

Azazel's Goat

Next he will take the two goats and place them before the LORD at the entrance to the tent of meeting. After Aaron casts lots for the two goats, one lot for the LORD and the other for Azazel, he is to present the goat chosen by lot for the LORD and sacrifice it as a sin offering. But the goat chosen by lot for Azazel is to be presented alive before the LORD to make purification with it by sending it into the wilderness for Azazel. - Leviticus 16:7-10 HCSB



When the high priest was finished purifying the most holy place, the tabernacle and the altar, he would be given a live male goat, lay his hands on its head and confess over it all the Israelites' wrongdoings and rebellious acts – all their sins. Then, he would send it away into the wilderness, led by a man appointed to the task. The goat was to carry on it all the wrongdoings into a desolate land, and be released there.¹

Everything in the Old Covenant's rituals symbolized something. The bloody death of the sheep taught us that the shedding of blood was necessary for the remission of sins.² The grain offerings and signified the people's understandings that everything they had belonged to Hashem and that they were merely caretakers of His things. So, what was the significance of Azazel's goat?

The people of Israel were surrounded by pagan tribes that worshipped goat demons called Se'irim. Sometimes, the Jews prostituted themselves by worshipping those goat-demons and a law prohibiting such activities was enacted.³ Rebellious King Jeroboam appointed priests for the Se'irim,⁴ but King Josiah destroyed them.⁵ Thus, there was already a strong occult association with the wilderness goat-demons.

So, when the people's sins were placed on these goats and sent out into the wilderness, there was a visual lesson being taught. Hold on to your sins and you will be cast out of the camp into the outer darkness, subject to the whims of predators.

We see this image continued in the New Covenant. The stubborn refusal of the Messiah earns the stiff-necked Jews a place in outer darkness.⁶ The man who tried to enter Yahweh Melek's celebration without being appropriately dressed in righteousness was similarly punished.⁷ The wicked servant who failed to submit to Hashem's rule and wisely care for His gifts was also cast out.⁸

When we pig-headedly seek to be our own masters, God will give us what we want. He will send us to a place where we are out of God's presence, answerable to no one but ourselves. However, in that place we will only find weeping, wailing and gnashing of teeth. Out there we find lions.⁹

We have the choice: the sacrificial lamb, or Azazel's goat. Jesus became that cursed creature for us, having been driven into the 'wilderness' outside the city by order of the high priests and bearing our sins upon Himself. Let us appropriate that sacrifice for ourselves.

¹ Leviticus 16:20-26

² Hebrews 9:22

³ Leviticus 17:7

⁴ 2 Chronicles 11:15

⁵ 2 Kings 23:19

⁶ Matthew 8:12

⁷ Matthew 22:13

⁸ Matthew 25:30

⁹ 1 Peter 5:8