

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

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Part One detailed why the two goats in the Day of Atonement ritual (Leviticus 16) were part of a single sin offering. As “the fulfillment of Moses’ teachings” (Romans 10:4, *God’s Word Translation*), Jesus Christ was the object of the whole system of sacrifices. Every sacrificial animal was an unblemished, substitutionary offering that found its fulfillment in His life or death.

In contrast, Satan is not involved in any sacrifice, let alone in bearing the sins of mankind. The identification of the *azazel* as a type of Satan does not spring from Scripture but ancient Jewish literature—specifically from the inventive *Book of Enoch*.

Each of the two goats played a separate role, and lots were cast so the high priest would know which goat was to fulfill which role, as determined by God. The first goat was “for the Lord,” meaning that it was to satisfy His justice as payment for sin (Leviticus 16:8-9). Its specific purpose was to provide a covering of blood for the Holy Place, the Tabernacle, and the altar (Leviticus 16:15-19). The high priest used its blood to purify the holy objects used in approaching God. Even though individual Israelites did not enter the Sanctuary, God still considered it defiled simply by being within the sinful nation. God’s holiness required the accouterments used to access Him to be purified before He removed Israel’s sins each year.

Bearing the Sin of Many

Most of what happened with the first goat and its blood was out of view of the congregation. More meaningful to the people was what happened to the second goat, “the goat of departure,” which they could watch as it carried their sins out of sight:

And when he has made an end of atoning for the Holy Place, the tabernacle of meeting, and the altar, he shall bring the live goat. 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. (Leviticus 16:20-22)

One of the best-known Messianic prophecies provides an unambiguous fulfillment of the live goat’s bearing of sins:

Surely He has *borne* our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. . . . 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 53:4, 11-12; emphasis ours throughout)

Scripture also describes the Messiah's "bearing" of transgression as acceptance, forgiveness, and pardon (Job 42:8-9; Psalm 25:18; 28:9; 32:1, 5; 85:2; Micah 7:18). The Hebrew word means "to lift up," "to carry," and "to take away." It is tied to forgiveness because it is as if He carries the sins out of sight. While the Bible also uses it to refer to what men do—such as "carry" (Genesis 47:30) and "forgive" (Genesis 50:17)—it is never used to refer to Satan.

Christ's bearing of sins goes beyond paying the penalty, fitting perfectly with one of the meanings of *azazel*, "complete removal" (compare Psalm 103:12). In Isaiah 53:12, the bearing is linked with intercession. They are not the same thing, but the parallelism indicates that an active work occurs in carrying the sins until they are completely removed from view, figuratively "as far as the east is from the west."

Along similar lines, God required Aaron to wear a turban with a blue cord on the front so he could "bear the iniquity of the holy things which the children of Israel hallow in all their holy gifts" (Exodus 28:38). This was the high priest's responsibility throughout the year, though the turban is also specifically mentioned in the Day of Atonement ritual (Leviticus 16:4). He symbolically bore the sins of the nation throughout the year, and on the Day of Atonement, he transferred them to the "goat of departure" (Leviticus 16:21), which bore them out of sight.

We see the same thing in the New Testament. I Peter 2:24 says Jesus "Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree." Not only did He bear the sins, but He did it by Himself, just as the *azazel* did (Leviticus 16:22). He did not share that role. The author writes in Hebrews 9:28, "Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many." His single and singular sacrifice both cleansed the sanctuary and bore the sins of many.

As an illustration, God had Ezekiel "bear" the iniquities of Israel (Ezekiel 4:4-6). More than ninety times, God calls Ezekiel "son of man," signifying he was a type of the Messiah, who in the Gospels frequently refers to Himself as "the Son of Man." Ezekiel could not bear Israel's sins in the ultimate sense, but in bearing them figuratively, he, like the high priest, represented Christ rather than the Devil.

Who Is Responsible for Sin?

Scripture plainly teaches that Christ bears our sins, and the next article will expand on His fulfillment of the Day of Atonement ritual. Yet, we introduce grave error if we gloss over either the Bible's general teaching on sin or whose sins, in particular, are atoned for in Leviticus 16.

One error lies in blaming Satan for the sins of humanity, then interpreting the *azazel* to represent Satan bearing mankind's sins. Apocryphal tradition holds that all sin should be ascribed to a fallen angel named Azazel, and even today it is commonly taught that the real cause—the actual author—of human sin is Satan. However, the Word of God shows that this is not true.

