994).

³ Note that “guilt offering” (NRSV) can be also called “reparation offering.”

⁴ Note that both offerings are expiatory gifts that deal with sin and disrupts the relationship with God. Expiatory gift refers to the compensation for the wrongdoing.

individual, are not private affairs. The offering must be made before Yhwh, as all sins are sins against God (the offended), thus threatening his holy presence and endangering the solidarity of the whole community.⁵

3.1 Sin Offering: חטאת

The account of the sin offering is recorded in Lev 4:1–5:13; 6:24–30. Despite the difficulty to identify the difference between sin and guilt offerings, it is quite clear that the sin offering is “graded” somewhat according to who sinned. The anointed priest (הכהן המושח 4:3), the whole congregation (כל עדת vv. 13ff), a ruler (נשיא vv.22ff), and one of the common people (נפש אחת מעם vv.27ff) are all singled out for special consideration in the case of the requirements for the sin offering.

What we have noted here is that the Hebrew word for “sin” (חטאת vv. 2, 3) is the same word for “sin offering” (חטאת vs 3). This sin is specifically stated to be one committed unwittingly or unintentionally (שגגה, vs 2). The word שגגה means sins committed “in error” and is used in contrast to sins committed “high handedly” or “presumptuously” as mentioned in Num 15:30. So my translation from the context of Lev 4:2 is: “If it is ‘the anointed priest’ (הכהן המושח) who sins, thus bringing guilt on the people, he shall offer for the sin (חטאת) that he has committed, a bull of the herd without blemish as a sin offering to the Lord.” Some scholars consider the phrase הכהן המושח (the anointed priest) as a reference to the priesthood or even to the high priest who received a special anointing as “chief” and representative of the other priests, as well as of Israel as a whole (8:12; 21:10; Num 35:25).⁶

⁵ See especially Samuel Eugene Balentine, *Leviticus*, (Louisville: John Knox Press, 2002).

⁶ For instance, see John D. Currid, *A Study Commentary on Leviticus* (USA: EP Books, 2004); Philip Eveson, *Leviticus: The Beauty of Holiness* (Darlington: EP Books, 2007).

The other significant point we have learned from this offering is the categories of sinners: the anointed priest (4:3,5); the whole congregation of Israel (4:13); a ruler (4:22) and finally the law deals with any member of the covenant community who is not a leader of any kind (4:27).

This offering therefore brings to our attention the need to recognize the place of collective sin and guilt. Indeed, a ritual when properly carried out, resulted in atonement for the persons involved; forgiveness was granted to the worshiper (Lev. 4:20, 26, 31, 34) and he is forgiven. The crucial connection between the sin offering and the idea of atonement will be discussed in detail below as the climax of this chapter

3.2 Guilt Offering: אשם

The guilt offering (אשם) is described in Lev. 5:14–6:7 (MT 5:14–26); 7:1–7. This offering operates similarly to the sin offering, not only to provide expiation for sin (especially an unfaithful act תמעל מעל Lev 5:15), but also serves as a means of reparation or guilt. However, it is different from the sin offering chiefly in the restitution requirement. The offeror must make good on any loss that he has made in the holy things of the Lord and pay an additional one-fifth of its cost to the priest (5:16). Damages against another person are also dealt with in 6:1–7 (MT 5:20–26), where the one-fifth restitution clause is also in effect. This offering also atones for the person making the sacrifice and he is forgiven. The sin offering deals with sins against God that also threaten the community. The guilt offering deals more with sins that require restitution to God or man.⁷

⁷ Geoffrey William Bromiley, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 268–69.

According to Mark Rooker, the use of the verb הָשִׁיב (restore) in parallel with שָׁלַם (restitution) suggests a legal context in which the offender has to compensate for the sin he has committed, *and the priest shall make 'atonement' (כָּפַר) on your behalf for your sin* (Lev 5:6).⁸ The guilty parties have to give the total sum to those who have suffered the damages before they can present their reparation offerings to Yhwh (Lev 6:5–6/MT 5:24–25).⁹ This unique step demonstrates that forgiveness from God cannot be secured until rectification has been made with the one who has been injured or harmed.

