



Daily Verse and Comment

Leviticus 16:5

(5) And he shall take from ^athe congregation of the children of Israel two kids of the goats as a sin offering, and one ram as a burnt offering.

Leviticus 16:21-22

(21) 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. (22) The goat shall bear on itself all their iniquities to an uninhabited land; and he shall release the goat in the wilderness.

New King James Version

The sequence of the common [sin offering](#) (Leviticus 4) is noteworthy: The guilty party first laid his hands on the sacrifice's head to symbolize one life being exchanged or substituted for the other. The slain animal's blood was then sprinkled before the veil of the Tabernacle, put on the horns of either the incense altar or the brazen altar (depending on who sinned), and the rest poured at the base of the brazen altar.

According to [Hebrews 9:13](#), 22, blood provides symbolic cleansing and purification. However, [Hebrews 10:4](#) states this practical fact: "It is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins," which applies on a couple of levels. In the wider context of Hebrews, it testifies to the transcendent efficacy of Christ's sacrifice—it was so pure and powerful that no animal sacrifice could ever begin to compare. In the immediate context, the author is pointing out that within the sacrificial law, blood could not *take away* sin—it could only cleanse, purify, or cover. Something else was required to show the sins of the Israelites being symbolically taken

away. This removal of sins took place on the [Day of Atonement](#), to which Hebrews 9-10 refers.

In type, the blood of the sin offering was a record—a witness—of the sin it covered. Thus, all the blood of sin offerings put on the incense altar (also called the golden altar) throughout the year symbolized all the iniquity committed by the priests and the congregation. As [Hebrews 10:3](#) observes, "In those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year." The Atonement ceremony brought to the Israelites' minds all the sins for which they had to bring their sin offerings. Because of the accumulated sins, [God](#) commanded the high priest to cleanse the incense altar with blood each year ([Exodus 30:10](#)).

The unique sin offering for the congregation on Atonement consisted of [two goats](#) ([Leviticus 16:5](#)). Through the casting of lots, one goat was designated as "for the LORD," meaning that it was to satisfy or appease the Lord. At this point, God's instructions intentionally leave out a *highly* significant step: No hands were laid on the first goat! It was simply killed. Its blood did not testify of sin. Rather than contributing more iniquity to the record, its blood *cleansed* the objects nearest to the Lord ([Leviticus 16:15-19](#)).

With the blood of the first goat—free of confessed sin—the incense altar and holy objects were atoned for or cleansed.

Many translations call the second goat the "scapegoat." The Hebrew word is *azazel*, which means "goat of departure" or "complete removal." [The azazel](#) was the means for all the cleansed sins to be *completely or entirely removed* from the congregation.

In the standard sin offering, hands were laid on the substitutionary sacrifice to symbolize a transference, and then its blood was shed. Notice, though, that on the Day of Atonement, the order is reversed! This explains why the offering required two animals: One animal had its blood shed, while a second animal had all the sins confessed over it so they could be taken away. Because the ceremony began with one animal being sacrificed, a second, living animal was necessary to have hands laid on it. The live goat received,

as it were, all the iniquities, transgressions, and sins of Israel. None of that defilement was ever placed on the first goat, whose purpose was simply to provide cleansing.

As [Romans 10:4](#) teaches, "Christ is the culmination of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes" (*New International Version*). [Jesus Christ](#) perfectly fulfilled both aspects of this unique Day of Atonement offering. [Hebrews 9:12-14](#) not only shows His fulfillment of the first goat with His own blood, but also how superior His shed blood was, even to the point of cleansing consciences.

Likewise, the Scriptures record Christ's fulfillment of the *azazel* through bearing and taking away sins. [Isaiah 53:6](#) declares, "And the LORD has *laid on Him the iniquity of us all*" (emphasis ours throughout), just as the high priest laid Israel's sins on the *azazel* each year. Christ likewise *bore* our sins, another function of the *azazel*:

- He shall see the labor of His soul, and be satisfied. By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many, for He shall *bear their iniquities*. Therefore I will divide Him a portion with the great, and He shall divide the spoil with the strong, because He poured out His soul unto death, and He was numbered with the transgressors, and He *bore the sin of many*, and made intercession for the transgressors. ([Isaiah 53:11-12](#))
- . . . who Himself *bore our sins* in His own body on the tree. . . . ([I Peter 2:24](#))
- . . . so Christ was offered once to *bear the sins of many*. ([Hebrews 9:28](#))

The blood of bulls and goats could not take away sin. The *azazel* did this in type, but it merely pointed to Jesus Christ, the only One who could perform this—and did ([Colossians 2:14](#); [Romans 11:27](#); [I John 3:5](#)).

— David C. Grabbe

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