



Leviticus 16:8

(8) He is to cast lots for the two goats—one lot for the LORD and the other for the scapegoat.

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This first biblical occurrence of lots being cast shows that the matter of choosing what goat fills which role is completely in God's hands. [God](#) does not leave it up to man to choose which would fulfill these roles because of man's inability to judge properly.

I Chronicles 24—26 shows that governmental roles in Israel were determined by lot. To remove any ambiguity, various officials, Levites, musicians, gatekeepers, and other leaders were assigned their lots in life through God's decision. The same thing occurs in Leviticus 16: God determines which goat will fulfill which role.

The matter of the different roles becomes clear after understanding [Leviticus 16:8](#). A difficulty springs up here, though, because the construction *seems* to imply two separate personalities: One lot is cast “for the LORD,” and another “for [azazel](#).” However, if we look deeper, we will see that the phrase “for the LORD” is not about identifying a personality at all.

Because we have the benefit of looking back in history on Christ's sacrifice and understand that the sacrificial system pointed forward to the work of the Messiah, our minds tend to interpret “for the LORD” to mean “as a *representation of the LORD*.” While the sin offerings did pre-figure Christ, the phrase was not intended to mean this, but that the first goat was designated “as *belonging to the LORD*.”

It is used in the same sense that the sacred incense was “holy *for the LORD*” ([Exodus 30:37](#)), that in wartime the Israelites were to “levy a tribute *for the LORD*”

ORD” ([Numbers 31:28](#)), and that an idolatrous city was to be completely burned “*for the LORD your God*” ([Deuteronomy 13:16](#)). The first goat's role was to appease the Lord and to be sacrificed to Him; it was for the Lord's satisfaction in the ritual, not to represent Him.

Consider that the Israelites did not truly understand the intent of the sacrificial system. During the first century, the concepts that the Messiah would be God-in-the-flesh and that He would be killed in fulfillment of the whole sacrificial system were entirely foreign. If there was ever a national consciousness that the first goat was a *representation* of the Creator God, dying for the sins of the people, it was clearly forgotten by the time it was fulfilled!

Even though we can now read various psalms and prophecies related to [the crucifixion](#) and recognize them as Messianic, the Israelites did not have this understanding; they thought the Messiah would be a human leader who would restore them to national greatness. In like manner, they certainly understood, not that one of the goats would *represent* the Lord, but that the goat was a sacrifice *to* the Lord. *The instructions do not specify how the ritual would later be fulfilled*—only what the goats were for.

Along these lines, *azazel* is not a name in the Bible, nor did the live goat represent a second *personality*, but instead it fulfilled a second *purpose*. It was chosen to accomplish just what the Hebrew root word means: departure, removal, or disappearance. The first goat was for the Lord because His justice must be satisfied; it was for the cleansing of His house (Tabernacle and people). The second goat was for an additional step after the penalty for sin was paid: completely removing the sins from view by bearing them to an uninhabited land. Thus, while many infer that two personalities are in view in [Leviticus 16:8](#), the construction does not require it. Rather, the lots were cast to determine which goat would fulfill each *role* within this compound atonement for sin.

— David C. Grabbe

To learn more, see:

[Who Fulfills the Azazel Goat—Satan or Christ? \(Part One\)](#)

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[Casting of Lots](#)

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