To sum up these two offerings, it seems that the ritual achieves its goal through a process of physical activities. Samuel Balentine argues that such process is a mode of communication that is accomplished through the symbols attached to the activities.¹⁰ For the purpose of this thesis, examining the sacrificial process is important for an understanding of the goal of sin offering. The ritual procedure varies for four classes of offenders: the anointed priest, the whole congregation, a ruler and a common person. Such variation is primarily based on the impact of the sin on the community as a whole. For the sake of atonement process, it generally involves the following steps:

1. by the offender: compensate the loss of the injured party (for guilt offerings only); bring an unblemished animal to the tent of meeting; and lay a hand on the animal to identify oneself with the animal, which one then slays.
2. by the priest: perform the blood ritual and handle the animal remains to signify the removal of impurity.¹¹
3. by Yhwh: a forgiveness is proclaimed (Lev 4:20, 26, 31, 35; 5:10, 13, 18; 6:7).

⁸ Rooker, *Leviticus*.

⁹ Note that this is the only sacrifice that can be converted into money (Lev 5:15, 18; 6:6 [MT Lev 5:25]).

¹⁰ Balentine, *Leviticus*.

¹¹ Radmacher, *New Illustrated Bible Commentary*.

The structure of the process above shows that both offerings place their emphasis on forgiveness. Such a complicated procedure is a reminder that the offender needs to take some form of submission before forgiveness is granted. First, the offender still suffers loss as the sacrifice is costly. Second, the laying on of the hand and the slaying of the animal in the worship place implies that the offeror must admit and confess their sin publicly. Third, the extra step in the reparation offering reveals that the offender, besides rectifying the relationship with God, must also compensate the damage caused to other parties. Lastly, with the assistance of the priest who performs the blood ritual, forgiveness from God will be granted. As a result, the offeror can be reconciled to both God and the world.¹² Here we can see that purification offering values both vertical and horizontal forgiveness. Both dimensions of purification are also depicted in Lev 9:7–24 to which we now turn.

3.3 Exegetical Work on Lev 9:7–24

Placing this whole chapter (Lev 9:1–24) into the ritual context described above, the emphasis is now placed on the priesthood duties. This is clearly described throughout this entire chapter starting with the first sacrifices offered by the priesthood (vv 1–6),¹³ and verses 7–24 explain the first service conducted by Aaron as high priest of Israel.

This means the first offering that Aaron makes publicly is a sin offering. This sacrifice made by Aaron on his own behalf, on behalf of the priests, and on behalf of the people of Israel. The order from Moses in verse 7 is clear: the offerings for the priests will precede those for the people. Chapter 10 records what happens to the priests when they do not obey the words and instructions of Yhwh. As in chapter 8, the opening

¹² Balentine, *Leviticus*, 50, 81; Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 370.

¹³ Note that Lev 8:1–10:20 record the consecration of the priesthood.

verses here (vv 1–4) display an overview of the rest of the chapter in sequence. For instance, Aaron is to bring a bull calf and sacrifice (vv 8–11); he had to fetch a ram and offer it (vv 12–14); followed by the offering for the people (vv.15–21) and its acceptance (vv 22–24). These two parts (Aaron himself and the people) will be briefly described below based on my own exegetical observation.

3.4 Offering for the Priest (Aaron)

Lev 9:8–11 – Sin Offering

Lev 9:8–11 Aaron drew near to the altar, and slaughtered (שחט) the calf of the sin offering (חטאת), which was for himself. **9** The sons of Aaron presented (קרב) the blood to him, and he dipped his finger in the blood and put it on the horns of the altar; and the rest of the blood he poured out at the base of the altar. **10** But the fat (חלב), the kidneys, and the appendage of the liver from the sin offering (חטאת) he turned into smoke on the altar (מזבה), as the LORD commanded Moses; **11** and the flesh and the skin he burned with fire outside the camp.

