

Jesus Christ, The Bearer Of Sin

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As God leads us through the process of conversion, He regularly challenges our concept of Him. As we accept and apply ourselves to each challenge, our mental image of God's character and nature becomes sharper. This principle underscores why searching the Scriptures is of paramount importance, because they testify of the Father and the Son. Rightly dividing the Word of Truth clarifies our vision of them.

Sometimes the Scriptures say things that are too challenging, and our minds revolt until we take an objective look, and then—hopefully—accept what Scriptures say. This came up because of some writings that indicate a reluctance to accept the ugly reality of Christ's sacrifice, and this resistance results in overlooking one of Christ's major works. The Scriptures say things that may be shocking. Sometimes it is easier to hurry past a verse than to let its meaning sink in. It is perhaps an understandable response, because it is unpleasant to think about the Son of God in terms of what we will see. But without accepting this facet of His sacrifice, we miss a most significant part of what He did.

Our subject today relates to the Day of Atonement ritual in Leviticus 16. We will only look at a couple of verses there and won't spend much time in that chapter. But if you would turn there, we will refresh our minds on the primary actions involving the *azazel*:

Leviticus 16:21-22 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.

So, notice the two actions: First, all the iniquities, transgressions, and sins of the people are laid on the head of the *azazel*. Second, the *azazel* bears all these sins.

Now, please turn with me to the Messianic prophecy in Isaiah 53:

Isaiah 53:4-6 Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

We will look at verse 6 first, and then come back to verses 4-5. Verse 6 is an obvious fulfillment of what we saw in Leviticus 16. The Lord—the Father, in this case—laid our iniquities on the Messiah, just as the high priest laid his hands on the *azazel* and confessed over it all the iniquities of Israel. The *azazel* was the type, and the Messiah is the antitype.

Verses 4-5 describe the physical trauma the Messiah was prophesied to undergo. It says He was stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. He was wounded and He was bruised. He was chastised, and He received the stripes of scourging. The English Standard Version has an effective rendering, particularly in the phrase concerning chastisement. The ESV says,

But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed.

This prophecy foretells that the Messiah would do more than just die. If death were all that was required for God's justice to be satisfied, He could have simply had the Romans slit Christ's throat, just like an animal's. One deadly cut, and it would be over. Yet God inspired Isaiah to foretell that the Messiah would undergo great suffering, in addition to death.

There is a potent lesson here, which is that sin incurs more than just the death penalty. Sin also causes physical and emotional pain. It causes grief

and sorrow. Other verses mention the shame of the crucifixion. Not only does sin cause shame before God, as Adam and Eve experienced, but sin also tarnishes our reputation in the eyes of others when it is known.

There is much that could be said about all the wretched and rotten fruit that sin produces, but for our purposes today, it is enough to recognize that when our iniquities were laid on the Messiah, it caused more than death. It caused disfigurement and agony that was unparalleled. The previous chapter says that He was marred more than any man, such that it was hard to tell He was human. That is what sin does—it distorts and corrupts the image in which we were created. We were created in God’s image, but sin destroys that likeness.

Down in verses 11-12 are two more testimonies of Jesus Christ:

Isaiah 53:11-12 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.

As we saw in Leviticus 16:22, the *azazel* had to bear on itself all the iniquities. Its primary role was bearing sin. Verse 11 here says that justification results from the Messiah bearing iniquities. Verse 12 uses the prophetic past-tense, saying that the Messiah “bore the sins of many.” When this prophecy was given, the bearing was as good as done.

If you want to look at it later, the book of Hebrews also describes Christ’s bearing of sin. Chapters 9 and 10 explain Christ’s fulfillment of the Day of Atonement ceremony, and Hebrews 9:28 says that Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many.

Now, we will focus in on how, when, and where Christ bore our sins.

I Peter 2:24 who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed.

This tells us when and how Christ bore our sins. He bore them while He was on the tree, and He did this in His own body. In other words, His bearing of sin was not an abstract legal pronouncement. It had a real-life application and recorded fulfillment. When He died, He fulfilled the perfect sacrifice for sin, but while He was alive on the tree, He was bearing sin. The bearing took place during His extreme suffering for hours, when He was experiencing the shame, the reproach, the anguish, the piercing, crushing, bruising, smiting, grief, and other terrible effects of sin, aside from death.

Now, this does not mean that because of Christ's crucifixion, our sins no longer produce pain, shame, or other bitter fruit. Sin is just as serious now as it ever has been. But we can connect the consequences we endure to the fact that Jesus is the Mediator. He intercedes for us. That does not mean that He mechanically lays down a "get out of hades free" card each time we repent. He bore the full chastening that we deserve, and now we receive chastening in other ways as God forms us into His image.

If we think about the sins we have committed, as well as the disciplining or chastening that we have received, I'm sure you will agree that we have not received anywhere near what God would have been justified in handing out. Christ received complete justice, poured out in full strength, so that we can have mediated chastening that isn't more than we can bear, so we can continue the sanctification process. As Paul says in II Corinthians 6:9, we are chastened, yet not killed. God's merciful chastening yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness, and it is offset by the chastening Christ received in our stead. Sin still has dreadful consequences, but God can oversee and turn them to a good end for His children.