There is no question that Satan deceives (Revelation 12:9). He broadcasts his attitudes, and we all have tuned in to them. Ephesians 2:2 establishes that an evil spirit influence is at work in the world today. Jesus calls the Devil "the ruler of this world" (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11), and John declares that "the whole world lies under [his] sway" (I John 5:19).

However, "there is a spirit in man" that is the basis of mankind's reason and free moral agency (Job 32:8; I Corinthians 2:11). This biblically revealed truth means that, while a malignant spirit can *affect*

the spirit in man, it does not *force* a person to act. This outside spirit gives people terrible information on which to base their decisions, but God says they have enough evidence of His power and divine nature to make them without excuse (Romans 1:20).

The ancient Israelites did not have God's Spirit, yet He still set life and death before them, commanding them to choose (see Deuteronomy 30:15-20). They had only the spirit in man, but the power to choose was still theirs. Earlier, God had warned Israel, "Take heed to yourselves, *lest your heart be deceived*, and you turn aside and serve other gods and worship them" (Deuteronomy 11:16). God's admonition shows that if they allowed themselves to be deceived, it was due to their not "tak [ing] heed." They could blame only themselves. Satan exerts influence, sometimes powerfully, but the responsibility to choose life still belongs to the individual.

When we sin, it is not because Satan authors it. James 1:14 says that we sin when we are drawn away by our desires, which give birth to sin (verse 15). We sin because our hearts are not yet like God's heart, which cannot be tempted. The core problem is not what Satan does—though it is certainly problematic—but the desperately evil human heart (Jeremiah 17:9). The solution is a new, spiritual heart like Christ's (Ezekiel 36:26).

The Soul Who Sins

In John 8:44, Jesus identifies Satan as the spiritual father of those Jews who opposed Him, implying that they had learned how to murder and lie because the Devil was their spiritual father. They were displaying his characteristics, just as children naturally adopt the traits of their parents. Some might seize on this principle to support the idea that Satan is responsible for their sins—except for what the pre-incarnate Christ says earlier through Ezekiel:

Yet you say, "Why should the son not bear the guilt of the father?" Because the son has done what is lawful and right, and has kept all My statutes and observed them, he shall surely live. The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not bear the guilt of the father, nor the father bear the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself. (Ezekiel 18:19-20)

God holds the father accountable for his sins, and the children responsible for their sins. The sinning soul bears its own guilt and penalty—death (Romans 6:23). Ezekiel 18 completely nullifies the justification that a child can blame his parents for his faults. Even though parents exert tremendous influence, God's view of parent-child relationships does not allow this shifting of blame.

Following this through, God will not accept this justification with regard to an individual blaming his *spiritual* father, Satan, even though he also wields considerable influence. According to the repeated principle in Ezekiel 18, Satan cannot bear the guilt of sins committed by a human. He bears the guilt for his own sins, which include deception, but Satan *cannot* make us sin.

In verses 14-17, God even gives the scenario of a son recognizing the sinfulness of his father and choosing to go a different way. The Jews who opposed Christ in John 8 should have done exactly that—realized that the murder and lies in their hearts did not originate with God, then chosen to act differently from their spiritual father.

In Genesis 3:17, God identifies the trigger of Adam's sin as heeding the voice of his wife. In the same way, our sin may also begin with heeding the voice of another (Satan), but he is not the author

of our sin, any more than Eve was the author of Adam's sin. Though Adam and Eve played the blame game, God did not accept their excuses. If we hold to the justification that Satan is the real cause of our sins, we are trying to dodge reality, just as they did.

The apostle Paul declares in Romans 5:12 that sin entered the world through one man, Adam. Notice that God does not put the origin of human sin on Satan, but on Adam, even though Satan sinned long before and overtly lied to Eve (Genesis 3:4). This is how God reckons human sin—as difficult as it may be to accept. The overall point in Romans 5 is that, even though the first man introduced sin to mankind, it is through the Son of Man that humanity will be justified and made righteous. Put simply, humanity has made the choice to sin, and Christ *alone* provides atonement upon repentance (Acts 4:12; Matthew 1:21; I Timothy 2:5-6).

A few chapters later, in Romans 7, we find Paul's anguish over his struggle with sin. His conclusion is not that Satan is the real cause—the Devil gets only one mention in Romans, where the apostle writes that the God of peace will crush him (Romans 16:20). Instead, Paul concludes that *he* had indwelling sin. Rather than point the finger at Satan, he mournfully recognizes his sinful state and declares his faith in Christ's work and deliverance (verse 25).

