

# The Day of Atonement

## Does the Azazel Goat Represent Jesus or Satan?

Most of the Churches of God teach that the Azazel goat on Atonement is a “scapegoat” picturing Satan being cast out, taking our sins with him.

Does Leviticus 16 really support this teaching?

Does this teaching make spiritual sense?

Let us study the Bible and let the inspired scriptures supply the answers.

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All quotes, except as noted, are from *The New Kings James Version of the Bible*

We read in Leviticus 16 that two goats were to be chosen. Aaron was to cast lots and one goat was to be sacrificed while the other was to be the “scapegoat.” It has been taught by most of the Churches of God that this scapegoat represents Satan and his removal at the beginning of the Millennium. Articles written about Leviticus 16 and Azazel quote non-Biblical sources to “prove” that Azazel in Jewish and Arabic literature refers to an evil demon. They then go to great lengths to talk about how Satan has deceived humanity and will be bound in the bottomless pit after the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. However, they quote no scriptures nor give any Biblical proof that this is what Azazel actually pictures. Let us read the scriptures and see what the Bible has to say about what Azazel truly represents. We’ll begin by reading key verses in Leviticus 16.

### One Sin Offering

There are several sacrifices and atonements made on the Day of Atonement as described in Leviticus 16. The High Priest, Aaron in this case, first had to offer a young bull as a sin offering for himself and his family before he was allowed to enter the Holy of Holies. In addition, he had to offer a ram as a burnt offering. In this process, he was also to choose two goats from the congregation. **These goats were to be identical and without blemish.** Since these goats were to be indistinguishable from one another, according to Jewish tradition, the High Priest would tie a scarlet thread around the neck of the Azazel goat as chosen by lot.

Leviticus 16:5a And he shall take from the congregation of the children of Israel two kids of the goats as a sin offering, ...

Note that while two kids of the goats, plural, were to be chosen, both goats were considered as a single sin offering. Read that again. We’ll discuss this in more detail later. Let us continue a few verses later.

### **Presented Alive to Make Atonement**

Leviticus 16:7-10 He shall take the two goats and present them before the Lord *at* the door of the tabernacle of meeting. Then Aaron shall cast lots for the two goats: one lot for the Lord and the other lot for the scapegoat. And Aaron shall bring the goat on which the Lord’s lot fell, and offer it as a sin offering. But the goat on which the lot fell to be the scapegoat shall be presented alive before the Lord, to make atonement upon it, *and* to let it go as the scapegoat into the wilderness.

The key verse with several critical points is verse 10.

Point 1 The scapegoat was to be presented alive before the Lord.

Point 2 The most important point of this discussion: “to make **atonement** upon it.”

Before we move on to the third point, let us ask a few questions. Is Satan ever presented alive before the Lord for any purpose of our salvation? **More importantly, can Satan make an atonement for our sins?** The answer to these questions should be obvious. This alone should show that the scapegoat does not represent Satan being put away at the beginning of the Millennium.

**Satan can never be an atonement for the sins of humankind.**

However, let us continue to examine this important topic.

## **Entire Removal and Separation from Sin**

Point 3 Let us examine the word “Azazel.” What does Azazel mean? There may have been a desert place with this name and there may have been a demon-god of that name. But, what came first? The Leviticus 16 ritual of Azazel or the naming of a desert place and demon-god? The root Hebrew word translated Azazel means “separation.” The word translated Azazel is used only three times in the Bible, all in Leviticus 16.

In the context of this chapter, **the best understanding for Azazel is “the complete separation,” or “the entire removal” of sin.** Hence, the term “scapegoat” or as we might say in modern English, escape goat.

According to the Jewish Encyclopedia, this goat represented the complete removal of Israel’s sins on the Day of Atonement. In our Christian belief, how and by whom are our sins completely removed from us?

## **Confession and Bearing Sin**

Let us consider a few more important points in verses 20 through 22.

Leviticus 16:20-22 And when he has made an end of atoning for the Holy *Place*, the tabernacle of meeting, and the altar, he shall bring the live goat. Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goat, confess over it all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions, concerning all their sins, putting them on the head of the goat, and shall send *it* away into the wilderness by the hand of a suitable man. The goat shall bear on itself all their iniquities to an uninhabited land; and he shall release the goat in the wilderness.

Note the phrase, “confess over it all the iniquities of the children of Israel.” Whom do we confess our sins to? Why would anyone think Azazel represents Satan when the scapegoat is used to represent the confession of sins?

## **A Living Savior**

There is no salvation with a dead savior. Note the next two scriptures from Romans and Corinthians.

Romans 5:10 For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.

1 Corinthians 15:17 And if Christ is not risen, your faith *is* futile; you are still in your sins!

## Removing and Forgetting Sin

Earlier, the statement was made that while two goats were chosen, they represented **one sin offering**. Jesus died for our sins. However, He was resurrected as our Living Savior now sitting at the right hand of God our Father. How do you represent that with one animal? In this physical world, you can't. God is not going to resurrect and bring back to life a sacrificed goat every Day of Atonement in Old Testament times.

**Therefore, two goats were chosen to represent both the forgiveness of our sins through the death of Jesus Christ and the complete removal of our sins through the resurrected life of our Living Savior Jesus Christ.**

Remember, these goats are just prototype symbols of the atonement Jesus would make for all humankind. We must understand the symbolic meaning of the confessing of sins over the live goat that was then released into the wilderness. The following scriptures provides a good answer to that symbolic meaning.