As mentioned above, the normal procedures for the sin offering are described in Lev 4:1–12. In comparison to the above verses, there are two elements missing here: first, Aaron does not place his hand on the head of the animal (perhaps he does so, but this is taken for granted in the narrative); second, Aaron does not sprinkle the blood in front of the curtain seven times inside the sanctuary as mentioned in Lev 4:6.¹⁴

Apart from these differences, there are two themes highlighted from the above action: (1) the slaughtering of the calf; (2) the pouring of the blood. The *qal* form of both verbs (slaughtered (ישחט) and poured (יצק)) may reflect that a sin (priest) has been committed and a sacrifice is made. The causative verb קרב (presented) according to my search is a rare form in the Hebrew Bible. This is the only time it is used in the entire

¹⁴ This second difference is described by Gordon Wenham as because Aaron had not entered the sanctuary yet and it was not in need for cleaning. I find this point by Wenham unconvincing and it is also irrelevant to the argument of this paper. See Gordon Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 149.

book of Leviticus. This implies that Aaron and his sons are included in the first process of priestly reconciliation, lead by Aaron himself.

Lev 9:12–14 – Burnt Offering

Then he slaughtered (שחט) the burnt offering (העלה). Aaron's sons brought him the blood, and he dashed it against all sides of the altar. **13** And they brought (ימצאו) him the burnt offering (העלה) piece by piece, and the head, which he turned into smoke on the altar. **14** He washed the entrails and the legs and, with the burnt offering (העלה), turned them into smoke on the altar.

Here, Aaron sacrificed the burnt offering (העלה) on the altar, assisted by his sons who “brought” (ימצאו) the victim piece by piece. The verb ימצאו is also a rare form in the Hebrew Bible and it only appears twice in the entire book of Leviticus (Lev 9:12, 18).¹⁵ In the sin offering, Aaron's sons only gave him the blood of the animal, but here, they also hand over the cut-up portions of the burnt offering.

This sacrifice seems to agree with the procedures of the whole burnt offering in Lev 1. That is the animal is slaughtered (1:5, 11); followed by the tossing of the blood on the altar (1:5,11); the animal is cut into pieces (1:6,12); inner parts are washed (1:9, 13); and then the whole animal is burned on the altar (1:9,13). The only significant part of the procedure that is missing is the imposition of the offeror's hand on the head of the victim (1:4). A number of scholars have argued that the purpose of the burnt offering here is for the acceptance of the offeror by God and for the reconciliation between a God and the people and hence atonement.¹⁶

¹⁵ Note that both texts present this verb מצא as a *hifil* imperfect plural form (ימצאו).

¹⁶ Refer to scholarship review above.

3.5 Offering for the People (Lev 9:15–21)

Lev 15–17 – Sin Offering, Burnt Offering, and Grain Offering

Next, he presented the people's offering. He took the goat of the sin offering (חטאת) that was for the people, and slaughtered (שחט) it, and presented it as a sin offering like the first one. **16** He presented the burnt offering and sacrificed it according to regulation (כמשפט). **17** He presented the grain offering (מנחה), and, taking a handful of it (ימלא כפר), he turned it into smoke on the altar, in addition to the burnt offering of the morning.

It appears that the same two offerings that Aaron had presented for the priests he now sacrifices on behalf of the people of Israel. Although some commentaries have suggested that these offerings are for the general sinfulness of the people,¹⁷ I argue that these offerings also include some specific sins and serious cases. The reason is because these sacrifices need atonement, purification and dedication. As vs 16 mentions, Aaron performs these sacrifices “according to regulation” described in Lev 5:10. It generally refers to a judgement that is based on prior precedent as found in Lev 1 and 4.

The third offering that Aaron presents on behalf of the people is a grain offering (מנחה). Here Aaron acts according to the procedures of Lev 2. The words such as ימלא כפר (“taking a handful of it”) often refers to the language of ordination.¹⁸

Lev 18–21 – Well-being Offering

He slaughtered (ישחט) the ox and the ram as a sacrifice (זבח) of well-being for the people (שלמים לעם). Aaron's sons brought him the blood, which he dashed against all sides of the altar, **19** and the fat (חלבים) of the ox and of the ram—the broad tail, the fat that covers the entrails, the two kidneys and the fat on them, and the appendage of the liver. **20** They first laid the fat on the breasts, and the fat was turned into smoke on the altar; **21** and the breasts and the right thigh Aaron raised as an elevation offering before the LORD, as Moses had commanded.