Verse 24 also says that healing comes from Christ's stripes, which is another reference to Isaiah 53. We commonly think about Christ's stripes in terms of physical healing, and that certainly is one application. However, both the Greek word for "healed" here, as well as the Hebrew word back in Isaiah 53, can indicate spiritual healing as well, and that is infinitely more important. Whether or not we are healed physically is inconsequential when compared to the spiritual healing that leads to eternal life.

Peter says “you were healed.” He is not saying that all saints were healed physically, but there was a spiritual healing that took place for each one of us. The next verse—verse 25—shows this. It says that we were like sheep, going astray—another reference to Isaiah 53, and it indicates a spiritual condition rather than a physical one. But because of Christ’s bearing of our iniquities, a spiritual healing took place, such that we turned to the Shepherd.

Now, as I mentioned earlier, a few who have a hard time with what happened when our sins were laid on Christ. One brother in the faith said, “He [meaning Christ] did not become representative of sin. He bore the penalty.” This means that because all the iniquities were laid on the *azazel*, that animal became representative of sin. And that is true. But then it makes a distinction between bearing the penalty and becoming a representative of sin. It says Christ did one, but not the other, with the implication that Christ could not have fulfilled the *azazel*. It is understandable that there would be reluctance to think of the Son of God as representing sin . . . and yet Paul says that is exactly what happened:

II Corinthians 5:21 For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

Paul’s words may be startling and uncomfortable, but they are true. God the Father made Christ to be sin. Now, there is an interesting detail about sin offerings that relates. If you look in an interlinear Bible at any verse where a sin offering is mentioned, you will see that the word “offering” is supplied by the translators. It turns out the Hebrew word for “sin offering” is also the word for “sin.” Like many Hebrew words, it has multiple meanings. It can indicate sin, or a sin offering, or several other related things. In a sin offering, the animal symbolically becomes sin, which is why the same word is used for both. When all the iniquities of Israel were laid on the *azazel*, the goat became a representation of sin. And Paul does not soften his words by saying Christ represented sin—Paul says God made Christ to be sin.

Another man likewise sees the dreadful role of the *azazel*. He writes:

When all the sins are placed on the head of the goat for Azazel,
then that amounts to a curse being placed on the individual who is

represented by the goat for Azazel. The individual who is represented by that goat is clearly being cursed! And when that goat is then led into the wilderness, that too is a curse! It is a curse to be sent into the wilderness. The goat for Azazel is clearly cursed.

This is essentially correct, especially the part about the goat becoming cursed. The symbol of the wilderness really can be either positive or negative, but it is quite true that being sent outside the camp was negative. However, then the author takes great exception to the thought of Jesus Christ being accursed. He writes, “We need to understand that claiming that the goat for Azazel represents Jesus Christ amounts to calling Jesus Christ ‘accursed’!”

Now, please turn to Galatians 3:13, where Paul says this very thing:

Galatians 3:13 Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree”),

This again refers to Christ on the tree. God laid on Christ “the iniquity of us all,” just as the high priest did with the *azazel*. Jesus became a curse—those are Paul’s words. Now, he does not say that Jesus is accursed right now, because the curse of the law was carried out. Christ died after becoming sin, after becoming a curse. Yet Paul says that, in the past, Christ became a curse for us. He fulfilled the awful role of the *azazel*.

Now we come to another significant aspect of Christ’s sacrifice, and that is where it took place. Remember that the sin offerings were killed at the tabernacle. The bodies of the animals were burned outside the camp, but their deaths took place at the tabernacle or temple. The exception was the *azazel*. For the Day of Atonement, two goats together were a single sin offering. The use of multiple animals was not unusual, for there are other instances of multiple goats used as a single representation of sin. The fact that the second goat was not slain does not mean it wasn’t a sacrifice. Its life was most certainly dedicated and consumed by its role of becoming sin and becoming cursed. Its life just didn’t end at the tabernacle. Instead, after it became sin, it was led outside the camp.

Now, where did Christ die? Hebrews 13:12 says that He “suffered outside the gate.” You might remember John’s sermons on “Eden, the Garden, and the Two Trees”—especially the third part, where he explained the most likely place for Christ’s crucifixion was across the Kidron Valley from the Temple, on a slope of the Mount of Olives. Jesus did not die at the temple. The gospels say He was led away, just as the *azazel* was. And unlike the first goat, but like the *azazel*, His sacrifice was not an immediate death—He was alive for hours while He “bore our sins in His own body on the tree.” Christ’s bearing of our sins took time, and He felt every second. He became sin and a curse as He hung there, bearing our transgressions, outside the gate.

I will read to you Matthew’s description of the end of Christ’s bearing of sin:

Matthew 27:45-46 Now from the sixth hour until the ninth hour there was darkness over all the land. And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, “Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?” that is, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"

During Christ’s ministry, He told the Jews that the Scriptures testify of Him. When we study His word, we should be able to see how the various symbols point to Him in some way. At times, this may challenge our concepts and test whether we are willing to accept His Word.

As we have seen, sin produces all manner of evil fruit. God, in His mercy, has provided a way for us to be healed, to be reconciled to Him, and not to be so overwhelmed by the consequences of our mistakes that we cannot continue. That solution was highly distasteful, because it involved the Messiah fulfilling a terrible yet necessary role—becoming sin, and becoming a curse, as He bore in His body all the chastening. If we accept His sacrifice, we must also acknowledge the reality of what the Son of God had to endure so that we can have life with Him.