

The Two Goats of Leviticus 16: What Do They Represent?

The instructions for the Israelites regarding the Day of Atonement in Leviticus 16 involve a number of detailed activities for the Levitical priests and the high priest, Aaron. Among these activities were the sacrifice of a young bull for a sin offering, the sacrifice of a ram for a burnt offering, and the dressing of Aaron in white linen from head to toe. He was to wash himself several times during the ceremonies, and enter the Holy of Holies to offer incense and blood. No one else was to enter the Holy of Holies except himself, as high priest, and then only once a year on that day.

Besides the various offerings for Aaron and his household, two identical goat kids from among the tribes of Israel were brought to the priests, and lots were cast to determine which one was to represent the Lord, and which was the scapegoat (Azazel). The goat representing the Lord was then offered as a sin offering, while the scapegoat was presented alive before the Lord to make an atonement with Him.

Aaron laid both hands on the goat's head to symbolically place the sins of Israel on it, and then the goat was sent out by a man to a wilderness area and left there. The scenario of the scapegoat is given below (Leviticus 16:20-22).

"And when he [Aaron] has made an end of reconciling the holy place, and the tabernacle of the congregation, and the altar, he shall bring the live goat; and Aaron shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat and confess over him all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions in all their sins, putting them

upon the head of the goat, and send him away by the hand of a fit man into the wilderness. And the goat shall bear upon him all their iniquities unto a land not inhabited, and he shall let the goat go in the wilderness."

Many Bible students believe that both of these goats represent Jesus Christ. Undoubtedly the first goat does indeed represent Him, for the lot ... *"for the Lord ..."* (Leviticus 16:8) fell upon him. The Hebrew word for Lord here is *Yehovah* (or *Yahweh*), the Tetragrammaton meaning "the self-existent or eternal One". The sacrifice of this goat symbolized the spilled blood of Jesus Christ, His atoning blood sacrifice as pictured by the many other sacrifices and offerings in Scriptures, for *"... almost all things are by the law purged with blood, and without shedding of blood is no remission"* (Hebrews 9:22).

The treatment of the scapegoat, however, does not paint a picture of Jesus Christ in the same way as the first goat, if it pictures our Saviour at all. Let us entertain some questions regarding the resolution of this issue.

1. Why would God select two identical goats to represent the same deity — Jesus Christ — and then clearly identify one of them as Him (Yahweh) while not so identifying the other one as Him? Would He not indicate that the second one would represent Yahweh as the first one?

2. Why were two goats necessary for this sacrifice, both of which were sin offerings (Leviticus 16:5), if all of the sins of Israel were



symbolically removed through the first goat which obviously represented Jesus Christ? Would not all of the sins of the nation have been removed by the first sin offering?

Thus, the second goat would have had to represent some other being, something parallel to Christ. Would not that be Satan himself, the one who tempted Eve and deceived her to partake of the forbidden fruit ... who then gave of it to Adam, thus insuring that they and those of all generations thereafter would die (Genesis 3:1-13), thus giving him the perverted idea that he could reclaim kingship over the entire earth?

He has striven through deception and murder, thievery and lies, while influencing political leaders and all of mankind to foment a worldwide government based upon his ways, attempting to replace the prophesied government of the Messiah. It is this sinful character that is placed on the head of the second goat and brought into a wilderness place to show how Satan, responsible for the deception into sin of all people, will be put away for 1,000 years, unable to tempt mankind (Revelation 20:1-3).

3. Why were the sins of the House of Israel placed on the head of the scapegoat (Hebrew *azazel*, or "goat of departure") if the head of Christ was perfect and sinless? Does not the placing of the sins upon this goat indicate *responsibility* for the sins? The sins were committed by the people of Israel — indeed, by the people of all nations, for as Jeremiah 17:9 states, "*The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?*", and David related in Psalm 51:5, "*Behold, I was shaped in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me*" — but the responsible party for deceiving mankind into sinning was none other than Satan himself in the Garden of Eden. We read in Genesis 3:1-7 that the *serpent* [Hebrew *nachash*, "to hiss or whisper", but in its et-

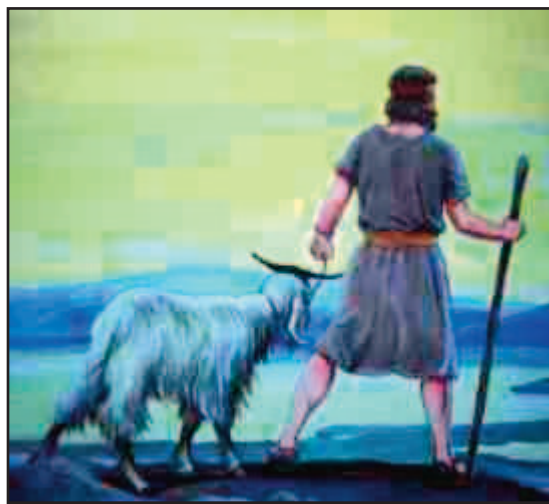
ymology "the bright and shining one"] beguiled Eve so she ate fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, and Adam ate of it also when Eve presented it to him.