Paul's conclusion suggests that, in addition to Satan being completely unworthy of being represented by a substitutionary sacrifice, it is also wholly incongruous to suggest that the sins of the people belong on Satan's head. Their sins are their own, and Satan's sins are his own.

The Second Error in Interpretation

The role of the live goat has been interpreted a second erroneous way. Leviticus 16:21-22 states that the sins in view are human sins, yet some propose that what is being expiated is *Satan's portion* of human sin. In other words, in any given sin, the individual plays a part and Satan plays a part, and thus God must deal with Satan's sins after the first goat is offered to cover humanity's sins.

However, we need to double-check that math very carefully. The Bible says nothing about a co-sinner. God does not split up the death penalty, such that a person earns part of the death penalty, while Satan earns the rest.

Leviticus 5:17 says, "If a person sins, and commits any of these things which are forbidden to be done by the commandments of the Lord, *though he does not know it, yet he is guilty and shall bear his iniquity.*" Sinning in ignorance—including transgressing due to deception—does not mean that less of a sin has been committed against God's holy, spiritual law. Regardless of what led to the infraction, when a sin is committed, the sinner earns the wages of sin. There is no concept of a partial sin or divided guilt in the Scriptures. If a sin involves two beings, then *each* has committed sin, and *both* earn the death penalty, as in the case of Adam and Eve (*cf.* I Timothy 2:13-14). That is the correct biblical math.

Think about this in terms of money. We each incur our own debt when we sin, and the debt is not shared, no matter how we incurred it and no matter who said what. If a generous benefactor pays our debt for us, then we are in the clear. Our debt's cancellation, though, is in no way pertinent to the slick salesman who suggested that we take it on in the first place. The deceiver is responsible for his lies, and we are responsible if we listen to him and make ourselves indebted.

The principle of “the soul who sins shall die” (Ezekiel 18:4) is why the Bible places such emphasis on drawing near to God, resisting Satan, loving the truth, and guarding ourselves against deception. The danger is not that Satan will make us sin; he cannot force anybody to sin. The danger is that *we* will sin and incur the death penalty by not taking heed. That God gives us so many admonitions means that *we* incur guilt when we let that happen—it is ours, not Satan’s.

Symbolically, to represent the guilty party, the substitutionary animal has sins placed on it that are not its own. Obviously, Satan has his own guilt, so he cannot be a substitute for anyone else. The Bible says these are human sins, and it is fallacious to try to explain away its clear statements.

In addition, *if* Satan were responsible for all human sin, then what would be the need to show a symbolic transference taking place? Under this assumption, the sins of mankind are already on his head! His guilt has never left him, so it does not need to be placed *back* on him. Yet, the Atonement ritual specifies that the sins be placed on an *innocent* party’s head—one that is not already responsible for those sins. At every turn, Satan fails to fit into what Leviticus 16 says.

An Uninhabited Land

Leviticus 16:22 stipulates that the *azazel* must “bear on itself all their iniquities to *an uninhabited land*.” The Hebrew word for “uninhabited land” (*Strong’s* #1509; used only here) literally means “a land cut off.” It derives from *Strong’s* #1504, defined as “to cut down or off; (figuratively) to destroy, divide, exclude, or decide.”

Jeremiah, the presumptive author of Lamentations, employs this root to describe the state of death: “The waters flowed over my head; I said, ‘I am cut off!’” (Lamentations 3:54). Isaiah 53:8, part of the Messianic prophecy quoted previously, uses it similarly: “He was taken from prison and from judgment, and who will declare His generation? For He was *cut off* from the land of the living; for the transgressions of My people He was stricken.”

Jesus Christ was cut off from the land of the living; He was taken to “a land cut off.” Similarly, Psalm 88, a Messianic psalm, also describes the Messiah as being “cut off” and put into a “land of forgetfulness”:

Adrift among the dead, like the slain who lie in the grave, whom You remember no more, and who are *cut off* from Your hand. . . . Shall Your wonders be known in the dark? And Your righteousness in the *land of forgetfulness*? (Psalm 88:5, 12)

These terms are figurative language for the grave, where no thought or memory occurs, nor knowledge or device (Psalm 6:5; Ecclesiastes 9:5, 10). In taking our sins to the “land cut off” and to the “land of forgetfulness,” they are not merely paid for but ultimately forgotten.

