



Forerunner

Preparing Christians for the Kingdom of God

Volume 26, Number 5

September-October 2017

**FOLLOWING
GOD'S
SIGNS**

September-October 2017

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Early in Scripture, God promised to supply a Savior and Redeemer, the Seed that would bruise the head of the serpent. After the Flood, God began to provide signs—messianic revelations—to inform and encourage His people about the One to come. By the time of the closing of the Old Testament, He had given enough clues for a faithful person to know who fulfilled the prophecies, but His own people rejected Him.

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Leadership and Covenants

Part Eleven: Signs

Amid the prevailing violence of the pre-Flood world, God singled out Noah, called him, and began giving him the grace he needed to complete what likely seemed like an impossible assignment. He spent one hundred and twenty years preaching, undertaking the hard labor to build the ark, and enduring the mockery of his neighbors. When the Flood came, he faced torrential rains combined with earthquakes that produced frighteningly huge waves on an endless sea, making him fear for his family's survival. While never knowing a period of absolute calm, he cared for the animals, including the birds sent out to reconnoiter conditions outside. When one did not return, and the ark settled into the soft but stable soil, the lifesaving voyage ended, and the reestablishment of life on earth began in a world of absolute calm dominated by silence.

From beginning to end, Noah's story has the sense and appeal of a fantastic fictional tale. Within it are events that may remind us of a superhero conquering every challenge devised by a mysterious villain to keep him from accomplishing his mission, and saving his family despite the sacrifices. Since God Himself reports Noah's work through Moses, his story is not fiction; one man lived the entire experience. Moreover, every

person born on earth since descends from this one man and his wife.

The events and challenges Noah faced were not concluded until God sealed a covenant with post-Flood humanity:

Then God said to Noah and his sons with him: "I now establish my covenant with you and with your descendants after you and with every living creature that was with you—the birds, the livestock and all the wild animals, all those that came out of the ark with you—every living creature on earth. I establish my covenant with you: Never again will all life be cut off by the waters of a flood; never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth."

And God said, "This is the sign of the covenant I am making between me and you and every living creature with you, a covenant for all generations to come: I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. Whenever I bring clouds over the earth and the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will remember my covenant between me and you

and all living creatures of every kind. Never again will the waters become a flood to destroy all life. Whenever the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures of every kind on the earth.”

So God said to Noah, “This is the sign of the covenant I have established between me and all life on the earth.” (Genesis 9:8-17, *New International Version* [NIV])

“I now establish my covenant with you
and with your descendants after you
and with every living creature that was with you.”
—Genesis 9:8



Some massively destructive events have occurred on earth, but except for the Flood, they have all been localized events, despite affecting millions of people: volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, hurricanes, and extremes of weather. The Flood is by far the most devastating event ever to occur on Planet Earth since God created Adam and Eve. Except for the eight people God sanctified before Noah began his work, it executed the population of the entire earth in one massive judgment determined and accomplished by the sovereign God. No destructive event comes close to matching it.

Searching for Signs

This article will not provide detailed documentation that the Flood occurred, but it will cover the obvious messianic revelations—signs—that God gave to His people through the centuries. By them, He kept them informed and encouraged that He had not forgotten His promise to supply the Savior and Redeemer whom we desperately need to free us from bondage to sin and death.

We do not have to search long to find the cause for God’s judgment: man’s unending determination to fill his life with every vile form of sin he could imagine. Humanity needed to be saved from itself before millions of minds became so set on sinful ways of living that they could not repent. The step God took—sentencing almost all of mankind to death—was, in reality, an act of divine mercy before humanity reached that point of no return.

This current generation of humanity is living in an atmosphere of widespread violence, which Jesus warned in His Olivet Prophecy would be similar to the state the world was in as Noah was finalizing the housing of the animals God brought to him. The beginning of the Flood was only days away.

How much time do we have before God gives the signal for Jesus to return to earth to establish the Kingdom of God? Before His crucifixion, even Jesus did not know the time of His departure from heaven, so we do not know either. He admonishes us to be ready at all times.

Searching for signs plays a role in the measures we take to be ready. Sometimes our looking for signs causes anxiety, as events between the nations make us uncertain. Everyone desires to live with far less anxiety. Everybody wants life to be “better” than it presently is,

leading many to look hopefully for indications that things are turning in their favor. Some may refer to these indications as their hopes, but they are really looking for *signs* that what they believe is necessary for happiness or a sense of well-being is about to be met. Thus, the pressures to meet each day’s needs will lessen to some extent.

“Sign” is used 76 times in Scripture. *The Reader’s Digest Great Encyclopedic Dictionary* contains twenty-one applications for the word in English. Some of them have no relevance to our lives in Christ, and others are used only in technical circumstances. However, some of them apply to daily situations in almost everybody’s life. Notice these six usages:

- A motion or action indicating a thought, desire, or command.
- A board, placard, or representation of any sort, generally bearing an inscription conveying information of some kind, as in a street sign.
- Any arbitrary mark, symbol, or token used to indicate a word, etc. or having its own specific meaning, as in a sign of mourning.
- Any indication, trace, or evidence of a state, or condition, as in a sign of poverty.
- Any evidence of a recent presence; a vestige; trace.

- Any omen, portent, or miraculous occurrence indicating a change of circumstance.

In the Scriptures

All six of these applications appear in the Bible. As one would expect due to the appearances being in Scripture, their usage denotes “an outward indication of an inner or hidden purpose, usually that of God Himself” (*Interpreters Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. 4, p. 346). The same source suggests, under the heading “signal,” that the corresponding term in Hebrew can be used interchangeably with “sign” because signs frequently indicate the nature of a forthcoming divinely purposed event (p. 345). Frequently, the word “sign” is used in the Old Testament when a prophet of God is asked to interpret a puzzling circumstance that appears to be a signal from God—a sign.

However, in the New Testament, the usage of the term is somewhat different. Signs tend to be given to identify personages so they can be recognized, as well as to provide descriptions of the times so that members of God’s Family can be alerted to make the best use of them for their own spiritual and physical protection, growth, and glorification of God.

A clear example is the Israelites’ prolonged expectations of the appearance of the Messiah. The first mention of Him appears in Genesis 3:14-15, within God’s judgment against Satan:

So the LORD God said to the serpent: “Because you have done this, you are cursed more than all cattle, and more than every beast of the field; on your belly you shall go, and you shall eat dust all the days of your life. And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel.”

Six thousand years later, the Israelitish people and modern-day Christians living by faith are still anticipating the Promised Seed’s second coming in glory. When God gave this judgment, there was little information within the sign to use as an identifier except that Eve was the only female at that time, and she had as yet no children. However, her first child was a son, and the anticipation began. She probably assumed that he was the Promised Seed. She was

wrong—he was a murderer.

She had a third son, Seth (Genesis 4:23-25), and he was not the Promised Seed either, but he did become an ancestor of the Promised Seed. The Promised Seed’s lineage can be traced from Seth through Noah to Abraham, Jacob, Judah, King David, and finally, Joseph and Mary when He was born in Bethlehem, Judea. The sign took around 4,000 years to come to pass after God’s judgment of the Serpent in Genesis 3.

As the centuries slid by, God occasionally added reminders and more precise descriptions of the Promised Seed so that, if the Israelites believed Him, they could more accurately identify the Messiah’s appearance when God sent Him. God kept His word. He did send Him, and He performed His responsibility admirably.

