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The Goat for Azazel

16: 20-22

The goat for Azazel DIG: How and why were the sins of Isra'el transferred to the goat? In what way did the goat for Azazel function like the second bird in the leper's purification ceremony? Why did the tradition of pushing the goat over a high cliff come about?

REFLECT: What is your favorite "scapegoat" when things go wrong? By establishing this process for ancient Isra'el to be reconciled with YHVH, what does that tell you about His yearning for a right relationship with us? What can you do this week to make that happen?

Upon that goat the high priest laid all the wickedness, rebellion and sins of the people of Isra'el.



Following the blood rituals (**to see link click [Cu](#) - The Blood of the Bull and Goat**), **the high priest** turned **his** attention to the remaining **goat** designed **for Azazel**, or sometimes called the "**scapegoat**." When someone blames an innocent party for a wrongdoing, the accused person is **the scapegoat**. The false culprit takes the blame and punishment for the **sin** committed. **When he has finished atoning for the Holy Place, the tent of meeting and the altar, he is to present the live goat. He laid his hands on the head of that goat** and confessed for **Isra'el**, not **his own sins** or those of **the priesthood**. Those would

be atoned for by the blood offering by fire outside the camp (see [Cw - The Cleanser Must be Made Clean](#)). **The scapegoat atoned for the people only, not the priesthood. Aaron is to lay both his hands on the head of the live goat and confess over it all the transgressions, crimes and sins of the people of Isra'el (see Psalm 65:4). The people responded in like manner to the pronounced name of YHVH, prostrating themselves and proclaiming, "Blessed be the Name of His Glorious Kingdom forever and ever" (Yoma 6.2). Upon that goat he laid all the wickedness, rebellion and sins of the people of Isra'el. In that way he transferred the people's sins to the head of the goat. Then a man specifically chosen for the task would release the goat into the wilderness (16:20-21).**

The goat for Azazel will bear all their sins away to some remote place, and (at least in the second Temple period) an appointed man shall release it into the wilderness (16:22 NIV). The live goat functions in the same way as the live bird did in the purification of the leper. You may recall from the comments made on [Leviticus 14](#) (see [Ch - The Initial Procedures for Cleansing Leprosy](#)) that **two birds were used in that purification ritual. The first was offered as a purification offering, the blood of which was sprinkled on **the leper** to be purified seven times. Then **the live bird** was released. That symbolized something of an ancient "exorcism." Rather than exorcizing demons, though, the ritual was meant to remove **the Levitical uncleanness** left behind by the leprosy. **The live bird** was released to carry away **the impurity** (see [Cp - The Purity Issue](#)).**

The two goats on **the Day of Atonement** service functioned in an almost identical fashion. The first was offered as a purification offering and its blood was sprinkled in seven-fold applications to remove **the impurity of Isra'el** from the Sanctuary. Then **the uncleanness (the wickedness, rebellion and sins) of Isra'el** was transferred by **the laying on of hands to the second goat, and released into the wilderness**. As with **the bird** ritual, the direction of **the goat** ritual is suggestive of exorcism. The association with **the Jewish concept of** the spirit of **Azazel** being **a demon** only adds to that impression. Yet it is not demons that are being exorcized, it was **the wickedness, rebellion and sins of Isra'el**.

The character of Azazel as a fallen angel is found in the apocryphal book of Enoch, which is not part of the Bible. Those books are accepted by the Roman Catholic church and the Eastern Orthodox church, but Protestant denominations disregard them from the canon of Scripture. **In the book of Enoch, Azazel is a leader of other fallen angels and responsible for evil in the world. He has led so much destruction that the book Enoch encourages Jewish readers to ascribe sin to him. This idea is related to the scapegoat as mentioned above and could be the reason "scapegoat" is translated as**

Azazel in some translations of the Bible. The term Azazel is highly debated, but can be identified as another name of Satan. The Azazel goat of Leviticus is sent into the wilderness, representing the people sending their sins back into the deserted wilderness, representing the people sending their sins back to the place they came from. In both the Bible and Apocrypha, we find Azazel far from the people of Isra'el and the ways of ADONAI. Therefore, it was not demons that were being exorcized, it was the wickedness, rebellion and sins of Isra'el.

According to the Oral Law (see the commentary on [The Life of Christ Ei - The Oral Law](#)) **the goat was taken out to a high cliff and then thrust over the edge.** We cannot help but wonder about that innovation of tradition. The Torah says nothing about killing **the goat**. Rather it was to be **released into the wilderness.** Those who know **goats** will understand the necessity of the violent end. **Goats** are especially hungry animals. A **goat released into the wilderness** will most likely follow you back. Imagine the dismay of the worshippers in the Temple. As they celebrated the successful atonement of the Sanctuary and **the nation**, suddenly **the goat for Azazel** was seen wandering back into **their** midst! Oh no! This can't be! It was better to make sure **the goat** didn't come back.²⁸⁶

Interestingly, **the Mishnah also records that the two goats were differentiated by the means of a scarlet thread.** **The high priest tied a scarlet thread on the head of the goat which was to be sent out into the wilderness, and turned it around (with its back to the Sanctuary) to face the way it would be sent out (Yoma 4.2).** Another **scarlet thread** was tied to the gate of the Tabernacle or the door of the Temple. Jewish tradition records that when **the goat died in the wilderness, the scarlet thread that was tied to the Temple gate turned white.** When Isra'el saw this, they knew that **YHVH had accepted their sacrifices and all their sins had been forgiven.** This may be why the prophet **Isaiah** said, **"Come now, let's settle this," says the LORD. "Though your sins are like scarlet, I will make them as white as snow. Though they are red like scarlet, I will make them as white as wool (Isaiah 1:18).** But around the time of **Messiah's death, it was reported that the scarlet thread on the door of the Temple stopped turning white. "For forty years before the destruction of the Temple the scarlet thread never turned white again but remained red"** (Rosh HaShanah 31b, Babylonian Talmud, Soncino Press Edition).

In **the Day of Atonement** ceremony the first **goat** pictures the means for **atonement** (see [Cu - The Blood of the Bull and Goat](#)), the shedding of blood in the sacrificial death. **The scapegoat** pictures the effect of **the atonement**, the removal of guilt. What is accomplished in **the scapegoat** ritual is expressed by **David** in the Psalms: **As far as the**

east is from the west so far has He removed our transgressions from us (Psalm 103:12). Both of these aspects of this special day have their fulfillment in the sacrifice of **Yeshua Messiah** on the cross. **The Lord's** sacrifice there would be the end of **Azazel**; from that time on, only **Messiah's** blood could cover **sins**. **The scapegoat** ritual may also have been in **Isaiah's** mind when **he** describe the suffering of **the Suffering Servant as bearing the griefs and sins (Isaiah 53:4 and 12).**²⁸⁷

*Dear Heavenly **Father**, Praise **You** for willingly being both **the scapegoat** and the **goat** that died; for **You** both **atoned** for our **sin** and **You** were a picture of the effect of the atonement - the removal of guilt far away. Thank **You** for **Your** pure and holy love that is so very deep that **You** willingly took on **Yourself** the painful sacrifice as **the Lamb of God** so that those **You** created could be given **Your righteousness** and so be holy enough to enter **Your** holy heaven. **He made the One who knew no sin to become a sin offering on our behalf, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God (Romans 5:21).***

*Praise **Your** deep love that nothing can separate us from. **For I am convinced that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Messiah Yeshua our Lord Romans 8:38-39).** We love **You** and want to live our lives thanking **You!** In **Yeshua's** holy name and power of **His** resurrection. Amen*