In common usage, “forget” and its forms indicate activities of the mind. However, in Hebrew thought, “forgetting” goes beyond the mental realm and into that of action, that is, forgetting contains an act that demonstrates that the forgotten thing is no longer a factor. The Hebrew words for *forget*—*shâkah* (#7911) and *nâshâh* (#5382)—mean “to ignore,” “to neglect,” “to forsake,” or “to willfully act in disregard to a person or thing.”

When God forgets our sins, He makes a conscious choice to ignore them—to forsake their occurrence, as it were; to disregard them—so that His actions are not swayed by what we have done. We may still feel other effects from our sins, but as far as God is concerned, He no longer looks at us through the lens of those transgressions. They have been borne away.

Jesus Christ fulfills all aspects of this unique sin offering: His shed blood paid for sin, and He bore those sins to the land of forgetfulness—to the grave—completely removing them from view. Thus, Hebrews 9:28 says that when He appears a second time, it will be “apart from sin.” In Isaiah 43:25, God says, “I, even I, am He who blots out your transgressions for My own sake; and I will not remember your sins.” Isaiah 53:6 states that “the Lord has laid on Him [the Messiah, not Satan] the iniquity of us all.” It is already finished—we are not still waiting for those transgressions to be sent away in the future.

Similarly, under the New Covenant, He promises, “For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more” (Jeremiah 31:34). Jesus bore sin out of sight, being cut off. Conversely, Isaiah 14:15-16 shows Satan put in a pit and gazed upon, very much in view.

The *azazel* is led by a “fit” or “suitable” man, who then had to be cleansed (Leviticus 16:26). Similarly, in Matthew 27:1-2, Jesus was bound and led away at the behest of the chief priests and elders. In verse 31, they “led Him away to be crucified” (see also Mark 14:53; 15:1, 16; Luke 23:26). Christ’s well-known petition, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do,” stands immediately after soldiers led Him to Calvary (Luke 23:32-34). In other words, He appears to be speaking specifically about forgiving those who were leading Him (even though His request would apply to all who participated in His death). In type, the ones leading Him were “cleansed” (forgiven), just like the man who led the *azazel* away.

The common view of Leviticus 16 holds that the goat being led away and released is a type of what happens to Satan. However, neither Satan’s binding (at the beginning of the Millennium; Revelation 20:1-3) nor his being cast into the Lake of Fire (sometime after the Millennium; Revelation 20:10) corresponds with the *azazel* being set free. While not every symbol will necessarily match up in a spiritual fulfillment, it is hard to see how these things even *begin* to match up. The goat is commanded to be released (Leviticus 16:22), while the fallen archangel is confined, restrained, and (later) cast into fire—completely dissimilar actions. In short, there is no scriptural support for Satan fulfilling the part the live goat plays.

Christ Is Our Focus

We understand the great danger in underestimating Satan and his influence over the world today, but is there not an even greater peril in ascribing to him the perfect work that Jesus Christ alone can (and did) accomplish? Have we inadvertently made Satan the focus of the most solemn holy day of the year, when our focus should be on the complete work of the Savior?

Recall that the Pharisees, witnessing one of Christ’s exorcisms, attributed the work of the Messiah to the power of “Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons” (Matthew 12:24). In response, Jesus delivered a thunderous warning against blaspheming the Holy Spirit (verses 31-32). Likewise, the proper identification of *who* carries out this work of atonement is critical!

Misunderstanding the *azazel* also gives us an excuse that the source of our problems is Satan. However, Paul identifies “the law of sin and death” working in his members as the source of his wretchedness, never resorting to “the devil made me do it” justification. In Psalm 51, in the great psalm of repentance, David takes full responsibility for his sins and sinfulness, never mentioning that they would be—or needed to be—put on Satan’s head. There is likewise a deafening silence from every other writer of the Bible in ascribing all of humanity’s sin to a fallen angel.

In reality, *sin* separates us from God, not Satan (Isaiah 59:1-3)—and the Devil cannot cause us to sin. He presents his temptations, and *we* choose whether to listen. God commands even carnal men to choose, which would not be possible if the decision of whether to sin were in Satan’s hand. Because sin is the reason for separation between God and man, God accomplishes atonement by dealing with the problem of sin rather than dealing with the presence of Satan. When the Word of God is rightly divided, Satan is nowhere to be seen in the ritual of the two goats. Satan simply is not a part of what God does to make atonement for His people and restore the relationship.

The next article will explore the oft-neglected New Testament explanation of the Day of Atonement ritual and how Jesus Christ perfectly fulfilled it.