This is the moment in the history of the present aeon that sin entered the world. It was introduced by the arch-enemy of Christ, Satan, the *nachash*, a Son of God (Job 1:6; 2:1) who very likely ruled a civilization on earth before mankind came on the scene ... in a world covered with flood waters (Genesis 1:2). Did God wipe away that sinful, corrupt civilization in a great flood, similar to the way He did in the days of Noah? We have the evidence that Lucifer (Satan) rebelled and sinned in Ezekiel 28:13-18, and we also know that Satan is the "god of this age" (II Corinthians 4:4; Ephesians 2:2) who, like Saul after David was anointed

king over Israel, refuses to give up rulership over the world. He has used every cunning trick possible to replace Jesus Christ, another Son of God, as king over the nations on earth. This rivalry is so clearly expressed in the temptation in the wilderness, when Jesus defeated Satan's ploys to reclaim rulership and depose the anointed King appointed by the Father

(Matthew 4:1-11; Mark 1:12-13; Luke 4:1-13).

Who is responsible for sin within the race of mankind? This responsibility goes back to the one who originated it, Satan the devil. Adam and Eve began as sinless and perfect, but since Satan's deception sin has become "imprinted," as it were, upon every person who has ever been born of woman since that time, with the exception of Jesus Christ, whose Father was God the Father directly. Thus, it is erroneous to attribute the scapegoat as being Jesus Christ, who never sinned in His life. Sin within the human race originated with Satan, and it is from this beginning that sin has passed down to all men.



4. Why was the second goat led out of the camp of Israel into "... a land uninhabited" ..., and let go, never to return to the camp? This action of the "fit man" makes no sense if one is suggesting that this goat represents Jesus Christ. Lead Him to an uninhabited land with the sins of Israel on His head? Let Him go to die there in the jaws of a lion or jackal? Such a fate for a sacrifice of Christ is absurd, when all other sacrifices were made with fire on an altar. If this second goat represented Jesus Christ, it is unprecedented and an unprecedented fate of an animal purporting to be the Saviour of all mankind!

We do, however, note that Satan is pictured as being sent out to an uninhabited, desolate place called the "bottomless pit". We read in Revelation 20:1-3,

"And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent [nachash in Genesis 3], who is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, and cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years should be fulfilled; and after that he must be loosed a little season."

Here we have a picture of the scapegoat, the second goat selected from the House of Israel, led to a wilderness area apart from Israel, unable to deceive them any more as Satan first deceived Adam and Eve ... and caused all of mankind to inherit a sinful human nature.

5. Why were Aaron after touching the Azazel goat, and the person who led the Azazel goat into the wilderness, considered unclean? Had they been touching the goat that symbolized Jesus Christ, in whom there is no spot or blemish, there would have been no need to wash themselves and remain unclean until being symbolically cleansed. Aaron had to wash

himself (Leviticus 16:24), and the "fit man" as well—his body and his clothes—once he returned to the camp and before coming into contact with anyone among the Israelites (Leviticus 16:26).

Note too that Aaron did not wash himself after the sacrifice of the first goat dedicated to the Lord (Leviticus 16:9-19). This indicates that his contact with the first goat, because it represented a sinless Jesus Christ, did not require his being cleansed as he was required after contacting the Azazel goat.

6. Does it make any sense that Aaron, a type of Jesus Christ, would lay upon Jesus Christ the sins of Israel? In Leviticus 16:21, Aaron was told to lay both of his hands upon the head of the Azazel goat and "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" Would Jesus Christ lay the sins of Israel on Jesus Christ? That redundancy makes no sense. For proof that the high priest, in this case Aaron, is a type of Christ, see the End Notes.

It is also wise to realize that the name Azazel is applied to a demon in the Dead Sea Scrolls and other ancient Jewish books. One scroll even contends that Azazel was the leader of the Elohim that came down and cohabited with women to produce the nephalim in Genesis 6:1-4. The book of I Enoch reiterates this contention (I Enoch 8:1; 9:6; 10:4-8; 13:1; 54:5-6; 55:4; 69:2). Besides, Old Testament scholars have connected the name Azazel to Mot, the god of death. As Michael Heiser states, "The identification of the term with a demon may also derive from cosmic geography and an association of the wilderness with the forces of chaos, which are hostile to God. This would make sense on several levels, as the desert would not only be a place forbidding to life but, as ground outside the camp of Israel and Yahweh, the source of life, would have a clear association with chaos."