¹⁷ See Currid, *Study Commentary*, 107. Here, Currid states “these offerings are for the general sinfulness of the people of Israel....not for the specific sins...”.

¹⁸ Evesson, *Leviticus*, 129–30.

The final type of sacrifice on behalf of the people is the well-being or peace offering (שלמים). Again, the procedure for presenting this offering is described in detail in Lev 3:1–16. However, it seems that the difference in the present scenario is that the sacrifice is greater than normal. That is an ox, and a ram are both slaughtered rather than just one animal. This major difference also supports what I have mentioned above about the seriousness of this sacrifice. As the final sacrifice of the day, it follows the offerings of the atonement, and it signifies the fellowship and thanksgiving that arise from reconciliation and forgiveness.

3.6 Offering and Divine Acceptance

Lev 9:22–24 describe the offering by Aaron of all the sacrifices and their acceptance by Yhwh. Aaron then “lifted his hands” (יָשָׂא אֶת יָדָיו) toward the people and blessed them (vs 22). The *qal* imperfect of יָשָׂא can be implied that Aaron has repeatedly turned to people and pronounced a benediction over them. In relation to this point, some commentaries describe the entering of Moses and Aaron into the tent of meeting as a symbol of not only the completeness of Aaron’s ordination but also symbolizes his new role as high priest.¹⁹

The fire consuming the offerings comes from the glory of God. It is a fire of rejoicing because it shows God’s acceptance of the Hebrew sacrificial system. This line of interpretation is confirmed by the response of the people in verse 24: “all the people saw it, they shouted and fell on their faces.” The verb “shouted” (רָנְנוּ) is usually used for a vocal response that is joyful. This can mean that it is a joy that leads to worship.

In summary, the priesthood performance described in Lev 9 reaffirms the former procedures of the sacrificial system described in Lev 1–7. It is a system that shows

¹⁹ Eveson, *Leviticus*, 133–34; Bellinger, *Leviticus*, 61–62.

costly giving and the presence of God among his people. Judging from the language used, the word “slaughtered” (שחט) is used four times in the above offerings.²⁰ This word refers to the draining of blood from the victim’s body (animal) and only the priest is responsible for the sacrificial slaughter of the animal. Blood is the most sacred part of the sacrifice.

The poured blood indicates that the creature’s life has been poured for the sake of the priest as well as the people. Theologically, this is the price that Israelites paid for forgiveness. Because all these offerings are the means of mediation between the holy God and his corrupt people in ancient Israel. The main purpose of this mediation is reconciliation or forgiveness via God’s acceptance as described here “fire came out from Yhwh” (v.4a). Such a result only comes with commitments, sacrifices, slaughtering and worship. It is with this point that I want to conclude this chapter with the idea of atonement as mentioned in Lev 9:7. Aaron’s first offering in the sacrificial system of Israel is a public display of his own sinfulness (and by extension for his sons) and his need for atonement and forgiveness.

3.7 The meaning of atonement כפר

The meaning of כפר (to make atonement) in general has been understood variously. Traditionally, scholars have argued that the Hebrew verb כפר is the word commonly used for atonement, in which sins were “covered” by offering a sacrifice as a substitute for the life of the sinner.²¹ Thus, in our text, the priest covers the sinner so that the sinner does not have to face the wrath of God. In this sense, כפר obviously refers only to God’s forgiveness of the transgressor (Dt. 21:8; Ps. 78:38; Jer. 18:23). Through

²⁰ Note that the word for “kill” is a special term for the slaughter of sacrificial animals, e.g., Lev 1:5, 11.

²¹ Bromiley, *The International Standard Bible*, 340; Jay Sklar, *Sin, Impurity, Sacrifice, Atonement: The Priestly Conceptions* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2005), 44–45.

careful exegesis of Lev 9:7 in the context of sin or purification offering, it indicates some elements of reconciliation.