The first sign given after God’s judgment in the Garden of Eden appears in Genesis 12:1-3 in the midst of God’s promises to Abram:

Get out of your country, from your family and from your father’s house, to a land that *I will* show you. *I will* make you a great nation; *I will* bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. *I will* bless those who bless you, and *I will* curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed. (Emphasis ours throughout.)

The part of these seven-fold “I will” promises that



“Get out of your country,
from your family and from your father’s house
to a land that I will show you.”
—Genesis 12:1

applies most directly to the Promised Seed is the final one. Abram was a mere man, though he would live to become 175 years of age. However, in no way could he be called a blessing to all nations, so he understood that the promise would be fulfilled by a descendant. When to this is added that the descendant will be a blessing to all nations on earth, he understood that the promise applied, not only to one generation, but to all nations for all time. Therefore, the last promise included that the Promised Seed, an eternal being, would be born from his family.

Another divinely inspired expansion came through

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Jacob, Abram's grandson. It appears in Genesis 49:8-10:

Judah, you are he whom your brothers shall praise; your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies; your father's children shall bow down before you. Judah is a lion's whelp; from the prey, my son, you have gone up. He bows down, he lies down as a lion; and as a lion, who shall rouse him? The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh comes; and to Him shall be the obedience of the people.

God is clear. The Promised Seed, who will be a king, will come from the tribe of Judah.

God inspired Moses to add this detail to the resume of the Promised Seed:

The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear, according to all you desired of the

desire to build Him a "house" (Temple) by which God would be honored. That rejection contains a promise:

When your days are fulfilled and you rest with your fathers, I will set up your seed after you, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his Father, and he shall be My son. If he commits iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men and with the blows of the sons of men. But My mercy shall not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I removed from before you. And your house and your kingdom shall be established forever before you. Your throne shall be established forever. (II Samuel 7:12-16)

David's humility about himself and his deep respect for God are clearly shown in his response. He, a converted man, was stunned by what God promised, understanding the expanse and depth of God's words as few others who have ever lived. His response is clearly juxtaposed with God's promise so we can perceive a distinct picture of the personality of a person who truly pleased God:

"When your days are fulfilled
I will set up your seed after you,
who will come from your body,
and I will establish his kingdom."
—II Samuel 7:12

LORD your God in Horeb in the day of the assembly saying, "Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God, nor let me see this great fire anymore, lest I die." And the LORD said to me, "What they have spoken is good. I will raise up for them a Prophet like you from among their brethren, and will put My words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him." (Deuteronomy 18:15-18)

In this, God adds honor to the life and reputation of Moses as both the governing leader and legislator of Israel. Moses is a clear type of Jesus Christ in both of these offices. However, in this case, the passage emphasizes the office of prophet. True believers have respected Moses to a degree few other leaders of any nation have been. The Promised Seed, the Messiah, will be like Moses but far greater still.

The next bit of information appears in regard to King David's response to God's rejection of his

Who am I, O LORD God?
And what is my house,
that You have brought me this far? And yet this was a small thing in Your sight, O LORD God; and You have also spoken of Your servant's house for a great while to come. Is this the manner of man, O LORD God? Now what more can David say to You? For You, LORD God, know Your servant. For Your word's sake, and according to Your own heart, You have done all these great things, to make Your servant know them. Therefore You are great, O LORD God. For there is none like You, nor is there any God besides You, according to all that we have heard with our ears. And who is like Your people, like Israel, the one nation on the earth whom God went to redeem for Himself as a people, to make for Himself a name—and to do for Yourself great and awesome deeds for Your land—before Your people whom You redeemed for Yourself from Egypt, the nations, and their

(continued on page 15)

Who Fulfills the Azazel Goat— Satan or Christ?

Part Five

A defining characteristic of the church of God is its commitment to truth. The book of Acts describes Christians in Berea as “more fair-minded” than others in that “they received the word with all readiness, and *searched the Scriptures* daily to find out whether these things were so” (Acts 17:11; emphasis ours throughout). In contrast, Christ frequently rebuked those in Judea and Galilee for holding fast to traditions that made the Word of God of no effect (Matthew 15:1-9; Mark 7:1-13).

Some have questions about Christ’s fulfillment of both goats in Leviticus 16, and this article will provide answers to the most common ones. Before getting to them, though, we ask the reader to consider these: What is the source of the teaching that the *azazel* represents Satan? Does this teaching spring readily from Scripture, or is it read into Scripture as a result of tradition? With a Bible and concordance, could we prove what the live goat typifies?

To hold fast to the truth, church of God members are accustomed to rejecting non-biblical tradition, even though taking such a stand sometimes comes at the cost of close relationships. Every false doctrine begins with a false premise that is accepted as true and then built up into seemingly plausible teaching. We have done due diligence in rightly dividing topics such as Christmas, Easter, the Trinity, going to heaven, and Sunday worship, concluding that these practices have arisen from the traditions of men—even blatant paganism.

These beliefs are so entrenched that professing Christians attempt to prop up such fictions with proof-texts, never considering that they are justifying a conviction handed to them by tradition. However, if one begins with Scripture instead, considering the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27), we expose these

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ideas for what they are: farces.

The largest Protestant, Sabbath-keeping organization, the Seventh-Day Adventist Church, holds a likely familiar view of the *azazel* goat: The *azazel* is a representation of Satan, on whose head the sins of humanity will be placed before he is bound for 1,000 years. Upon digging into the writings of Seventh-Day Adventist scholars, it becomes plain that they have no qualms about basing this doctrine on the apocryphal *Book of Enoch*.

Even the various versions of the *Ambassador College Correspondence Course*, produced by the Worldwide Church of God, begin with “ancient Jewish literature” (Lesson 37, 1965 edition, p. 4), “apocryphal literature” (*ibid.*), “apocryphal Jewish works” (Lesson 29, 1986 edition, p. 10), and even Arabic/Islamic tradition (*ibid.*)—which comes so long after the Pentateuch that it has no relevance—to build a case that the live goat represents Satan. Are the traditions of men a valid starting point for doctrine within God’s church? On the contrary, tradition is not an acceptable primary source at all. The only doctrinal foundation that will hold is the Word of God.

Does the Binding of Satan Fulfill Leviticus 16?

The same apocryphal Jewish work provides a textual—though not scriptural—link between the *azazel* goat and the binding of Satan. In the *Book of Enoch*, “Azazel” is the name of a demon blamed for all the sins of mankind (Enoch 10:8). He is not the chief demon—not actually Satan—but subservient to a demon named “Semjaza” (Enoch 6:3; 9:7). Azazel is bound and cast into darkness, confined to the desert until the day of judgment:

And again the Lord said to Raphael: ‘Bind Azâzêl hand and foot, and cast him into the darkness: and make an opening in the desert, which is in Dûdâêl, and cast him therein. And place upon him rough and jagged rocks, and cover him with darkness, and let him abide there forever, and cover his face that he may not see light. And on the day of the great judgment he shall be cast into the fire. (Enoch 10:4-6)

Bizarrely, all of humanity’s sins are ascribed to this demon, not to the chief demon, yet the sins of the world are allegedly placed on Satan’s head. This is the myth—a clever counterfeit—that links the Hebrew word *azazel* with something evil. Without the *Book of Enoch*, nothing ties Leviticus 16 to the binding of Satan, whether in terms of actions, purposes, or effects.

