The book of Leviticus possesses rich literature comprised of cultic texts, including laws, rituals, and even stories in regards to the Sanctuary of God. At the heart of the Pentateuch, Leviticus contains words, concepts, and procedures which are or could be reflected in the New Testament. The nature of חָרַת in the book of Leviticus and its correlations to the figure of Jesus in the New Testament is of utmost importance. The main purpose of this document is to know if this word when used in the Levitical/Torah text referring to a death beyond the natural one (i.e. Second Death), a simple alienation from the camp, or divine extirpation? If it is the former, did Jesus died this death as a correlation of the usage of the word חָרַת in Daniel 9? Finally, this document will try to determine whether the connection of terms between חָרַת and the death of Christ is possible in light of the textual evidence from the New and Old Testaments. The process to follow will be to analyze the usage of חָרַת in the Levitical text in all of its occurrences trying to decipher the closest general meaning possible. Then, it will be applied to the Sanctuary echo in the book of Daniel and analyze the parallel with Jesus Christ in the New Testament. After the analysis, this document will present the evidence found and answers to the questions previously posited.

Syntactical Analysis

The basic syntactic meaning of the word חָרַת is “cut off.”¹ In the Levitical context, it can be applied towards animals, things, and people. The latter will be the focus of this paper. The occurrences of this word in the Old Testament are around 289 occurrences. From these, 20 are found in the book of Leviticus and their application is mostly directed

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towards people. When this term is applied to individuals it is mostly in the context of failure to fulfill a command given by the Lord, whether as part of laws concerning ritual impurities, worship to other gods, or disregard of the presence of the divine in the midst of the camp. As a result, the meaning of the term is then that individuals who have committed these grievances before יְהֹוָּה are cut off/separated from the congregation. Jacob Milgrom’s commentary on Leviticus 1-16 points out that “Jewish exegesis unanimously holds that kārēt is a divine penalty but is in disagreement concerning its exact nature.” In the book, Milgrom discusses the different possibilities of כָּרַת as divine punishment coming to the two most plausible one’s to be the extirpation of the perpetrator by a divine death decree/divine execution or the non-allowance to the heavenly realm as a punishment from יְהֹוָּה. Milgrom, furthermore, points out that while כָּרַת is not found in examples, such as Nadab and Abihu’s story or Korah’s rebellion, there are semantic synonyms and correlations between those texts in order to substantiate “cutting off” as extirpation from the congregation through divine death penalty, which also results those individual’s offspring termination. Thus, let us analyze these examples first.

Exegetical Analysis

The Nadab and Abihu story in the book of Leviticus could propel one to think that the meaning of the word is direct extirpation of the offender as well as of their offspring when commands from the Lord are directly disregarded. The scriptures do indicate that

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Nadab and Abihu did not have any offspring. \(^4\) However, it is not explicitly mentioned that the reason why they were childless is because of the extirpation on Leviticus 10. Death penalty by divine action is evident in this example as fire comes down from heaven, but the lack of recognition of why the descendants were non-existent leaves us without a concrete answer.

Moreover, the Korahite rebellion in Numbers 16 would seem to point towards total destruction of descendants as the text states that “so they and \textit{all} that belonged to them went down alive into Sheol, and the earth closed over them, and they perished from the midst of the assembly” \(^6\) (emphasis mine). However, later in the book \(^7\), we find that the sons of Korah are spared from the destruction and permitted to live. Not only that, but they become of great importance later in the Israelite kingdom to the point of writing some profound parts of the Canon. Therefore, these two Torah parallels to the concept of “cutting off” do not completely verify the meaning of כָּרַת as extirpation of the individual’s line of offspring, but seem to point towards extirpation at the individual level in conjunction with those who adhere to individual’s rebellion.

Another instance in the Old Testament that points towards the punishment at the individual level is found in Malachi 3. The passage emphasizes that if the priests disobey, they will be eradicated (“taken away”) and their offspring will be corrupted/rebuked.

\(^4\) Unless otherwise indicated, all references have been taken from The Holy Bible: English Standard Version Containing the Old and New Testaments: ESV. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007.