First, the wrong of the guilty party has broken the relationship with the injured. Second, the life of the ox owner is forfeited in order to compensate for the loss of the suffering party. Third, whether a כפר is accepted instead of death is up to the injured to decide. Fourth, if כפר is granted as the mitigated penalty, then the כפר functions not only to rescue the life of the guilty, but also to appease the injured. Finally, as a result, the damaged relationship is restored in peace.

These elements are reflected in the rest of this passage (vss 8–24) where כפר is described as a legitimate payment; performed by Aaron on his own behalf (vss 8–14), and on behalf of the people (vss 15–22); which is a mitigated penalty accepted by Yhwh (vss 23–24). This means Yhwh has acted as the offended party that delivers the guilty party from death, as the original punishment that the sin warranted. In this case, כפר is a price for life. Atonement therefore serves as a payment to rescue the life of the guilty and to appease the offended party, aiming at restoring peace to the disturbed relationship.

Moreover, כפר not merely means to pay the ransom, but also to purge impurity. This strongly suggests that רפכ plays an important role in the context of purification and consecration.²² The double use of piel form of כפר in Lev 9:7 may indicate that although the priest carries out the כפר rites, only God can determine the efficacy by forgiving sin. Yhwh himself has provided the sacrificial system as a means for sinners to obtain forgiveness.

²² Robert B. Girdlestone, *Synonyms of the Old Testament: Their bearing on Christian doctrine*, (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, 1998), 130.

3.8 Conclusion

The slaughtering of animals and pouring of their blood reflect the costly offerings performed by Aaron for himself and for the people and signifies the removal of impurity. This is supported by the unique language – using the two verbs pouring (יָצַק) and slaughtering (יִשְׁחַט) in all offerings.

The inclusive side of the offering is shown by the rare verbs that are unique in the language of Leviticus. For instance, both verbs בָּרַק (presented) and יָבִיאוּ (brought) are rare verbs in the Hebrew Bible and these verbs appear only here throughout the whole of Leviticus. Both verbs point to the inclusion of Aaron's sons to the purification process lead by Aaron.

Obedience plays a big role in the acceptance of the offering. Through Moses, Aaron must listen and do all these offerings as Moses commanded before Yhwh. When it comes to burnt offering, Moses must do it “according to regulations.” They both believe and have faith in what they are being told to do.

The divine acceptance of these offerings is affirmed by the presence of God through his glory (כְּבוֹד) and the people's shout of joy (רִנָּן).

As the function of atonement in sin offering is to cover sins and it refers only to God's forgiveness. So, atonement in this case is not only to rescue the life of the guilty party/sinners but also to appease the offended party.

Chapter 3

Hermeneutical Relevance

With respect to the text of Lev 9:7–24, forgiveness is a central part of a mutual relationship between God and the people of Israel. The other crucial part of these sin offerings is the obedience of the offender or the offeror. God does not accept without obedience, nor is it required of mankind. The effect of forgiveness is to restore to its former state the relationship that was broken by sin. Such a restoration requires the cooperation of both parties. There must be both a granting and an acceptance of the forgiveness.

It is widely accepted that the concerns about the adverse effects of sin on one's behaviours, has on other people, especially the poor, constitutes one of the distinctive features of the priestly or Holiness Code.¹ Drawing on this consensus, it is reflected in this paper that the Holiness Code's concern via sin offerings is reconciliation and sanctification. Likewise, the word כפר (to atone) not only means to pay the ransom, but also to purge the sin (impurity). Taking Lev 9 as part of the Priestly literature, we now focus on the value of atonement in relation to the understanding of *ifoga* in the Samoan context. In addition, this work is based on my experience of what I have witnessed and seen with my own eyes. Having said that, I want to suggest that the ability to read the Bible through my Samoan eyes will be crucial for understanding the real meaning of *ifoga*. This way of reading looks for analogies between our own cultures and those of the Bible. In fact, analogies imply both similarities and differences.

¹ Israel Knohl, *The Sanctuary of Silence: The Priestly Torah and the Holiness School* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 175–80.