Notice the contrast between what happens to the biblical *azazel* (“goat of departure”) and what befalls Satan:

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.” (Leviticus 16:21-22)

Satan: “Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; and he cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal on him, so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished. But after these things he must be released for a little while.” (Revelation 20:1-3)

The goat is sent away into the wilderness to an uninhabited land, where it is released, never to be seen again. However, a strong angel binds Satan and casts him into a pit but later releases him. The animal is set free, while the Devil is fully constrained for a millennium. The *azazel* disappears from view, while Satan may actually be on display while in the pit (Isaiah 14:15-16). There is no parallel between what happens to each.

God’s stated purpose for the *azazel* goat is to “bear on itself all their iniquities to an uninhabited land.” His purpose for Satan’s binding is “so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished.” These purposes are also completely dissimilar.

Satan’s binding effectively and thoroughly stops his work as the “prince of the power of the air” (Ephesians 2:2). Once isolated in the pit, he will no longer be “the god of this world” (II Corinthians 4:4, KJV). While the pit facilitates temporary protection from his influence, God has determined to release Satan to deceive again (Revelation 20:7-8). He remains unrepentant and continues his evil work. His binding provides a reprieve but no atonement.

In contrast, the live goat acts as a substitutionary sacrifice, and by itself, this nullifies the possibility of it representing either Satan or another demon presumably named “Azazel.” The goat’s role was to bear iniquities until they were completely removed from view. In the

ritual, the sins were those of the children of Israel. Scripture provides multiple witnesses that Jesus Christ bears mankind's sins (Isaiah 53:11-12; I Peter 2:24; Hebrews 9:28) and that God would lay the iniquity of us all on the Messiah (Isaiah 53:6).

Conversely, neither Satan's nor a demon's sins are in view in Leviticus 16. An unblemished animal—symbolizing sinlessness—could in no way represent either of them, and for the same reason, neither qualifies to be a substitutionary sacrifice. In addition, there is no biblical basis for placing humanity's sins on Satan's or a demon's head.

Revelation 20 makes no mention of atonement, justification, reconciliation, cleansing, propitiation, human sin, or any other theme found in Leviticus 16. Instead, Satan is bound in order to curtail his influence on the nations, not to satisfy God's justice in any way. Scripture provides no legal foundation for his binding to pay the debt for sin, whether his own or mankind's. The wages of sin is death, and the gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ (Romans 6:23), but the confinement of Satan neither pays those wages nor facilitates that gift. Put simply, the binding of Satan does not—indeed, cannot—provide atonement. Only Christ's blood does that.

Must Satan Be Bound for Humanity to Be One With God?

It is commonly held that mankind cannot be “at one” with God until Satan is bound. Consider, though, how much this belief diminishes God's power while elevating the status of the wicked one. God will bring all those alive during the Millennium to salvation without Satan being around, even as He is perfecting the firstfruits now *with* Satan around. God is sovereign, and thus neither limited by Satan's presence nor dependent on it.

During Christ's final Passover, He speaks at length about what His upcoming sacrifice would make possible. His confident statements demonstrate that a close personal relationship with God is entirely possible even while Satan is still the god of this world. Jesus promises to love and manifest Himself to those who love Him and keep His commandments (John 14:21). He declares that both He and the Father will make Their home with those who love Him (John 14:23). His work allows humans to abide in Him, even while Satan deceives the whole world (John 15:4-5, 7). He assures us that we can have peace in Him, even as the world—under Satan's influence—is against us (John 14:27; 16:33; see also Acts 10:36; Romans 5:1; 8:6; II Corinthians 13:11; Galatians 5:22; Ephesians 2:14-17; Colossians 1:20; II Thessalonians 3:16). He reveals that

the gift of eternal life is entirely His to give (John 17:1-3), and there is no proviso regarding Satan's presence. He promises oneness through the Father's keeping (John 17:11, 20-23)—not through Satan's binding. All the things covered in His prayer are not limited to the original disciples, “but also for those who will believe in Me through their word” (verse 20).

Jesus teaches that it is quite possible to be one with the Father and Son *without* Satan being bound. When we are brought to Christ, He “delivers us from this present evil age” (Galatians 1:4) and “from the power of darkness” (Colossians 1:13). Satan is powerless to stop God's work (see Job 1:10-12; 2:4-6). Since God's converted people are walking proof of oneness with God in the face of the Devil's influence, it makes no sense to conclude that humanity can be one with God only once Satan is bound.

The world needs the same covenant the elect are under now. Satan's binding will be a tremendous gift to those alive during the Millennium, so in no way should it be diminished, as it will remove a great deal of spiritual pressure. But is Satan's influence so vast as to prohibit the Father and the Son from working out Their plan in the Millennium? Certainly not!

Christ's Blood Provides Atonement, So Why Does the Ritual Use Two Goats?

These articles have focused primarily on the live goat in Leviticus 16, but it is critical to remember that the Atonement ritual used *four* sacrificial animals. Each animal served a specific purpose in “tutoring” Israel (Galatians 3:24), each aspect of the ritual pointing to the Messiah in some way.

Before analyzing the sacrificial animals and their functions, it may help to understand that the Day of Atonement accomplished more than a singular atonement. The Hebrew word underlying “atonement” in the English phrase “Day of Atonement” is actually plural—*kippurim* (Leviticus 23:27-28; 25:9). Thus, the holy day is literally “the Day of Atonements,” which shows that more than one atonement took place during the ceremony.

In fact, Leviticus 16 mentions five atonements:

1. for the high priest and his house (verses 6, 11, 24, 33);
2. for the *azazel* goat (verse 10);
3. for the Holy Place and Tabernacle of meeting (verses 16, 20, 33);
4. for the altar of incense (verses 18, 33); and

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5. for the whole assembly (verses 30, 33-34).

Though we may have little point of reference for these details, they are nevertheless critical in properly understanding how—and by whom—the various types were later fulfilled.

Leviticus 16:3 mentions the two animals that receive the least attention: “Thus Aaron shall come into the Holy Place: with the blood of a young bull as a sin offering, and of a ram as a burnt offering.” Though introduced early on, the day’s burnt offering was not made until after “a suitable man” led the *azazel* away and the priest removed the holy garments he had worn to enter the Holy Place (Leviticus 16:21, 23-24).

The burnt offering, as outlined in Leviticus 1, contained no contemplation of sin. It was “a sweet aroma to the LORD” (Leviticus 1:9) because the Lord was pleased with what it represented: wholehearted devotion and commitment to God. The substitutionary animal was completely burned up, even as a man’s life is to be consumed in service to God.

Jesus Christ was the epitome of this throughout His life, for even as a youth, He was dedicated to His Father’s business (Luke 2:49). His human life was consumed by sacrificial devotion to His Father, up to the point of death. This spanned His life and concluded at His crucifixion. Without a doubt, the ram for the burnt offering was a type of Christ. His death simultaneously fulfilled the sin offering and completed His burnt offering, but in the order of sacrifices given in Exodus 29 and Leviticus 16, atonement had to occur before the sacrifice of the burnt offering. This teaches that we must have the right standing before God as a prerequisite to being utterly devoted to Him.

