

## Who Fulfills The Azazel Goat— Satan Or Christ? (Part Three)

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As we have seen, the unique offering on the Day of Atonement for the sins of Israel consisted of two goats (Leviticus 16:5). The first goat was killed, and the high priest cleansed the sanctuary and the holy objects with its blood. The second goat—the *azazel*, the goat of departure—had all the sins of the people laid on its head, bearing them to an uninhabited land, a land “cut off.”

Jesus Christ fulfilled the roles of both sacrificial animals: He died to provide a covering of blood and open the way to the Father, and He also bore the sins of many, taking them to the land of forgetfulness—the grave. Isaiah 53 prophesied that the Messiah would accomplish this. Scripture is silent about sins being placed on Satan’s head or his bearing sins in any way.

The name of this holy day derives from the Hebrew *yom kippur*. *Kippur* means “expiation,” while its root, *kaphar*, can be translated as “cleanse,” “disannul,” “forgive,” “pardon,” “purge,” “put off,” and “cover.” It is “the Day of Atonement [*kippur*], to make atonement [*kaphar*] for you before the Lord your God” (Leviticus 23:28). Leviticus 16:30 summarizes: “For on that day the priest shall make atonement [*kaphar*] for you, to cleanse you, that you may be clean from all your sins before the Lord.” The holy day deals with providing a solution to the people’s defilement—and, therefore, separation from God—through cleansing and removal of sins. As Leviticus 16:21-22 makes plain, the ceremony involves the sins of the people, not of Satan.

These articles have explored how the part of the ritual involving the “goat of departure” is fulfilled. Even without poring over the ritual’s details, we can see that the name of the day indicates only one logical way this can take place. The expiation of mankind’s sins—the atoning, cleansing, disannulling, purging, and putting away of sins—is what the *Savior* does, by the very definition of the word, rather than what the Adversary does.

### A Problematic Linkage

The releasing of the *azazel* into the wilderness is commonly—but incongruously—linked with the binding of Satan (Revelation 20:1-3). This linkage is problematic because the account in Revelation makes no mention of sins—whether mankind’s or Satan’s—being placed on Satan’s head. Instead, the express purpose for his binding is “so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished” (verse 3). He is bound to cut off his influence, not to provide any sort of expiation.

In addition, since the book of Revelation is generally dated around AD 90-100, John’s vision did not occur until the very end of the apostolic generation. Earlier, Jude had written to exhort the beleaguered first-century church “to contend earnestly for *the faith* which was *once for all* delivered to the saints” (Jude 3; emphasis ours throughout). “The faith” is a specific faith, indicating a well-defined body of beliefs. However, when Jude wrote his epistle, Satan’s binding had not yet been foretold. It was not revealed to John until *after* “the faith” had *already* been delivered to the saints.

Similarly, Paul writes to Timothy that the “Holy Scriptures”—which, at that point, would have consisted of what is generally called the Old Testament—“are able to make you wise for salvation

through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (II Timothy 3:15). Even without the book of Revelation, the first generation of Christians had all they needed to understand God’s plan.

The matter of how sin is atoned for is at the very core of being “wise for salvation,” and Paul’s words indicate that “wisdom” was already available from 1) what had been written before, and 2) God-given faith in Jesus Christ. In other words, the apostolic generation understood salvation—including the Day of Atonement and how sins are expiated—without the revelation that Satan will be bound. The former is not dependent on the latter.

In Colossians 2, Paul warns the churches at Colossae and Laodicea against any philosophy or system of beliefs—specifically mentioning “the tradition of men”—that detracts from Christ’s sovereign position and role under the Father (verses 4, 8-9). He points out that the brethren there were already “complete in Him” (verse 10). This does not mean that they had already achieved spiritual perfection or that their salvation was assured, but that they had no need of anything supplementary to what was already available in Christ. If they were still awaiting Satan’s binding—after having been resurrected to glory, no less!—before their sins were completely removed from view, how could the apostle write that they were already “complete” in Christ? On the contrary, those who come under Christ’s blood are not awaiting the final resolution of their transgressions; their previous sins have *already* been completely taken care of.