4.1 The meaning of Atonement and the Role of *Ietoga*

One of the analogies in the context of *ifoga* is the connection between the use of כפר (to atone/cover) and *ietoga* (to cover). This connection suggests that כפר also plays an important role in the context of purification. The sins of the anointed priest as well as people are so serious and their negative consequences not only affect the priest himself but also the whole community that he serves. Hence, disrupting their relationship with God. כפר is then understood as the effecting of a payment on behalf of the guilty. The offended (God) agrees to accept a substitute (כפר) which is the life of the sacrifice. Although the punishment is still costly to the offender, it is much less so when compared with the deserved penalty as the consequence of sin is usually death. Like the act of *ietoga* (fine mat) as an *ufi* (cover) or *pulou ole ola* (cover of life) in the Samoan context, כפר in the context of Leviticus rescues the offeror, the guilty party from the consequence of sin as well as the whole community including the offended party.

The people usually covered with fine mats during *ifoga* between families are definitely the high chief of the family, with adults in the family gathered. But if it is a village, the paramount chief(s) and other matai of the village. However, in some *ifoga* cases, the church ministers (*faifeau* or *feagaiga*/covenant) are obscured for the sake of the guilty party as well as for the benefit of the whole community. Significantly, it can instill sympathy in the bereaved family to whom worship is being addressed, as they know with certainty that it is the elderly who are covered with fine mats and are bowing. In the view of the Samoan custom and tradition, the perpetrator could not come and bow down and be covered with fine mat. Because when that happens, the result is chaos. Because if they think and recall the memories they once shared with the victim or their loved one, the afflicted family cannot give a chance to the person who caused the tragedy which affected their family member.

A similar feeling is given in Leviticus 9. While the people of Israel commit sin, there are certain people to perform and prepare the sacrifice to atone for the people before God. The preparations for the offering for the sins of the people is not to be done by just anybody. Aaron and his sons are formally ordained to this mission, and it is their responsibility.

4.2 Costly Offering – Total Commitment

In the Samoan context, there is a lot of work and responsibility for a guilty party/family to prepare before the *ifoga* ceremony. Times, efforts, meditations as well as feelings of pressures and stresses are all counted and costly to such family. The life and the reputation of a guilty family/party is now placed on risk but it reflects such a commitment for the sake of others. Likewise, the distinctive feature that stands out in the sin offerings ceremony in Leviticus is the slaughtering of animals (innocent). The analogy of those covered by the *ietoga* is reflected when the blood of animals was brought to the altar (vv 9–10). The purpose of *ifoga*, which is an ordinance or sacrifice of atonement, is the action to save human lives, lest the afflicted family turn against it and try to avenge the death of the dead. But it is also an atonement to obtain forgiveness on both sides, and then reconciliation can be obtained.

4.3 Collective Sin

Collective sin is a notion not foreign to the Samoan society because the Samoans appreciate the communal living. We cannot assume as individuals that, even though we belong to a particular family/village, we are not implicated in the sins of that family, or that we have no responsibility for doing something about the wrongs within it. As a Samoan, one belongs to a family and cannot distant himself/herself from his/her family. When we come to *ifoga* practice, the family of the culprit which caused the accident,

including the parents, brothers and sisters, and the whole extended family prepare everything that needs to be prepared. But in the case of a village, the whole village participate and are involve in the preparations and contributions for the *ifoga* to another village. When we say the whole village, it simply means from adults to children (including all men, women and children). It is not a practice that just needs to be done and get over with, but something that people of the village needs to take into consideration its important and whole main purpose behind this special event and the sacrifice it brings. If one does wrong, the whole village feels it and is affected by it.

In the sacrifice mentioned in Leviticus, everyone is affected. As Moses called Aaron and his sons, and the elders of Israel. In addition, the sacrifice for sin was made known to all the children of Israel. It reflects the influence of all people, from Moses and Aaron to all the children of Israel. However, the offering of the sacrifice was specific to Aaron and his sons.

In Lev 9:1 Moses called Aaron and his sons, together with the Elders of the people of Israel, and then declared the commandment of God in the performance and the preparations for the offerings. After preparing all the parts and things needed, God commanded Moses to perform the offering for Aaron himself, as well as the offering for the people of Israel. Then all the prepared parts and things were brought to the front of the tabernacle of the whole congregation (Lev. 9: 5).