\(^5\) 1 Chronicles 24:2

\(^6\) Numbers 16:33

\(^7\) Numbers 16:29
Here the household is corrupted, but there is no clear indication that they are “taken away” with the priest who dishonors יהוה. As an important detail, Milgrom points out that this passage is parallel to Hittite texts and contains identical language to those references, which leads to believe that the practice was common among nations in the Ancient Near East’s deities (see below).  

The propositions found in Milgrom’s commentary seem to be in accordance with a basic understanding of the biblical data found in the book of Leviticus and the Torah. However, cutting off the descendant’s line as means of כָּרַת is not substantiated explicitly or implicitly in the canon as the sole meaning of כָּרַת. Rather, in at least one of the stories, the family of the individual extirpated survives. In the light of the analysis of the biblical narratives and propositions from Milgrom’s commentary, the position this paper takes is that the term כָּרַת is simply used in the Levitical/Torah context as a means to signify the separation of the individual from God because of his/her rebellion, covenant breaking or defiance against God and His appointed people. This separation does not directly impact his/her line of descendants, but does signify the losing of afterlife for the individual and the one’s he represents as a punishment for rebellion (see below). Moreover, the separation is not in regards to the life of the individual through divine extirpation, but through either natural death, as an outcome of their separation from the camp, or death by the hands of the congregation as shown in other Levitical passages.

At this juncture, it is important to notice that the cutting off of people is not dependent with their function among the congregation. Either priests (Leviticus 7) or individuals (Leviticus 19) from the congregation can be cut off from the camp.

emphasizing that God does not make exceptions in accordance with the position held by anyone. This finding is important in correlation to one of the sub-questions of this paper in regards to Christ, as a proposition that even the divine-human being could have been separated from God if He disregarded any of the commands from the Lord.

The second proposition, that one can lose the afterlife as a means of punishment from the divine is more plausible in the light of the biblical text. For example, in Leviticus 20, the man who worship’s Molech by means of infant sacrifice will be put to death and כָּרַת will be executed by God. As Milgrom points out, the כָּרַת and the death are not synonymous in this passage, but rather the congregation puts the idolater to death and יְהֹוָּה executes כָּרַת. Moreover, Leviticus 23 provides important evidence regarding the cutting off during the Day of Atonement. The text reads in verse 29 “For whoever is not afflicted on that very day shall be cut off from his people.” There seems to be no indication of immediate death. However, one knows that if the individual does not participate of the cleansing during this day, that person does not receive atonement for his/her sins, signifying the loss of the afterlife. In the same manner, the parallel is made in the New Testament when one does not receive Christ as Saviour before the closing of probation in the book of Revelation.

There is a nuance throughout these passages that must be considered. Cutting off could refer to excommunication from the congregation. There is no indubitable evidence in the Old Testament that כָּרַת must be effectuated immediately. Therefore, כָּרַת could have signified the losing of privileges of being in the congregation as part of the

9 Ibid.

first phase of כָּרַת, which will end in the lack of atonement and possible secondary life for any individual, completing a second phase.

Milgrom’s analysis of the כָּרַת as separated from death and parallels from Revelation’s close of probation with the Day of Atonement aid towards an understanding to the proposition of two phases of כָּרַת: (1) death of the individual either through means of natural death or human execution and (2) כָּרַת as divine punishment/loss of a second life. It is important to point that the decree of כָּרַת comes from יְהֹוָּה, thus the death of the individual is only a phase before losing the participation in heavenly places by means of resurrection. There seems to be no remediation for the decree in the same manner that after the close of probation no one can change their decision towards salvation. The death of the individual and his/her fate are decreed by the deity as a result of that person’s rebellion against יְהֹוָּה’s ordinances.

Another area of importance in regards to the כָּרַת understanding is the manner of “cutting off” in other Ancient Near Eastern civilizations. Ancient Near East parallels, such as Egypt’s or Mesopotamian accounts differ greatly on the manner of loss of a second life. In Egypt, eradication of the name results in the losing of any afterlife possibility for the individual.\(^{11}\) However, this is not done by the deity, but usually by the desecration of a tomb from a human agent, such as in Amasis II’s case.\(^{12}\) In Mesopotamia’s tradition humans get to participate of a second life through the life as a

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spirit (gidim/אֶתְמָמוּ) until they arrive to the netherworld. They can be “cut off” from the divine realm if the proper procedures were not carried out by human agents, such as proper mourning and burial.