Paul continues:

And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. (Colossians 2:13-14)

Notice the definitive wording. There is no hint here—or anywhere else—that God’s people are awaiting Satan’s binding so their sins can finally be expiated. “The wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23), and those wages have already been paid in full. Therefore, we are alive in Christ *now*, and not waiting for an imagined final payment on the debt when Satan is bound.

The phrase “having wiped out the handwriting of requirements” in Colossians 2:14 is often misinterpreted as meaning that God’s law has been done away, yet in the Greek sentence structure, it is parallel with “having forgiven you all trespasses.” The “handwriting of requirements” is the written record of violations against God’s ordinances. Paul says that this “handwriting”—the record of sins, not the laws—was expunged, reiterating that our sins have been forgiven. Other translations say He “erased,” “blotted out,” or “destroyed” it. The record is completely obliterated, in God’s reckoning.

Verse 14 says that Christ has “taken it out of the way.” *Strong’s Concordance* states that the Greek word for “taken,” *airo*, means “to lift up; by implication, to take up or away; . . . by Hebraism to expiate sin.” It means the same as the Hebrew word used for “bearing,” *nasa’* (Strong’s #5375). In addition, *airo* is in the perfect tense, indicating action completed in the past. The live goat lifts up, carries, and takes away the sins placed on its head by the high priest (Leviticus 16:21-22). In Colossians, Christ is declared to have lifted up, taken away, and expiated the record that was against us—an exact match to what is said about the goat of departure.

## Hebrews and Atonement

While this should suffice to prove who fulfills the *azazel*—especially in the absence of *any* verses pointing to Satan—even stronger evidence exists. More than any other New Testament book, Hebrews gives the most complete explanation of the sacrificial law, and chapters 9 and 10 specifically cover the Day of Atonement. If the Bible were to contain any support for Satan playing a vital role in man's becoming one with God, we would expect to find it here.

However, Satan is absent. If the author understood that the *azazel* was a type of the Devil, leaving him out of these chapters would be an incredible oversight. But the only mention of Satan appears in Hebrews 2:14, where it simply says that the Devil has the power of death. Conversely, chapters 9 and 10 resound with the work of Jesus Christ, and it is there that we find even more evidence of His fulfillment of the *azazel*.

Before examining these chapters, it is worth considering what comes before. The author wrote Hebrews to an unnamed group of people who were apparently neglecting their salvation (Hebrews 2:3) and “turn[ing] away from Him who speaks from heaven” (Hebrews 12:25). The epistle does not correct specific sins but admonishes them to shake off their apathy and remember how superior Christ is to every other personality, system, or spiritual factor, allowing the Hebrews to return to a focused and steadfast walk with Him.

As this unique treatise opens, the author points out Christ's finished work regarding our sins: “. . . who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had *by Himself purged our sins*, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high” (Hebrews 1:3). Even as Jesus “*Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree*” (I Peter 2:24) and “*He Himself is the propitiation for our sins*” (I John 2:2), so He also purged our sins *by Himself*. This threefold witness shatters the possibility that any other being is involved in the resolution of human sin. That He “sat down” also shows His work of purging our sins is complete. It does not depend on a future act involving Satan.

Hebrews 1:4 speaks of Christ, “having become so much better than the angels.” The first two chapters demonstrate Christ's superiority over angels, which would certainly include the fallen ones. How could a fallen angel possibly play a part in the divine solution to sin? Is the work of Jesus Christ somehow deficient? As Paul would say, God forbid!

## Hebrews 9

Hebrews 9 opens with a description of the earthly sanctuary and its contents. Instructions from Leviticus 16 begin in verse 7: “But into the second part the high priest went alone once a year, not without blood, which he offered for himself and for the people's sins committed in ignorance.” Verses 11-15 show Christ's fulfillment of the cleansing ritual and how He entered the Most Holy Place in heaven with His own blood. Verse 15 points out that our promise of eternal inheritance is based on *His* mediation; neither He nor we are awaiting Satan to fulfill any part of the sin offering. Verses 22-25 also explain Christ's cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary with His own blood, once for all, in contrast to the yearly purification of the physical sanctuary.

Comparing these explanations with the instruction in Leviticus 16, we see that both passages follow the same general order. Leviticus 16 begins with the instructions for the high priest on Atonement, just as Hebrews 2-9 presents Christ's superior High Priesthood. Next, Leviticus 16 proceeds to the slaughter of the first goat and the use of its blood to cleanse the sanctuary and holy objects. The bulk of Hebrews 9 explains Christ's role in fulfilling that.