Leviticus 16:3 also mentions “a young bull as a sin offering,” which was in addition to the two goats used as a sin offering for the nation on Atonement. The law of sin offerings specifies that the offering of a young bull would cover the high priest’s sin (Leviticus 4:3). Of the four sacrificial animals in Leviticus 16, three of them were used for sin offerings. The three animals did not represent three different personalities, but each pointed to the Messiah in a distinct aspect or role. We may consider one or more of these animals extraneous, but God had specific reasons for each part of this ceremony. Each animal had a common fulfillment in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

We find the instructions for the bull in Leviticus 16:6, 11, 14, 18-20, 27. To summarize, this sin offering for the high priest held a more meaningful purpose than the one outlined in Leviticus 4. In a typical sin offering for the priest, the blood was sprinkled “seven times before the LORD, in front of the veil of the sanctuary” (Leviticus 4:6). The priest also put blood on the horns of the

incense altar and poured the rest at the base of the altar of burnt offering (verse 7). The blood thus provided a covering—an atonement—for those areas of the high priest’s service that God considered defiled through his sin.

But on the Day of Atonement, the high priest entered the Most Holy Place with a cloud of incense. He did not stop at the veil, but instead went farther and sprinkled blood on and in front of the mercy seat (Leviticus 16:14).

The mercy seat—where God said He would meet and speak with the leader (Exodus 25:22; 30:6)—was the point of intersection between God and Israel, through her representative. On the day when atonement was made for the nation, the cleansing began with the sacred meeting place between God and man. The first account to be settled was between God and the high priest (including his house), setting the stage for the remaining atonements.

After cleansing the mercy seat (including the ground in front of it), the blood of the bull purified the incense altar (Leviticus 16:18-19). Incense is a symbol of prayer, yet even prayer can be an abomination to God because of sin (Proverbs 28:9). Thus, the priest’s instruments used in the worship of the Holy God had to be cleansed because of the defilement of sin.

After the priest had sprinkled the bull’s blood before and on the mercy seat, the first goat was killed and its blood used in the same way—the priest first sprinkled its blood on and before the mercy seat (verse 15) then on the altar of incense (verses 18-19). The first goat is designated as “for the LORD” (verse 8), meaning it is for His satisfaction or appeasement.

As with the priest’s sin offering, using the goat’s blood on and before the mercy seat was unique to Atonement. These were not typical or general sin offerings; God expressly commanded them to cleanse the symbolic point of interaction with Him. Leviticus 16:19 explains that their blood was to “cleanse it, and consecrate it from the uncleanness of the children of Israel.” Verse 20 summarizes that the bull and the first goat were for “atoning for the Holy Place, the tabernacle of meeting, and the altar.” Access to God—both for the priest and the people—had to be opened through cleansing before the general removal of the nation’s sins could occur. The first goat’s blood, applied to the mercy seat and incense altar, appeased the Lord.

Hebrews 9:11-14 declares Christ’s fulfillment of the bull and the first goat (as well as the purification rite involving the ashes of a red heifer in Numbers 19):

But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect taber-

(continued on page 17)

Worthy to Take the Scroll

Revelation 5:11-14 is the source of the finale of George Frideric Handel's acclaimed oratorio, *The Messiah*:

Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne, the living creatures, and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice: "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom, and strength and honor and glory and blessing!" And every creature which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, I heard saying: "Blessing and honor and glory and power be to Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, forever and ever!" Then the four living creatures said, "Amen!" And the twenty-four elders fell down and worshiped Him who lives forever and ever.

This passage, a fitting conclusion to that epic piece of music, describes a vast choir of apparently over 100 million voices (verse 11) singing praises to the Father and the Son. What is more, verse 13 states that "every creature which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and such as are in the sea" joins in to give honor and glory to the Father and the Son (emphasis ours throughout). Without grasping what led to this scene, the vast heavenly choir and its proclamation may be just so many words on a page, perhaps something that comes to mind only when catching a snippet of *The Messiah* on the classical music station.

THE WEeping APOSTLE

The immediate context begins in Revelation 5:1-4, which hints at the magnitude of what is happening in the apostle John's vision:

And I saw in the right hand of Him who sat

"Then I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, 'Who is worthy to open the scroll and to loose its seals?' And no one in heaven or on the earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll, or to look at it."

—Revelation 5:2-3, NKJV

on the throne a scroll written inside and on the back, sealed with seven seals. Then I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, “Who is worthy to open the scroll and to loose its seals?” And no one in heaven or on the earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll, or to look at it. So I wept much, because no one was found worthy to open the scroll, or to look at it.

Why does the apostle “[weep] much”? Was he emotionally overwrought because his desire to see the scroll’s contents was denied, or is there more to it? His weeping signifies something momentous taking place. John, probably in his 90s at this point, had already seen and experienced extraordinary things. Given the amount of time God had worked with him, he must have attained a level of spiritual maturity of the highest order. Yet, this faithful servant—not given to whimsy—sobbed over what was at stake. Something shook him to the core—something far beyond mere disappointment over not having a prophecy opened.

John’s account in chapter 5 begins in the previous chapter, where he sees “a throne set in heaven” occupied by the Most High God (Revelation 4:2). Twenty-four elders and four living creatures surround the throne. His description of the four living creatures matches the angelic beings that Ezekiel saw, identified as cherubim (Revelation 4:6-8; Ezekiel 1:5-11; 10:14-22). Significantly, the cherubim are first mentioned as guarding the way to the Tree of Life after Adam and Eve sinned and God evicted them from His presence (Genesis 3:24).

As Revelation 4 closes, John describes the twenty-four elders prostrating themselves before God and saying something very significant: “Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you *created all things, and by your will they existed and were created*” (Revelation 4:11; *English Standard Version* [ESV]).

The twenty-four elders praise God as the Creator of all things. We understand that the One who became the Son, Jesus Christ, was His Spokesman (John 1:1-3), but the Most High—the Father—was the motivating Source behind all that has ever existed. While the focus of their words is the creation, the mention of the cherubim recalls an event that has affected creation, most specifically, humanity’s access to its Creator.

On the heels of this, John sees a scroll in the Father’s right hand. But there is something else to consider about the setting. In chapter 4, John refers to the throne twelve times, and he mentions it another five times in chapter 5, indicating that the throne is a dominant element in this vision.

A throne is often used as a symbol of judgment or as

a representation of legal authority. Thus, the vision shows God about to act in judgment or a legal matter, and it revolves around this sealed scroll. To grasp what was weighing on John so heavily, then, we have to understand this scroll.

SCROLLS IN PROPHECY

Several passages can provide insight into this scene. Obviously, the aged apostle was familiar with the Scriptures, so when he saw this vision of God’s throne, the One who sat on it, and a sealed scroll, several writings of the prophets probably came to his mind.

For example, in Daniel’s vision, thrones are set up, the Ancient of Days takes His seat, and books are opened (Daniel 7:9-10). We tend to focus on the four beasts in this vision, but the more significant theme shows the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven, given dominion, glory, and a kingdom (Daniel 7:13-14, 27).

In Revelation, John sees the Ancient of Days likewise seated on a throne. Remembering Daniel’s vision, John knows that court’s purpose is to remove the dominion of man and the satanic power behind him and to give the Kingdom to the saints of the Most High under the Son of Man.

The prophet Ezekiel provides another related record. He also had a vision of the divine, including cherubim and a throne of God (Ezekiel 1:1-28) as a prelude to his commission to warn the rebellious house of Israel (Ezekiel 2:1-8). His vision contains another, similar scroll to the one John saw:

Now when I looked, there was a hand stretched out to me; and behold, a scroll of a book was in it. Then He spread it before me; and there was writing on the inside and on the outside, and written on it were lamentations and mourning and woe. (Ezekiel 2:9-10)

Like Ezekiel’s scroll, the one John saw had writing “inside and on the back” (Revelation 5:1), but there are some differences as well: Ezekiel’s scroll was the symbol of a commission to a human servant, while the one John saw was not. Also, Ezekiel’s scroll was open and readable, while in Revelation 5, the scroll is sealed. Both scrolls, though, do involve “lamentations and mourning and woe.”