These examples from Ancient Near Eastern religions show that the losing of afterlife is not directly connected to a deity’s decree, but they can be affected by human agents, while at Israel יְהֹוָּה’s command of כָּרַת is the only one that determines what will happen after death. Important to note is that the Egyptian and Mesopotamian cutting off is for the individual and does not involve the family or household, which attests against the first theory aforementioned. The idea that the cutting off is affecting only the individual’s afterlife, rather than the collective (e.g. his household) aid towards the Levitical understanding of כָּרַת. In the Torah example of Leviticus 20, the only way in which the household is put to death is if they are part of those who “follow him in whoring after Molech.” Therefore, it follows that it becomes an individual’s decision to defy יְהֹוָּה or not, which results in Him losing his life by means of כָּרַת punishment.

The view that כָּרַת is more intense than losing carnal life seems to be stronger than just mortal extirpation or separation from the camp. Moreover, the individual’s line of descendants does not need to be punished as means of כָּרַת, since it only applies when they participate of the violations. However, whether this is the case for the Messiah in the

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14 Ibid.

15 Leviticus 20:5
New Testament remains to be tested by Scripture. We turn now to this part of the investigation.

Inter-textual Analysis

The book of Daniel reveals that the Messiah will be cut off after the sixty-two weeks.\textsuperscript{16} Moreover, the New Testament verifies that the Messiah, Jesus Christ, was put to death, which fulfills the prophecy of the book of Daniel from the stance that כָּרַת signifies death. However, the cutting off referring here seems to be temporary given that the canon reveals Jesus resurrected on the first day of the week after His death, Easter Sunday. The phases of כָּרַת could be applied here as evidence why Jesus does not remain in the grave. One reason is that He was not liable to death by כָּרַת as He did not offend or violated the law. In order to be liable for כָּרַת, one had to defy the ordinances from God. There are nineteen offenses of “cutting off” in the Old Testament which are spread out through different categories, such as “violation of holy days (including the Sabbath), committing moral offenses, violating purity laws such as eating the blood, and failure to circumcise on the eight day.”\textsuperscript{17} Jesus, scripture points out, was “without sin.” Therefore, he did not commit any violation before יהוה that merited כָּרַת. This finding seems to point towards Jesus not incurring in a death beyond the mortal one, given that He did not remain on the

\textsuperscript{16} This document upholds that the 70-week period spoken in the book of Daniel starts in 457 B.C. and its fulfillment at the 69\textsuperscript{nd} week and \( \frac{1}{2} \) perfectly matches the death of Christ as recorded in the New Testament. See Jacques Doukhan, Secrets of Daniel: Wisdom and Dreams of a Jewish Prince in Exile (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Pub. Association, 2000), 12. and Frank B. Holbrook, ed., Symposium on Daniel (Biblical Research Institute, 1986).

grave to partake of the damnation in the final day. However, how can one be sure of this without clear evidence from biblical data which is at large lacunae from Scripture.

One explanation for this conundrum can be a comparison of כָּרַת in the Old Testament and the death of Christ. If one recalls the worshipper of Molech in Leviticus 20, he died a death by the hands of the people and then received the כָּרַת punishment from God. This כָּרַת declaration came as an ordinance from יְהֹוָּה, but the worshiper was put to death by the congregation and then כָּרַת was effective. The two phases seem to be in play. First, the death of the individual and כָּרַת punishment from YHWH following that. It is possible that in the same manner the first phase of כָּרַת applies to Jesus, temporarily, as part of Him becoming our sin, but the second part in regards to the losing of afterlife, which is the second death, does not apply to Him, given His sinlessness. Moreover, the first part is also non-effective given that He did not deserve to die our death.