The next step in Leviticus 16 is the placing of the people's sins onto the *azazel*, coinciding with what follows in Hebrews:

... but now, once at the end of the ages, He has appeared to *put away sin* by the sacrifice of Himself. And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment, so Christ was offered once to *bear the sins* of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation. (Hebrews 9:26-28)

After the purification of the sanctuary, the very next theme is that Christ *put away sin*. His sacrifice *alone* is sufficient for this; Satan has nothing to add to Christ's work of salvation! We denigrate His name by suggesting that His work is somehow insufficient and that a "counterpart" is needed to fulfill half the sin offering.

The Greek word translated "put away," *athetesis*, means "to cancel," and it can also be translated as "disannul." The root of this word, *atheteo*, means "to neutralize," and can be translated as "cast off," "despise," and "bring to nothing." Thus, in addition to cleansing the sanctuary, Christ's sacrifice *put away sin*—it cancelled the sin, bringing it to nothing, for those who repent and come under His blood.

Verse 28 says that Christ's sacrifice was for the sake of bearing the sins of many, precisely what the *azazel* did in type. In addition, He will appear a second time, apart from sin. An ancient Israelite would be horrified to see the young goat wander back into the camp because it would signify that all his sins had come back into view. Spiritual Israelites, however, have confidence that their sins have been completely removed. So, when our Savior appears again, it is not to bring those sins back into view, but to bring salvation.

## Hebrews 10

In Hebrews 10:1-4, the author continues explaining the completeness of Christ's sacrifice:

For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect. For then would they not have ceased to be offered? For the worshipers, once purified, would have had no more consciousness of sins. But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins.

Part of the problem with animal sacrifices is that a consciousness of sins remains. The Israelites went through the ceremony, but spiritually, nothing happened. Christ's sacrifice, though, includes the removal of sins from consciousness, which is implied in the role of the *azazel* but not actually accomplished. Along these lines, the author of Hebrews notes three times that Christ's sacrifice cleanses the conscience (Hebrews 9:9, 14; 10:22).

Hebrews 10:4 uses significant wording when speaking of taking away sins. The Greek word, *aphaireo*, has familiar meanings and implications. Its basic meaning is "to remove," while it can also be translated as "cut off." The author uses terminology that exactly describes the *azazel*, the goat of "complete removal" (as *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* renders it) that bears the sins to a land that is "cut off."

Certainly, nothing involving animals can do that. But Christ's sacrifice was both necessary and entirely sufficient to deal with sin. He became sin for us (II Corinthians 5:21) and was cut off. He paid the death penalty, giving us access to the Father, as well as bearing the sin into forgetfulness and cleansing the consciences of those who accept Him.

Hebrews 10:10 reads, "By that will we *have been sanctified* through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ *once for all*." The sanctification to which this refers has already been performed by Christ; we are not still waiting for Satan to bear sins in the future. If we are still awaiting the final resolution for sin, how can we say that we will "put on incorruption, and . . . immortality" at the first resurrection (I Corinthians 15:53-54), given that Satan is not bound until *after* Christ returns and not cast into the Lake of Fire until after the Millennium? In type, we would still be waiting all that time for our sins to be completely removed!

Hebrews 10:12-14 declares that Christ, "after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God, from that time waiting till His enemies are made His footstool. For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified." As mentioned, the fact that He "sat down" shows that the entire work (regarding sacrifice, atonement, bearing the sins, removing transgression, etc.) is already complete. It is not dependent on "Act II"—something involving Satan in the future.

Hebrews 10:17-18 completes the explanation: "then He adds, 'Their sins and their lawless deeds *I will remember no more*.' Now where there is remission of these, there is *no longer an offering for sin*."

Jeremiah 31:34 foretells that under the New Covenant, God would not remember sins and lawless deeds. Simply put, sins are not remembered because they have been borne to the "land of forgetfulness." The author then takes the explanation a step farther, showing that once remission of sin has been accomplished, there is "no longer an offering for sin." That is, the role of the *azazel*—the second part of the compound offering for sin (Leviticus 16:5)—has *already* been fulfilled! We *already* have remission of sins; there is not a future fulfillment of any sin offering that those who are already under Christ's blood should be waiting for.