Zechariah 5:1-4 contains another vision of a scroll, which may also have flashed through John’s mind when he saw the scroll in the right hand of the Most High. An angel explains that Zechariah’s scroll, also written on both sides, is “the curse that goes out over the face of the whole earth”—specifically, a curse on thieves and

perjurers. When John sees the divine scroll opened, it likewise contains a judgment for sin, but it affects far more than just thieves and perjurers.

Each of these scrolls symbolizes the judgments contained within them. In addition, each is written on both sides, indicating that nothing further will be added. The contents of each scroll are complete for its purpose, and once the scroll is opened, everything written on them will occur until God's purpose is fulfilled. As He says in Isaiah 55:11, "My word . . . goes forth from My mouth [and] it shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it." Nothing more needs to be added, and nothing will change the judgment that has been decreed.

WHO IS WORTHY?

In Revelation 5:4, John gives the primary reason for his weeping, and the issue is one of *worthiness*. Isaiah describes a similar circumstance where the prophet also has a vision of the Lord sitting on His throne (Isaiah 6:1). Seraphim are praising God, and at the sight of all this, Isaiah becomes unglued (verses 2-5), painfully aware of his uncleanness. He knows that in his state he is not worthy to look upon the Lord of Hosts.

However, a seraph touches Isaiah's mouth with a coal, removing his iniquity and purging his sin (verses 6-7). Then the prophet hears the Eternal asking, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?" Isaiah eagerly answers the call and receives his commission (verse 8). With cleansing, he was fit—worthy—for God to use him to take a message to Judah.

However, in John's vision, something like a call goes out, but nobody answers it. Even with the cleansing that God is willing to do for His people—as He did for Isaiah—nobody can be found who is worthy. John, looking forward in vision to the Day of the Lord, sees that no angel in heaven, no servant of God on earth, and no spirit under the earth can open the scroll.

The matter of worthiness, then, must go beyond the matter of sin, because heaven is filled with angels who have not sinned, yet they still are unworthy to take the scroll. Likewise, as with Isaiah, God can purge the sin of His servants, but something even above sinlessness is needed to be worthy to open the scroll of Revelation.

What, exactly, makes this scroll's worth so great? John's reaction to it indicates that he was not ignorant of what it was; instead, he felt the full weight of its significance and expressed great distress over the absolute need for it to be opened. The apostle greatly desired the scroll to be opened, suggesting he knew that it contained something of tremendous worth, in

addition to including judgments like the other prophetic scrolls.

JEREMIAH'S SEALED DEEDS

Scripture contains another sealed scroll that rarely receives a second glance, yet it more closely resembles the scroll John agonized over than the scrolls of Ezekiel and Zechariah. Just before the siege of Jerusalem, God instructs Jeremiah to perform an act as a sign that the Jews would return to the land:

The word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Behold, Hanamel the son of Shallum your uncle will come to you, saying, 'Buy my field which is in Anathoth, for the right of redemption is yours to buy it.'" Then Hanamel my uncle's son came to me in the court of the prison according to the word of the LORD, and said to me, "Please buy my field that is in Anathoth, which is in the country of Benjamin; for the right of inheritance is yours, and the redemption yours; buy it for yourself." Then I knew that this was the word of the LORD. So I bought the field from Hanamel, the son of my uncle who was in Anathoth, and weighed out to him the money—seventeen shekels of silver. And I signed the deed and sealed it, took witnesses, and weighed the money on the scales. So I took the purchase deed, both that which was sealed according to the law and custom, and that which was open; and I gave the purchase deed to Baruch the son of Neriah, son of Mahseiah, in the presence of Hanamel my uncle's son, and in the presence of the witnesses who signed the purchase deed, before all the Jews who sat in the court of the prison. Then I charged Baruch before them, saying, "Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: 'Take these deeds, both this purchase deed which is sealed and this deed which is open, and put them in an earthen vessel, that they may last many days.' For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: 'Houses and fields and vineyards shall be possessed again in this land.'" (Jeremiah 32:6-15)

This passage is about inheritance and redemption of property, in which Jeremiah is the kinsman-redeemer, similar to Boaz (Ruth 4:1-11). At God's direction, Jeremiah pays the purchase price, signs and seals the deed, and performs it all in the presence of witnesses.

Verse 11 refers to the purchase deed in the singular but later describes it as "both that which was *sealed*

Prophecy Watch

Worthy to Take the Scroll

. . . and that which was *open*.” These title deeds consisted of duplicates. One copy was left open so the contents could be read by any interested party, while the second copy was sealed to ensure that no tampering could be done. When it was time to buy back the property, the sealed copy would be unsealed to verify the original agreement. The only person with authority to unseal the deed, however, was the rightful owner—the one redeeming the property.

Consider how this applies to the scroll of Revelation 5. In type, it is not merely a prophetic scroll of judgment but a sealed title deed! Its sealing is not due to its contents being truly secret since the majority of its contents can be found in other places. God’s prophets warn about religious deception; wars; famines; pestilences and earthquakes; the deaths of God’s servants; great signs in the heavens; and the future Kingdom. In other words, in the words of the prophets, we already have the open deed, though it is fragmented and not in time-sequence. The essence of what John sees as the seals are opened has not been completely hidden from human knowledge; the prophets have already, at least in part, spoken of each of them.

Also, we have Jesus’ testimony in the Olivet Prophecy, of which the Revelation scroll is essentially an expansion, particularly regarding the Seventh Seal. The two prophecies describe the same judgment events in the same order. In type, then, the gospel of the Kingdom of God, including the Olivet Prophecy, is like the open deed that we can consult at any time.

Thus, the Revelation scroll remains sealed until the right time for a different purpose—not because of wholly secret contents, but because the seals denote that only the one claiming the property at issue is legally allowed to open the scroll. John sees the scroll in the Father’s right hand because the time has come to release the seals. It is time for the property to be redeemed and the proper ownership to be legally determined. With the sealed scroll in the Eternal Judge’s right hand, a strong angel—an officer of the court, so to speak—issues a challenge for the worthy party to step forward and claim what is his.

WHAT IS REDEEMED?

What, then, is being redeemed? The rest of the book of Revelation gives the basic answer, as do Christ’s teachings. After the Lamb takes the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fall before Him (Revelation 5:8) and sing a new song:

Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and *by your blood you*

ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth.” (Revelation 5:9-10, ESV)

Notice that the immediate response by the beings closest to the Lamb (aside from the Father) is to praise Him for redeeming a diverse people and making them “a kingdom and priests.” Similarly, Peter calls the church “a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people” (I Peter 2:9). Later in John’s vision, the 144,000, described twice as being redeemed (Revelation 14:3-4), also sing a new song.

In Christ’s Parable of the Hidden Treasure, He teaches, “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid; and for joy over it he goes and *sells all that he has and buys that field*” (Matthew 13:44). In the Parable of the Wheat and the Tares given immediately before, He defines the symbol of the field as being the world (Matthew 13:38). His people are so valuable to Him that He is willing to give everything He has—that is, exchange His life—to redeem the world!

This answers why John wept so much: He was looking at the title deed of all things! God is praised for creating “all things” (Revelation 4:11), and He has appointed the Son as heir of “all things” (Hebrews 1:2). However, the world and its inhabitants are presently in Satan’s hand. He currently holds the property in question, having the whole world under his sway (I John 5:19).