Psalm 103:12 As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us.

Isaiah 43:25 I, *even I, am* He who blots out your transgressions for My own sake; And I will not remember your sins.

John 1:29 The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"

## Who Bears Our Sins?

Next, let us emphasize the phrase in Leviticus 16:22, "The goat shall bear on itself all their iniquities..." Who has borne our sins? Upon whom does our Father lay our iniquity?

**Only Jesus bore our sins with His suffering, shed blood, and death.**

Isaiah 53:4-6 Surely He has borne our griefs And carried our sorrows; Yet we esteemed Him stricken, Smitten by God, and afflicted. But He *was* wounded for our transgressions, *He was* bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace *was* upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

Isaiah 53:11 He shall see the labor of His soul, *and* be satisfied. By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many, For He shall bear their iniquities.

Hebrews 9:28a So Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many.

1 Peter 2:24 who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed.

## The Scarlet Thread

According to the *Talmud*, the Jewish sacred writings second only in importance to the *Tanach* (the Jewish name for the Old Testament), the sacrificial animal that had a scarlet cord tied around its neck, the scarlet thread turned white when God had accepted atonement for the people. This miracle occurred nearly every year for around 1500 years. However, it did not occur again from the year Jesus was crucified until the last Atonement before the Temple was destroyed and all Temple worship ceased. (*Talmud yoma 39a*)

### Sacrificed and Living Birds for Leprosy

Leviticus 14:1-7 Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, "This shall be the law of the leper for the day of his cleansing: He shall be brought to the priest. And the priest shall go out of the camp, and the priest shall examine *him*; and indeed, *if* the leprosy is healed in the leper, then the priest shall command to take for him who is to be cleansed two living *and* clean birds, cedar wood, scarlet, and hyssop. And the priest shall command that one of the birds be killed in an earthen vessel over running water. As for the living bird, he shall take it, the cedar wood and the scarlet and the hyssop, and dip them and the living bird in the blood of the bird *that was* killed over the running water. And he shall sprinkle it seven times on him who is to be cleansed from the leprosy, and shall pronounce him clean, and shall let the living bird loose in the open field.

We see from the above scripture that God also uses the procedure of sacrificing one animal, a bird in this case, and letting a second bird go free to pronounce a leper as clean. The Day of Atonement is not the only such example. Would we ascribe the living bird as representing Satan in the above scripture?

### Holy Days Picture God's Plan of Salvation

We all know the seven feast and holy days picture God's Plan of Salvation. Passover pictures the crucifixion of Jesus for the forgiveness of sin. The Days of Unleavened Bread picture the putting out of sin from our lives. Pentecost pictures the coming of the Holy Spirit that gives us the ability to obey the spirit of the law and enjoy the fruits of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Trumpets pictures end-time events, the Second Coming of Jesus Christ and the First Resurrection. Atonement pictures the cleansing of the place of worship so we can have an at-one relationship with God. The Feast of Tabernacles pictures the Millennium. The Eight Day pictures salvation for everyone who never had a chance to understand Jesus in their first lifetime.

**What part does Satan play in bringing God's Salvation to humanity? None!**

He doesn't play any such a part. Satan is a hindrance to God's Plan of Salvation. Is Satan real? Of course he is. Do any of the Feasts and Holy Days represent Satan's hindrance to God's Plan of Salvation? I think not. All of the Holy Days represent the positive process of God's Plan of Salvation.

### Summary

The two identical goats were considered as a single atonement for the forgiveness and removal of sins from Israel and their place of worship. Is Jesus or Satan our atonement and Living Savior? The High Priest confessed the sins of Israel over the Azazel goat, transferring those sins to the Azazel goat. Whom do we confess our sins to, Jesus or Satan? Who bears our sins, Jesus or Satan? Azazel in the Hebrew means a complete separation. Who separates us from our sins and carries them away from us, Jesus or Satan?

We confess our sins to God the Father. He forgives them by the shed blood of His Son and our Savior Jesus Christ. Jesus said He and the Father were One. Two God beings, One God family.

Does Satan exist? Yes he does. Will Satan be bound and chained in the bottomless pit at the Second Coming of Jesus Christ? Yes he will. Will there be less sin and turmoil in world without Satan and his demons during the Millennium. Definitely.

However, the question before us today is, is this what the Azazel goat represents? We've quoted the scriptures.

**The scriptures say that only Jesus is our atonement. Our sins are confessed to and transferred only to Jesus. Only Jesus bore our sins. Only Jesus can separate us from our sins, carrying them away from us as far as the east is from the west. Jesus is our Eternal Living Savior.**

**This is what the Azazel goat represents.**

## **Conclusion – Who is Your Authority?**

We are to grow in grace and knowledge (2 Peter 3:18), but without changing the core doctrines as originally taught in the Church of God. We still keep the Day of Atonement with fasting. However, we now understand it is to be a group fast, a day of group repentance and the cleansing of the place of worship. Those who want to cling to the interpretation that the Azazel goat pictures Satan being bound in the bottomless pit at the beginning of the Millennium ignore the scriptures where the Bible provides the correct explanation. What will you look to for the answers to what the Azazel goat represents? The traditions of men or the inspired scriptures?