## Deafening Silence

Reading through Hebrews 9-10 should impress us with all that Christ has accomplished for us. It also helps us to recognize the astounding incongruity of allowing Satan to be inserted anywhere in God's solution to sin.

To summarize, we have no biblical justification for blaming Satan for our sins. There is no reason to have our sins placed on his head, nor for his sins—which Leviticus 16 does not even contemplate—to separate us from God (see Isaiah 59:1-2). Scripture is deafeningly silent about the Devil bearing human sins in any way—not even a whisper as to why such a task would be given to a sinning angel. The only reason Satan has even a toehold in Leviticus 16 is the extra-biblical tradition that names *azazel* as a fallen angel.

The inspired Scriptures are completely devoid of any support for Satan being part of the atonement for sin, while they give abundant, unimpeachable witnesses of Jesus Christ's final and efficacious atonement. As Hebrews 12:2 declares, He is "the author and finisher of our faith."

### **Inset: Can the *Azazel* Be Fulfilled Only After Christ's Resurrection?**

The entire sacrificial system pointed to Jesus Christ in some way; it was a “tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith” (Galatians 3:24). This certainly includes all the instructions in Leviticus 16. There is a pitfall, however, in trying to make the sequence of the ritual precisely fit the timing of Jesus’ ministry, death, and resurrection. This is crucial to understand because some identify the *azazel* as Satan on the assumption that the role of the *azazel* can only be fulfilled *after* Jesus was resurrected.

The assumption is this: In Leviticus 16, the Lord’s goat is slain to make payment for sin, understood to be a type of Christ’s sacrifice. After His resurrection, He ascended to heaven to take on the role of High Priest. This line of reason leads to the conclusion that, since the first goat represented the slain Christ, and the high priest represented the resurrected Christ, then the *azazel* must represent someone entirely different from Christ.

Yet, even though the entire sacrificial system pointed to Christ, the order in which He fulfilled things did not match the instructions given to Israel. He completely fulfilled the essence of those instructions, but it is impossible—and unnecessary—to fit the timeline of the reality into that of the shadow, the type. We will follow a brief tangent to see this, taking as our example God’s instruction concerning the consecration of the Aaronic priesthood.

Exodus 29 provides a specific order in which the various sacrifices for dedicating priests to their office were to be carried out. Performed first, the sin offering acknowledged sin and made symbolic atonement before anything else was done. Next came the whole burnt offering, representing a life given in complete service to God (different from a life sacrificed in payment for sin). Offered with the burnt offering was a grain offering, which similarly represents a life given—lived—in complete devotion to fellow man.

Though this is not a complete expounding of Exodus 29, the order of these elements teaches that we cannot approach God until payment for sin has been made (sin offering), and that our highest priority after our justification is wholehearted devotion to God (burnt offering). Only after that can we truly love our fellow man and be devoted to him (grain offering).

In contrast, Jesus’ fulfillment of these sacrifices occurred in a different order. He did not become the sin offering until *after* He had lived a life of complete devotion to God and man—that is, after He had already fulfilled the burnt and grain offerings. Similarly, He did not qualify to be our High Priest until *after* He had fulfilled the burnt offering, grain offering, sin offering, and other offerings like the Wavesheaf and the Passover. What we see is that the actual sequence in which Christ fulfilled all these things was not identical to the sequence given to Israel in Exodus 29. However, He fulfilled their spiritual essence, which the Father accepted.

Returning to the Atonement ritual, we observe the same thing. The instructions *begin* with the high priest entering the Holy Place (Leviticus 16:3-4). If, in interpreting the ritual’s symbols, we require this chapter to follow the sequence that took place in Christ’s fulfillment, we are immediately faced with an impossibility: He did not qualify to be High Priest until *after* His earthly work was completely finished—after His crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension (see Hebrews 5:9-10). Therefore, trying to match the Leviticus 16 instructions with what actually happened leaves us starting out with Christ’s earthly work already complete and after His installation as High Priest.

It is not necessary to match up the order of these things, nor is it required that the *azazel's* antitype be fulfilled only after Christ's resurrection. Forcing a rigid, sequential fulfillment of Leviticus 16 results only in tying ourselves in symbolic knots.