The practice for the Samoan *ifoga* as in ancient times, the feeling grows and develops within the family environment, between the father and his covenant, between the *matai* and his family which causes the action to be taken. But the current belief is that whenever serious problems occur within families and communities, the solution to that problem seems to have already been laid, which is the performance and the preparation of an *ifoga*. It also brings a question to my mind as to whether this was the

practice which has been laid down anciently, which is why it is being followed and carried out as of today. Even though it is not done out of a feeling that has developed to bring about forgiveness and reconciliation between the two families/communities or villages.

From a postcolonial view, sin (חטאת) or “sin offering” (חטאת) is the common element in both contexts (Leviticus and Samoan). חטאת becomes the driving force or an oppressor who oppressed the powerless Israelites in Leviticus and the guilty party in the Samoan context. Hence sin becomes an oppressor and a powerful force behind the scenes. The idea of atonement through the act of sin offering can be considered as a postcolonial approach from *ifoga* perspective to not only cover and eliminate sins but also to provide reconciliation and forgiveness for the whole community.

4.4 Offering and *Ifoga* – Public Ritual

The whole family of the guilty or culprit goes from 4am to 5am, to the bereaved or the victims’ family. The main purpose is to arrive at the place of the bereaved family while they are still asleep, so that they will not know about the time when they arrive. When they arrive on site, the *ifoga* is then performed, those who are prepared to represent the family are in the forefront. He would sit facing the house of the afflicted family and be given a mat to cover himself. While the rest of the family sits behind him or those who are bowing and are being covered.

No matter the duration or how long the victim's family wait, they cannot get up and leave, until the afflicted family responds. Also, during the practice of *ifoga*, silence is required and patience is needed.

4.5 Divine Forgiveness vs *Talia le Ifoga*

The last analogy is drawn between the scene of lifting the fine mat by the bereaved family in the Samoan context and the appearance of the glory of the Lord to all the people in Lev 9:23. *Fire came out from the Lord and consumed the burnt offering...* (Lev 9:24). This demonstrates the Lord's acceptance of the offerings. This causes the people to express vocally and by their posture ("fell on their faces" or in Samoan *ifo* or "bow"), their wholehearted worship of God. Such a posture is also reflected in the Samoan context when a possible outcome of the *ifoga* announces – the acceptance of the apology (*talia le ifoga*). This occurs when dawn arrives. The receiving party may have anticipated the *ifoga* and even prepared for it. As mentioned earlier, such a gesture is deeply moving to Samoans and always leads to reconciliation (*faaleleiga*).

To give a ringing cry of joyful praise and to *ifo* (bow) in awesome wonder at the presence of God in Leviticus reminds us the high point of worship depicted by the practice of *ifoga* as well, especially when an aggrieved family invites the supplicants into the house. That plausible outcome teaches the value of social honor in both contexts (Leviticus and Samoan).

Chapter 4

Concluding Remarks and Application

After considering the information and the evidence, it is concluded that, sin offering and *ifoga* have the same purpose and meaning for their existence. Despite the differences in the way they are being practiced, their purpose is the same. However, one of the research problems raised in this thesis, was to investigate the purification and sin offering in Lev 9:7–24 in order to articulate the theological truth and implications of forgiveness and reconciliation in relation to the Samoan ritual of *ifoga*. Therefore, all has been proved and identified.

Atonement, which is often attached to sacrifice, both of which often connect ritual cleanness with moral purity and religious acceptability. This is why Moses, Aaron and his sons made the offerings. They have sacrificed themselves and do as they are being commanded by God to stand in between the people and God, to offer reconciliation between the people and God, in order to save the people. In similarity with the practice of *ifoga*, the high chiefs of the culprit's family will be the ones to do the atonement in order to seek forgiveness from the victim's family, for the wrongdoing done by an individual. Therefore, the high chief or senior representatives from the culprit's family have taken action which aims to atone and correct the wrong doing on their part, even though it cannot undo the consequences of the act already being done, but the expression of feelings of remorse for the victim's family.