Thus, the ownership of the creation and the whole purpose of Elohim in creating humanity in God’s image are hanging in the balance—and nobody is found who could claim it. The weight of what it would mean for the deed to go unredeemed—for the world to continue with Satan as its god—must have overwhelmed John.

In Satan’s temptation of Christ, the Devil had the authority to offer Him all the world’s kingdoms because they are legitimately his (Matthew 4:8-9). Our first parents chose to become citizens of his kingdom, and the cherubim of Genesis 3:24 ensured that they could not renege on their unwise decision. All their children have remained part of Satan’s kingdom, except for the very few whom God has redeemed at great cost. The physical nation of Israel was redeemed with lambs (Exodus 13:13-16; 34:19-20), but the spiritual nation—the church—has been and will be redeemed by *the* Lamb of God (John 1:29).

Paul writes in Romans 8:19-24 that the whole creation eagerly awaits the revealing of the sons of God.

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gods? For You have made Your people Israel Your very own people forever; and You, LORD, have become their God. Now, O LORD God, the word which You have spoken concerning Your servant and concerning his house, establish it forever and do as You have said. So let Your name be magnified forever, saying, "The LORD of hosts is the God over Israel." And let the house of Your servant David be established before You. For You, O LORD of hosts, God of Israel, have revealed this to Your Servant, saying "I will build you a house." Therefore your servant has found it in his heart to pray this prayer to You. And now, O LORD God, You are God, and Your words are true, and You have promised this goodness to Your servant. Now therefore, let it please You to bless the house of Your servant, that it may continue before You forever; for You, O LORD God have spoken it, and with Your blessing let the house of Your servant be blessed forever." (II Samuel 7:18-29)

Expanding the defining attributes of the Promised Seed, God sanctifies the family of King David within the tribe of Judah before all others.

Revelation through the prophet Isaiah provides further definition to the responsibilities the Promised Seed will eventually hold. Isaiah lived at the time the Assyrian Empire crushed Israel as a nation between 722 and 720 BC. Notice Isaiah 9:6-7:

For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.

This revelation does little to define Him in His appearance as a human to crush the god of this world and free humanity from the serpent's spiritual grip. However, it describes the greatness of His leadership that will be reflected in the wisdom of His works before being enthroned as the ruler of the World Tomorrow. As King of kings, He will be the Mighty God who rescues and then endlessly rules humanity in the peace it has always desired but could never achieve.

Micah is the next prophet God used to identify the

promised Messiah. He was a contemporary of both Amos and Isaiah, and he and Isaiah both came from towns not far apart within Judah. They may have spoken to each other on occasion and shared their views. Micah 5:1-5 reads:

Now gather yourself in troops, O daughter of troops; he has laid siege against us; they will strike the judge of Israel with a rod on the cheek. But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be Ruler in Israel, whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting. Therefore He shall give them up, until the time that she who is in labor has given birth; then the remnant of His brethren shall return to the children of Israel. And He shall stand and feed His flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD His God; and they shall abide, for now He shall be great to the ends of the earth; and this One shall be peace.

This prophecy does not necessarily state where the Messiah would be born but that the home base, town, or city of the family of the Promised Seed would be Bethlehem Ephrathah. He was indeed born there. David's particular family line (see Ruth 4:18-22) begins with a son, Perez, that Tamar bore to Jacob's son, Judah. Five generations later, Salmon was born into that family line, and his son was Boaz, who married Ruth the Moabitess. These two, who made their home in Bethlehem (Ruth 1:1, 19; 2:4), produced Obed, who fathered Jesse, David's father. Jesse and David were also from Bethlehem (I Samuel 16:1, 4, 18).

The signs of identification are becoming more evident. When the Promised Seed began His public works, He stood out clearly to those who truly believed.

People Searching, God Revealing

In the New Testament, each of the four gospel accounts explicitly begins to identify Jesus of Nazareth as the promised Messiah. God most certainly did not hide the arrival of the Promised Seed. God used angels to reveal plainly and directly to Joseph and Mary the unique occurrence of the virgin birth. When Jesus was about to be born, God employed a light beaming from the sky to pinpoint the location of His birth. By means of angels, He announced it to nearby shepherds, and they also publicized it to others within the area of Bethlehem. An angel clearly proclaimed that the One born was the long-

awaited Savior. Matthew and Luke provide lengthy genealogies, given in reverse order of each other, showing that the newborn Babe's family lineage aligns with the Old Testament prophecies.

In the account of His birth and early life, Luke 2:12, 34 use the term "sign" purposely: In verse 12, an angel uses it to identify to the shepherds how He would be dressed ("in swaddling cloths"). In verse 34, after the elderly Simeon calls the Babe "Your [God's] salvation," he prophesies to Mary that He would be "a sign which will be spoken against."

After traveling a long distance following that mysterious star, the wise men arrived in Jerusalem, inquiring of King Herod about the birth of the King of the Jews. A divine warning in a dream told them not to return to his palace before going back to their native land. The appearance of an angel propelled Joseph into fleeing to Egypt with Mary and Jesus, triggering the fulfillment of another prophecy: calling God's Son out of Egypt even as He did with Israel (Hosea 11:1).

Though Matthew did not use the word "sign" in recording these incidents, each of them was indeed a sign that distinguished Jesus from other newborns. They all appeared in a relatively short period of time to ensure His birth was well known within Judea by the time His ministry began. Even the sign of His intelligence and unusual depth of understanding on biblical subjects at age twelve was noted by experienced, adult religious figures. More important is that He, too, was aware and referred to God as His Father in the presence of His physical parents (Luke 2:41-52).

John Purposely Gave Clear Signs Too

We must not overlook Jesus' cousin, John, whose responsibility to God was to prepare the way for Christ's ministry. As Luke 3:15-17 shows, John's ministry was a sign as well:

Now as the people were in expectation, and all reasoned in their hearts about John, whether he was the Christ or not, John answered, saying to all, "I indeed baptize you with water; but One mightier than I is coming, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather the wheat into His barn; but the chaff He will burn with unquenchable fire."

Shortly after this pronouncement, John baptized Jesus. On that day when he baptized many, he baptized Jesus

last, focusing all attention on Him:

When all the people were baptized, it came to pass that Jesus also was baptized; and while He prayed, the heaven was opened. And the Holy Spirit descended in bodily form like a dove upon Him and a voice came from heaven which said, "You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased." (Luke 3:21-22)

No sign announcing His identity could be more clear. The long-awaited Promised Seed, Messiah, Redeemer, Savior, and Creator—all in one living, divine Being—had arrived on earth to do His work and was duly announced as no other had ever been.

Familiarity Breeds Contempt

Soon thereafter, He was led into the wilderness to be tempted by the Devil. After passing these tests, He returned to His hometown where a different type of test awaited Him:

So He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read. And He was handed the book of the prophet Isaiah. And when He had opened the book, He found the place where it was written: "The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed; to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD." Then He closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all who were in the synagogue were fixed on Him. And He began to say to them, "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in Your hearing." So all bore witness to Him, and marveled at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth. And they said, "Is this not Joseph's son?" He said to them, "You will surely say the proverb to Me, 'Physician, heal yourself! Whatever is done in Capernaum, do also here in Your country.'" Then He said, "Assuredly, I say to you, no prophet is accepted in his own country." (Luke 4:16-29)

First, note the sign He gave them and all those who claim to follow Jesus: Our Savior keeps the Sabbath. Second, the more arresting sign, everyone in the synagogue understood His reading from Isaiah

61:1-3 to refer to the Messiah's responsibilities, and Jesus boldly stated, "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." By this, He claimed divine anointing (*messiah* means "anointed"), and He declared that He would set them free from what held them in bondage, another sign of the Messiah. Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph and Mary—the Man who lived next door, as it were—announced with beautiful words and great conviction that He was the Messiah.