Another way to understand the reason why כָּרַת only applies in the first phase is because of New Testament texts explaining the process of death and judgment. Jesus’ statements in regards to death point out that it is no more than mere sleep\(^\text{18}^\). If those who die did not accept the sacrifice of the saviour as means of atonement, then they are resurrected to a judgment of condemnation, rather to receive life. Paul further expositions this understanding in his discussion of death and resurrection in 1 Thessalonians 4. Furthermore, Paul speaks about the way in which we are baptized resembles the death and resurrection of Christ. He pens in Romans 6:3-4 “Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead

\(^{18}\) John 11
by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.” If כָּרַת was applied to Jesus as loss of afterlife, how is it possible to resurrect into newness of life if the Scripture’s themselves show that there is no resurrection from the second death. While there is no denial that God could do anything that He desires, there seems to be a degree of inconsistency if He allowed someone to raise from the place where there is no resurrection.

Some further explanation to the phenomenon of כָּרַת in Jesus’ life is that the יְהֹוָּה could pardon כָּרַת. One example of this is found in 2 Chronicles 30. The text mentions that a great majority of the people had eaten of the Passover without proper cleansing. According to the Sanctuary rules, כָּרַת was to be effected upon those who do not properly cleanse themselves before partaking of the Passover. However, in this instance, Hezekiah prays for them as means of intercession and the Lord cleans them and pardons their offense. If the Lord is willing in this case to pardon individuals who have committed a break of His covenant, then how much more He would not apply the כָּרַת punishment upon Jesus and those who are hidden in Him.

Inter-textual Alternative Views Analysis

If כָּרַת is tied to divine direct extirpation or it is regarded as loss of offspring some issues arise in Old Testament examples and Jesus’ death. For example, in Exodus 9 there seems to be an indication of the sinner bearing the consequences of sin, even during the Passover. Moreover, in Numbers 15, the Sabbath violator is stoned by the people and not יְהֹוָּה. Leviticus 20 (see above) also presents that the congregation is in charge of the death of the individual and not the divine. The only way in which there will be divine death imposed is if the congregation is reluctant to put the perpetrator to death. These examples
help us to see that כָּרַת is not strongly tied to the idea of God killing the individual, but to something deeper than that after his/her death. כָּרַת as divine direct extirpation does not seem to be supported by the texts relating the word, thus this theory has less weight than “cutting off” as no life after death.

Moreover, the theory of כָּרַת as means of loss of offspring is also not substantiated by Scripture. An individual who does not have a household and violates the ordinances of God would definitely not be able to have an offspring. However, for those who have household, their family is not liable on the punishment of the perpetrator. This would be in accordance with יְהֹוָּה respecting the individual decisions of His people. One example for this is Numbers 16 (see above). Furthermore, none of the texts indicating cutting off in the Torah show that the household must be extirpated in conjunction with the rebel. In Jesus’ death, if כָּרַת, as part of Daniel 9, signifies that there are no descendants, it would eliminate us as children of God and unable to partake of the blessings of His death. Therefore, it does not seem plausible to accept כָּרַת as no line of offspring.

Conclusion

The importance of כָּרַת is not only effectual in the Old Testament, but also in the death of our Saviour. This analysis has attempted to answer whether כָּרַת means direct divine extirpation, separation from the camp, or loss of offspring in the Levitical/Torah context. It is explained here that כָּרַת does not seem to be either divine direct extirpation, nor loss of offspring, but separation from the camp. The means of separation may be either through excommunication, death by the congregation, or divine execution as last resort in case the congregation does not put to death the perpetrator. This separation is not referring to the individual’s death, but the loss of eternal life (e.g. second death).
Furthermore, in the example of Jesus’ death as a fulfillment of Daniel 9, He does not seem to be liable for כָּרַת because of His sinlessness. Also, Jesus is not partaking of the divine declared כָּרַת, loss of afterlife, but He does incur in death, although temporarily. The reason why His death is temporary is because He did not sin. Therefore, He is not liable to die, nor be separated from God. All in all, כָּרַת seems to be the loss of participation in the heavenly places. The process of כָּרַת is twofold: (1) the loss of life of the individual either by means of natural death or execution and (2) divine כָּרַת taking away the possibility of eternal life. Therefore, one must keep in mind the process and apply it to the different cases in order to arrive to a consistent answer in both the Old and New Testaments.

Introduction → Research question (1 sentence)
   Sub-questions
   Methodology

   1. 1 sentence questions
   2. Unpack those here
   3. Finalize

Conclusion → Remind of Research question
   Summarize conclusion to sub-questions
   Overall answer
   Implications