



"Education without values, as useful as it is, seems rather to make man a more clever devil."

—C.S. Lewis

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Inventing Goddesses and Demons (Part Three)

Parts One and Two in this series covered the ancient Babylonian myth of the demon goddess Lilith, who became enmeshed in Jewish folklore with her companion, Samael. Lilith was imagined in the Genesis 1 creation account and later "discovered" in the prophecy of Edom's destruction in [Isaiah 34:14](#). But Lilith is not the only extra-biblical character to be insinuated into Scripture by those influenced by folklore.

In the [Day of Atonement](#) ritual involving [two goats](#), the Hebrew text calls the living goat *azazel* ([Leviticus 16:8](#), 10, 26), often translated as "scapegoat." Scholars present numerous and conflicting interpretations of the living goat, and they cannot even agree on a definition of this word. Given that a basic tenet of Bible study is not to base a doctrine on the meaning of a Hebrew word—nor "to strive about words" ([II Timothy 2:14](#))—we will skip the definition and consider the larger picture.

The interpretation with the most biblical support is that this goat prefigures [Jesus Christ](#): The Father laid our sins and iniquities on His innocent head ([Isaiah 53:6](#)), and He bore them as a substitutionary sacrifice ([Isaiah 53:11-12](#); [Hebrews 9:28](#); [I Peter 2:24](#)), just like [the azazel](#). Paul writes in [II](#)

[Corinthians 5:21](#) that He became [sin](#) for us as the live goat did for the Israelites. Jesus, too, was led "outside the gate" ([Hebrews 13:12](#)) as the *azazel* was led "outside the camp" (see verse 11: The two phrases are parallel). And, just as being sent from God's presence signifies a curse, Christ became a curse for us ([Galatians 3:13](#)). Many scriptures readily support Christ's fulfillment of the live goat.

A second interpretation is that the live goat represents [Satan](#). Humanity's sins will be placed on Satan's head, and he will bear them. This interpretation is highly problematic, chiefly because the bearing of sin is what the Messiah does, not the Devil! Nowhere does Scripture support the idea that humanity's sins will be confessed over or laid on Satan's head. It is an assertion without any biblical fulfillment.

[Worldwide Church of God](#) (WCG) leaders recognized that Satan cannot bear human sins and said so adamantly in their writings. Nevertheless, the WCG still interpreted the *azazel* as a type of Satan, claiming that the Day of Atonement pictures the Devil's sins being put on his own head. Yet, this explanation is also a non-starter because Atonement contemplates only *human* sins, not those of demons ([Leviticus 16:21](#)). This third interpretation is another assertion without biblical backing. It sounds plausible at first, but the Bible nowhere reveals a fulfillment.

A fourth, less common—but hair-raising—interpretation of the live goat exists. First, notice how the *New King James Version* (NKJV) translates [Leviticus 16:10](#):

But the goat on which the lot fell to be the scapegoat [*azazel*] shall be presented alive before the LORD, to make atonement upon it, and to let it go as the scapegoat [*azazel*] into the wilderness.

Contrast this with the *New Revised Standard Version* (NRSV) translation:

. . . but the goat on which the lot fell for Azazel shall be presented alive before the LORD to make atonement over it, that it may be sent away into the wilderness to Azazel.

Did you catch the shocking difference? The NKJV reads that the live goat was chosen *to be* the *azazel*. In this translation, *azazel* describes *the role* that this goat fills: to be taken away, bearing the nation's sins, so they are completely removed. However, the NRSV (along with some other modern translations) reads that this goat was to be *sent to* Azazel. In other words, the translators do not interpret the goat *as* the *azazel*, but rather that the goat is sent to *a personality* named Azazel!

Some scholars see "Azazel" as a name because compound nouns—nouns made of two words—are often proper nouns (names) in Hebrew. The Hebrew word *azazel* appears to be a compound noun, so the possibility exists that it is a name. While Hebrew allows for it, it does not require it. What tips the scale for modern translators is the same Jewish folklore that persuades them to see a demon goddess of the night named Lilith in [Isaiah 34:14](#), despite the prophecy just referring to a nocturnal animal.

Between the testaments, Jewish folklore invented a lesser demon named Azazel, who was blamed for all human sin (see *The Book of Enoch*). A millennium after Leviticus 16, the word *azazel* had been turned into a name. Many Jews of this time used a saying that reveals how they intertwined Scripture with folklore: "On the day of atonement, a gift to Sammael" (see *The Judgment, Its Events and Their Order* by J.N. Andrews, pp. 78-81). These Jews viewed the live goat as an offering *sent to* Samael, the Devil (and Lilith's companion), who blended with their myth of Azazel, as folklore is wont to do.

A significant difference exists between the goat being chosen "to be" the *azazel* and it being "sent . . . to" a personality, a demon, named Azazel! Let this sink in: If, at God's command, the Israelites sent a sacrificial animal to Azazel—if this biblical ritual was designed to appease or even acknowledge a demon—the Israelites would be committing gross idolatry at God's instigation! It is an appalling assertion.

Regardless of the thoughts of some Jews in the centuries before Christ or what translators think the Hebrew suggests, the live goat could not possibly represent a gift or offering sent to a demon. Not only is sacrificing to demons directly prohibited in the very next chapter ([Leviticus 17:7](#)), but [God](#) says

right in the covenant not even to *mention* the names of other gods ([Exodus 23:13](#)). In [Deuteronomy 12:3](#), He commands Israel to destroy the names of false gods wherever they find them. He declares in [Exodus 22:20](#), "He who sacrifices to any god, except to the LORD only, he shall be utterly destroyed."

Yet, modern translators and other scholars would have us believe the holy God not only enshrined the name of a demon in the instructions for this solemn day, but He also intended His people to acknowledge or even placate this false god with a sacrificial animal. He did not. Instead, He commanded an Israelite to lead a substitutionary animal bearing the nation's sins away from the camp. God called that animal *azazel*, "complete removal."

As seen in the example of Lilith, if we stick to God's Word, we get a single, cohesive scenario. If, however, we borrow ideas from this anti-God world, something very different and destructive emerges, twisting the truth of God. As Paul writes, such doctrines of demons lead to people departing the [faith](#) ([I Timothy 4:1](#)). We must reject the cup of demons and drink only from the cup of the Lord ([I Corinthians 10:21](#)).

- David C. Grabbe

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[False Gospels](#)

by Richard T. Ritenbaugh

To distinguish the true gospel from the myriad false gospels, a major clue is that any teaching attempting to change the nature of God or Christ or their doctrines is anti-Christ and false. In Galatians 1:6-11, Paul suggests that the motivation to preach a false gospel (a deadly mixture of truth and error) is to please man, pandering to his carnal nature, rather than to please God. The true gospel (of the Kingdom of God) comes only by God's revelation, producing fruits of faith and eternal life. The best antidote preventing us from becoming duped by false gospels is to become a living sacrifice ([Romans 12:1](#)), totally immersing ourselves into God's service, avoiding evil by doing good'much as even a little light dispels the deepest darkness.

From the Archives: Featured Article

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

by David C. Grabbe

For years, the church of God has taught that the azazel goat, found in the instructions for the Atonement (Yom Kippur) offering in Leviticus 16, represented Satan taking man's sins on his own head and being led into outer darkness, taking sin with him. However, Scripture does not support this interpretation. David Grabbe focuses on the inappropriateness of Satan as a sacrifice for sin, as well as what the Bible shows that the azazel goat actually accomplishes.

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