For this reason, the townspeople quickly turned

against Him and attempted to kill Him by casting Him off a cliff. To them, His words were blasphemous, making Him deserving of death. God spared Him, but three-and-a-half years later, the Jews insisted that Pilate crucify Him on the same basic charge.

In Christian love,



Ready Answer

Who Fulfills the Azazel Goat—Satan or Christ?

(continued from page 10)

nacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

In addition to fulfilling the burnt offering, Christ's singular sacrifice also fulfilled all the "cleansing" sacrifices. As these verses show, the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, signified symbolic purification and cleansing. A covering of blood purified those points of contact between the holy God and defiled man. Through Christ's death, resurrection, and ascension, there is now a way into the "Holiest of All" (Hebrews 9:8). His blood opens access and makes Him the Mediator of a New Covenant (verse 15).

The Holy Place, Tabernacle, and altar had been cleansed—satisfying the Lord—but God still had another object lesson for Israel: He commanded a second goat to reveal another function. Leviticus 16:21-22 instructs the high priest to lay both his hands on the *azazel's* head to indicate a symbolic transference—a substitution—taking place. The priest "confess[ed] over [the goat] all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions, concerning all their sins."

Notice that these iniquities, transgressions, and sins were still outstanding, as it were. The blood of the first goat had not paid for them, so they still had to be resolved. Thus, God designated this fourth sacrificial animal—a "goat of departure" or "goat of complete

removal"—to "bear on itself all their iniquities to an uninhabited land" (verse 22). The first goat cleansed the holy place, while the second goat bore the iniquities away, completely removing them from view.

The fulfillment of this goat should be clear to any Bible-believing follower of Christ, for Scripture states unambiguously that our iniquity was laid on Him (Isaiah 53:6), He bore our sins (Isaiah 53:11-12; I Peter 2:24; Hebrews 9:28), and He took them away (Colossians 2:14; Hebrews 10:4)—all the actions of the live goat—leaving no room or need for any other being to accomplish this.

Consider what would happen if God left out either of these two magnificent purposes. If we gained access to God but no forgiveness of sins, access to Him would be short-lived, for our sins would separate us from Him in short order (Isaiah 59:2). Alternatively, if God forgave our sins but gave us no access to Him, we would never rise above merely being legally justified—never attaining to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ that comes through a relationship with Him.

The New Covenant, though, provides a way for us both to know God (access to God) and to have our sins forgiven and forgotten (Hebrews 8:10-12) so that we can have atonement as we grow in the image of God. Because of Christ's sacrifice, we have access to an altar others lack (Hebrews 13:10).

Why Were Lots Cast for the Two Goats?

Proverbs 16:33 explains the use of lots most succinctly: "The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD." The Israelites cast lots to establish God's will, particularly in contentious matters (Proverbs 18:18). Throughout the book of Joshua, lots determined the division of the Promised Land so each tribe received the inheritance God intended. Later, they cast lots to decide who would fill various functions within the government

Ready Answer

Who Fulfills the Azazel Goat—Satan or Christ?

(I Chronicles 24–26).

Regarding the goats, recall that the instructions in this chapter follow the priesthood's profound failure in offering profane fire (Leviticus 16:1). The Day of Atonement may also be connected with the infamous priestly and national failures in the Golden Calf incident. God had them cast lots to remind them of the priest's fallibility and inability to choose correctly in the worship of God.

God determined which goat would be for Him and which would be sent away. In this, He was choosing between functions, not typified personalities. The con-

cept of personalities only arises due to the tradition that holds that *azazel* is a demon's name. Without that assumption, the matter concerns merely which goat would fulfill which function, and God reserved that decision for Himself.

God remained the arbiter, and the priest had to look to Him for direction. Recall that God rejected Cain's offering because he chose to sacrifice according to what seemed good to him (Genesis 4:3-7). The lots provide a lesson that God dictates the terms of worship, even in things we might consider arbitrary.

—David C. Grabbe

Prophecy Watch

Worthy to Take the Scroll

(continued from page 14)

"All things" are subjected to futility, and all of creation waits to be delivered from the bondage of corruption—he describes it as "groaning" (verse 22). This is why, after the Lamb takes the scroll,

every creature which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them [declare]: "Blessing and honor and glory and power be to Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, forever and ever!" (Revelation 5:13).

Paul also says that Abraham and his spiritual descendants are heirs of the world (Romans 4:13), and the Lamb's works are how we obtain that inheritance. Having paid the ultimate purchase price for His property, He alone is worthy to open the sealed deed. The Lamb even provides His own witnesses to testify of His eligibility—His claim on His property—throughout His earthly ministry (John 1:6-8, 15); after His death (Acts 1:8, 22; 2:32; 3:15; 4:33; 5:32; 10:39; 13:31; 14:17; 22:15; 23:11); in every martyr willing to die for his Kingdom and King (Revelation 6:9-11); and in two final witnesses of the Lamb's right to all things (Revelation 11:3-13).

THE LAMB TAKES THE SCROLL

In Revelation 5:5, one of the elders tells John, "Weep no more; behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that He can open the scroll and its seven seals" (ESV). The One who prevailed is the Heir of the Kingdom, and David's throne belongs to Him. So the Lamb who had been slain takes the scroll from the hand of God.

The rejoicing that follows is solely in His taking the

scroll before He even opens it. The rest of the chapter—including the one-hundred-million-voice choir (verses 11-12), then every last creature (verse 13)—contains praises because One is found worthy to take the scroll, open its seals, and redeem the property in question. If we allow the scope of this vision to sink in, it is evident it cannot simply be about unlocking prophecy.

When the scroll's seals are opened, we see glimpses of what happens as the redemption is fully realized. The seals reveal a world in turmoil as the current ruler strains to retain what has been his, even as the Redeemer stakes His claim on what He has created and purchased. The last trumpet of the Seventh Seal sounds, completing the redemption of the earth. Not only that, but the firstfruits are resurrected, finalizing our redemption as well.

The conclusion appears in Revelation 11:15-18, another stirring hymn in Handel's *The Messiah*:

Then the seventh angel sounded: And there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdom of this world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!" And the twenty-four elders who sat before God on their thrones fell on their faces and worshiped God, saying: "We give You thanks, O Lord God Almighty, the One who is and who was and who is to come, because You have taken Your great power and reigned. The nations were angry, and Your wrath has come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that You should reward Your servants the prophets and the saints, and those who fear Your name, small and great, and should destroy those who destroy the earth."

—David C. Grabbe

The Saudi Arabian Makeover

Students of Bible prophecy tend to keep an eye on the Middle East. That broad stretch of land squeezed by the continents of Africa, Asia, and Europe is the setting for most of what takes place in the Bible, and this is also true for its prophecies. While focusing specifically on the state of Israel and Jerusalem, some may miss events happening elsewhere in the region. In that vein, we may wish to consider what is happening in Saudi Arabia.