In a real sense the Azazel goat banished the sins of the Israelites to the realm outside of Is-

real. Israel's domain was considered holy, while that of the territory outside of Israel was under the control of other unfriendly Elohim. By removing the Azazel goat to the wilderness outside the holy camp territory, Azazel was getting what belonged to him—sin—and it was being removed to an “unclean” place far outside the camp (M. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm*, Lexham Press, Bellingham Washington, 2015, pages 177-178).

After writing most of this article, I reread a booklet by Herbert W. Armstrong entitled *Pagan Holidays or God's Holydays – Which?* (Ambassador College, Pasadena, California, 1970). Interestingly, I discovered that his discussion of the matter, which covers nearly eight pages of the booklet, shows that he considered understanding the identities of the two goats is a very important matter for Christians. A synopsis on page 49 states the following:

“Thus, finally, as the acceptance of the blood of the first goat (Christ) symbolized complete propitiation, and pardon of Israel's sins, so the sending of Azazel bearing away those expiated sins symbolizes the complete removal of all sins—deliverance by the atonement from the power of the Adversary.

“The sacrifice of the first innocent victim was the means of reconciliation with God, but not yet complete justice. “The driving away of the second goat shows the final atonement, by placing the sins on their author where they belong, and the complete removal of the sins and their author from the presence of God and His people—and thus the complete deliverance of the people from the power of Satan.”

Even though a correct understanding of the meaning of the scapegoat is not critical to salvation, it is certainly a great benefit to know how our Maker has revealed, in the context of His Holy Days, the details of His unfolding plans. Right here within the messages of the Day of

Atonement we have a symbolic binding of Satan so he is removed from Israel, and can no longer influence the people on earth for 1,000 years.

What a mighty and loving God we have who does not neglect to reveal His plan through the pattern of His Holy Days. Praise be to Him for His undying concern for us all!

End Notes

The *Topical Encyclopedia of the Bible* indicates the following proofs for Aaron, the high priest in ancient Israel, as a type of Jesus Christ (see [www.https://biblehub.com/topical/ttt/t/the_high_priest_christ--typified--aaron.htm](https://biblehub.com/topical/ttt/t/the_high_priest_christ--typified--aaron.htm)).

The role of the High Priest in the Old Testament serves as a profound typology of Jesus Christ, the ultimate High Priest. Aaron, the brother of Moses, was the first to be appointed as High Priest, and his life and duties foreshadow the priestly ministry of Christ. This typology is rich with theological significance, illustrating the continuity and fulfillment of God's redemptive plan through Jesus.

Aaron as High Priest

Aaron was chosen by God to be the first High Priest of Israel, a position of great spiritual responsibility and honor. His primary role was to act as a mediator between God and the Israelites, offering sacrifices for the atonement of the people's sins. The *Book of Exodus* details Aaron's consecration and the specific garments he was to wear, symbolizing holiness and the weight of his duties (Exodus 28:1-43).

Typology of Christ

1. Divine Appointment: Just as Aaron was divinely appointed to his role, so too was Christ. Hebrews 5:4-5 states, "No one takes this honor upon himself; he must be called by God, just as Aaron was. So also Christ did not take upon Himself the glory of becoming a high priest, but

He was called by the One who said to Him, 'You are My Son; today I have become Your Father.'"

2. Mediator: Aaron's role as a mediator prefigures Christ's ultimate mediation. 1 Timothy 2:5 affirms, "For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." Christ's mediation is superior, as He offers a permanent reconciliation through His sacrifice.

3. Sacrificial System: Aaron's priesthood involved the continual offering of sacrifices, which pointed to the need for a perfect and final sacrifice. Hebrews 10:11-12 contrasts this with Christ's work: "Day after day every priest stands to minister and to offer again and again the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, He sat down at the right hand of God."

4. Intercession: Aaron interceded for the people, especially on the Day of Atonement, when he entered the Holy of Holies to make atonement for the sins of Israel (Leviticus 16). Similarly, Christ's intercession is ongoing and

efficacious. Hebrews 7:25 declares, "Therefore He is able to save completely those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to intercede for them."

5. Holiness and Purity: The High Priest was required to maintain a standard of holiness, symbolized by his garments and rituals. Christ, however, embodies perfect holiness and purity, being without sin. Hebrews 4:15 notes, "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who was tempted in every way that we are, yet was without sin."

Fulfillment in Christ

The typology of Aaron as a High Priest finds its ultimate fulfillment in Jesus Christ, who surpasses the limitations of the Aaronic priesthood. Christ's priesthood is according to the order of Melchizedek, eternal and unchangeable (Hebrews 7:17). His sacrifice is once for all, providing complete atonement and access to God for believers. Through Christ, the shadows of the Old Testament priesthood are realized in the substance of His perfect work.