Every Christian believes and has been taught that should an act of wrong doing be made known whether it was intentional or unintentional; they should lead and be the ones to take action and made atonement with the victim's family. As it was being mentioned in Leviticus 9, so as in practice by our Samoan people in times of trouble.

Repentance and the feeling of guilt with the wrong-doing done, as seen and told in the practice of *ifoga*, bowing down (*ifo*) is a sign and a reaction of weakness, showing respect to the family being affected. However, in the offerings as mentioned in Leviticus, feeling repentant is all that matters and what God wants to see from his people. Whatever wrong they have done, feeling repentant is what makes the offering acceptable in the sight of the Lord.

However, when the person or people committing the crime know and felt repentant from their sins and wrong doings, then forgiveness will come by. The people or the family feeling remorse will have the courage and have the heart to forgive the family or person that did wrong, by accepting their offering and by uncovering the fine mat that was used during the *ifoga*, and not only that but welcoming them into their home. Therefore, forgiveness is an act of and a sign for the presence of God.

When God is present in the heart, mind and souls of the remorseful bereaved family, then reconciliation between the two sides is in place, between the family of the victim and the culprit's family. Similarly, when God accepts the offerings made by his people Israel, as shown by the fire and the burning of the offerings, for sure God and his people have been reconciling. Therefore, the most important thing of all is to reconcile and get along with each other. Because that is what God wants for his children.

The *ifoga* and Leviticus 9, teaches and reminds the EFKS people of the importance of living in harmony and fellowship among the children of God. It teaches the feeling of forgiveness and the importance of striving for reconciliation with another person as reflected in the book of Leviticus, and in our culture for the harmony of families, communities and churches. It makes the leader feel inferior and takes his role as leader to save his family, community or church from problems that arise.

The problem with violence against each other, is a major problem that church members see needs to be reduced and solved. This is one of the problems in which many lives are lost due to the lack of forgiveness and humility. The wisdom inherited from our ancestors is an important practice that Christians consider to be a solution to the problems that arise from violence. For Christians themselves, this practice is easier to accept because of the power of living by faith and trust in God. Therefore, they try to make peace and reconcile with one another so they can live in harmony.

The *ifoga* continues to provide a vehicle for reconciliation in circumstances where other means of reconciliation are unavailable and in which quick, decisive and public action is required to prevent escalation. The symbolism of the elements of the contemporary *ifoga* remain unchanged. In offering, at least symbolically, the *matai*, who represents its dignity and prestige, the *äiga* offers its most valuable “asset”: the person in whom its honour and social reputation are embodied. It has also been performed to mediate conflicts between Samoan and non-Samoan communities abroad.

Glossary

ā'isa	-	in order, divide
auaiga	-	family, kinship, extended family
augafaapae	-	sister
Afega	-	name of the village
ala i le pule	-	way to authority
alii	-	literally – highest chief
alu i lalo	-	lowering one
Atua	-	God, Lord
Atunuu tofi	-	inherited country
i'a iviivia	-	fish with many bones
ietoga	-	fine mat
ifo	-	bow down
<i>ifoga</i>	-	a traditional apology, act of reconciliation
faamaulalo	-	seeking for acceptance, yearning for peace
faamaualaloga	-	showing remorse
fala ninii	-	another traditional mat
fale	-	traditional Samoan house
feagaiga	-	covenant
leleiga	-	reconcile
mālolo	-	lowering, lose
matai	-	chief
measina a Samoa	-	heritage
moana	-	ocean

pulou	-	cover
siapo	-	tapa cloth
solī tofaga	-	going to a place while the family are asleep
ta'a	-	toss around, roam around
taulaga	-	offering, sacrifice
tautua	-	to serve
talia le <i>ifoga</i>	-	traditional apology accepted
tasi ae afe	-	one to many (another name of <i>ietoga</i>)
tamalii	-	highest chief
tane	-	male, brother
to'otū	-	a stick used to hang leftover food
va-fealoai	-	mutual respect
va tapuia	-	sacred space

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