More specifically, Mohammad bin Salman Al Saud, 32, is quickly becoming a significant player in the turbulent region. Since June 2017, he is the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia, the heir-apparent to the throne. He also fills the posts of Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense, the youngest in the world to hold the latter position. In addition, Prince Mohammad is chief of the House of Saud royal court and chairman of the Council for Economic and Development Affairs. He has been described as the power behind the throne of his aging father, King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, 82. And, typically, some prophecy buffs have already tabbed the prince as the Antichrist!

Since being named Crown Prince, Prince Mohammad has engaged in a massive reform program for his kingdom, vowing to return the country to “moderate Islam” and asking for global support to transform the hardline kingdom into an open society that empowers citizens and lures investors. Contending that ultra-conservative Saudi Arabia has been “not normal” for the past thirty years, he blames rigid doctrines that have governed society in reaction to the 1979 Iranian Revolution, which he claims his predecessors “didn’t know how to deal with.”

On this point, Prince Mohammed said in a recent interview:

We are simply reverting to what we followed—a moderate Islam open to the world and all religions. 70% of the Saudis are younger than 30. Honestly, we won’t waste [another] 30 years of our life combating extremist thoughts. We will destroy them now and immediately.

With such fighting words, he has thrown down the gauntlet at the feet of Islamic extremists across the Middle East and around the world.

What has he accomplished so far? Most importantly, he has succeeded—in part—in breaking an alliance between hardline clerics, who have long defined the national character, and the House of Saud, which has run affairs of state. He rounded up more than 200 members of the Saudi elite, accused them all of corruption, and locked them up in a luxury hotel in Riyadh. His goal, of course, is to separate mosque and state.

Shortly after the prince took charge of defense, Saudi Arabia launched its largest-ever military intervention, entering into neighboring Yemen, which is backed by Iran. In June, the kingdom imposed a blockade on its Persian Gulf rival, Qatar, for dealing diplomatically with Iran and Islamist groups.

His reforms have also tackled head-on certain societal taboos such as the recently rescinded ban on women driving and entering sports stadiums. He has scaled back guardianship laws that restrict women’s roles. Also, he has established an Islamic center tasked with certifying the sayings of the prophet Muhammed, since some apocryphal sayings ignite extremism.

He has also been working on bringing new forms of entertainment into the kingdom because he believes the millions of young Saudis are bored—45% of the population is age 25 or younger—which causes many of them to turn to extremism just for something exciting to do. Public entertainment—like jazz concerts, Comic-Con, and video gaming events—is now supported. The government recently lifted a decades-old ban on movie theaters and has made a point of encouraging the fledgling Saudi filmmaking industry to expand. Six Flags Entertainment Corporation announced in June that it would build a theme park in the kingdom.

The true centerpiece of his efforts, though, is economic. He wants to turn the kingdom away from a near-total dependence on oil and into a diverse, open economy. He will have to overcome significant obstacles: an entrenched poor work ethic due to pervasive government handouts, a crippling regulatory environment, and a general reluctance to change. Saudi Arabia will need massive resources if it is to succeed in putting its economy on a new footing.

Everything hangs, however, on securing broad social and religious reforms, or otherwise, the kingdom will fail to generate strategic investments from wealthy Western nations. Contrary to popular belief, Saudi Arabia does not have the money to move away from its petro-dependence on its own. A great deal depends on the planned sale of five percent of state oil giant, Saudi Aramco, which could be the biggest initial public offering in history.

As *Time* magazine speculated in its December 25, 2017, issue:

But 2018 is likely to be just the start. After he takes the reins from his elderly father, Mohammed bin Salman could rule the kingdom for a generation. Top officials in the royal court say no plan is in the works for the ailing King to abdicate, a step unprecedented in Saudi history. Besides, he may prefer to rule alongside his father for some time, with the King providing a degree of political cover as he continues to transform the kingdom completely.

While a stable, moderate Saudi Arabia appears promising, we should not forget about the kingdom’s hardline conservatives. They *will* attempt a counter-punch, which may come in the form of Islamic terrorism against the Saudi state. And then things will really become exciting in the Middle East.

—Richard T. Ritenbaugh

The Miracles of Jesus Christ

A Second Large Catch of Fish (Part One)

The gospels record two different miracles displaying Jesus Christ's power in facilitating a large catch of fish. The first instance, recorded in Luke 5:1-11, occurs during the early stages of His ministry, when Christ is "recruiting" His disciples, preparing them for an intensive education. The second, found in John 21, transpires after His resurrection but before His ascension, as He gives His final marching orders to His beloved "graduates."

While this study focuses on the second occurrence, comparing the two "large-catch" miracles adds to our understanding. As Christ's final miracle *before* His ascension, the second miracle compared with the first reveals the progress of His efforts to prepare His students for the next phase of their sanctification journey. Moreover, the comparison provides all of His disciples, then and now, a lesson on the need for self-examination—to measure our growth in faith—as well as our growth in the grace and the knowledge of Jesus Christ (II Peter 3:18).



As a way of introduction and to help establish context, Part One discusses three compelling questions:

1. Why does Christ select Galilee for this final miracle? John 21:1.

COMMENT: On at least three occasions, Jesus directs His disciples to meet Him in Galilee after His resurrection (Matthew 26:32; 28:7, 10; Mark 14:28; 16:7). Galilee is the location of the first fishing miracle of Luke 5, where He called His first disciples: Peter, John, James, and Andrew. Not only does it invite a natural comparison between the two miracles, but it also provides a sense of completion—of coming "full-circle." Galilee is the disciples' home, and their fishing boats are docked there. Moreover, just as in the first fishing miracle, the Sea of Galilee—also known as Lake Tiberias or Lake of Gennesaret—allowed for an intimate gathering away from the masses while providing a feeling of solace and comfort following their Savior's crucifixion.

2. What should we infer from the disciples' decision to go fishing? John 21:2-3.

COMMENT: John presents the narrative without Christ commenting on the disciples' decision to fish. Though His promises to go before them to Galilee are clear, in the opening verses of John 21, we find seven of the disciples following Peter to go fishing. No casual occasion for leisure, this fishing trip is a commitment to many hours of hard work.

Obviously, these are difficult days for the disciples. They had spent most of the past three-plus years in the direct company of Jesus. Even though He informed them several times of His impending death and resur-

rection (Mark 8:31; Matthew 16:21; 26:2), the disciples are still deeply troubled by the former and confounded by the latter (Luke 24:36-41; Matthew 28:17). Peter is particularly distraught, still shamefaced from having denied Him three times (Luke 22:61-62; John 21:17).

Even though they are filled with joy in the presence of the post-resurrection Christ, they also realize that times are changing. They recognize that their future is more uncertain—and probably more difficult—than they desire. We can easily understand their need to engage in an activity with which they are familiar and comfortable, and which removes them from prying eyes and ears.

3. Why can the disciples catch no fish on their own? John 21:3-5.

COMMENT: Jesus had earlier taught His disciples, "Without Me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). None of His handpicked devotees was yet capable of confidently anticipating His resurrection into His natural, spiritual state (Luke 24:36-37). Therefore, uncertain of the events surrounding them, six of the disciples chose to follow Simon Peter—probably more restless and impatient than usual—onto the fishing boat. Like Peter, they were not fishing as an activity to prove their faith, but as cover for their unease and uncertainty—their lack of faith. Christ wanted to emphasize upon them that any activity they undertook without Him would be fruitless.

Having set the stage and the context for Christ's final miracle, in the next issue, we will dive deeper to bring more details to light.

—Martin Collins