

The Scapegoat

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The annual Sabbaths, or Holy Days, as observed by Israel before the first appearance of Christ, were considerably different from the way we observe them today. Each day had its own specific rites, or rituals, that were to be carried out in a very precise manner and in accordance with the instructions given to Moses by God. The rituals, as they were performed, were rich in symbology and pointed to events that were yet off in the future and that someday would come to pass. Some of these events have been fulfilled and some of them are still yet to be fulfilled now in our time, many years on down the road. Each Holy Day represents an important event in the plan of God.

The Day of Atonement is one of God's Holy Days that is not the favorite of many people. There are certain requirements that we are instructed to perform, that are not very comfortable and many people do not look forward to going without food and to going without water and afflicting their souls for twenty-four hours. As in everything that He does, God has a very specific purpose for having us observe His Holy Days in a certain way. There are things we are to learn and there are things that we are to remember and these days help us to do that.

The Day of Atonement is a day like no other. It has a very profound and deep spiritual meaning, and a special ceremony was performed on this day anciently, that was like no other. After the coming of Christ and his atoning sacrifice for our sins, the observance of this day was changed by the establishment of the new covenant. By examining the way this particular day was observed in the past, we can continue to learn and expand our knowledge of the profound significance of each of God's Holy Days.

Leviticus 16:5

⁵ And he shall take from the congregation of the children of Israel two kids of the goats as a sin offering, and one ram as a burnt offering.

⁶ "Aaron shall offer the bull as a sin offering, which *is* for himself, and make atonement for himself and for his house. ⁷ He shall take the two goats and present them before the LORD *at* the door of the tabernacle of meeting.

The services that were to be performed on this day were very unique and held a very special meaning. Notice that Aaron had to make an offering to atone for himself and his household, before he even began the rest of the rituals that had to be completed on this day. He had to be pure and clean.

There are two important points that need to be noted here. First, the goats that were to be used for sin offerings were special, they had to be perfect and without blemish. It takes perfection to atone for sin. Only that which is unblemished and perfect, or free from sin can atone for that which is blemished, or contaminated by sin.

Leviticus 4:27

27 'If anyone of the common people sins unintentionally by doing something against any of the commandments of the LORD in anything which ought not to be done, and is guilty, 28 or if his sin which he has committed comes to his knowledge, then he shall bring as his offering a kid of the goats, a female without blemish, for his sin which he has committed.

We cannot know for sure that both of these goats were completely acceptable for the sacrifice, because scripture just does not go into that sort of detail. We do know that one of them **had** to be **perfect** and without **blemish**, because it was to represent Christ in the ceremony that was to be performed.

Second, Jesus Christ led a perfect sinless life; we know that beyond all doubt. Christ is the one that made Atonement for us; He paid the price of death for our sin. He led a perfect life to qualify as our sin offering for all time. Satan at one time was also perfect and was at the very throne of God, until iniquity was found in him.

Ezekiel 28:14

***14 "You were the anointed cherub who covers;
I established you;
You were on the holy mountain of God;
You walked back and forth in the midst of fiery stones.
15 You were perfect in your ways from the day you were created,
Till iniquity was found in you.***

By the time God gave this ordinance to Israel and its observance was put into practice, God had already judged Satan and found fault with him, he was guilty of leading a rebellion against God. He had failed in the position that God had placed and entrusted him in. So, even though it does not say so here, it is very probable that one of these goats had some sort of flaw, or blemish that was not apparent to the priest. It was not readily visible. Satan's flaws were not apparent at first either and he had been entrusted with great responsibility and a high position within God's court. The representation of that flawed character and that sin was important to this service too.

Leviticus 16:8

8 Then Aaron shall cast lots for the two goats: one lot for the LORD and the other lot for the scapegoat.

The selection of the goats, for the purpose and use that they would serve, was **extremely** important. This service held great symbolic meaning. No man, not even the priest, was qualified to make the selection between the two goats. Without God's help, not even the high priest, a man, could make the distinction between the two goats and the roles they would serve. Lots were cast and God influenced the selection. Without God's help, man could not discern between the goat that was to represent the body of Christ and the one that was to be representative of Satan.

And so it is with us, it is the indwelling of God's spirit that allows us the discernment and understanding that is so vital to our Christian lives. It is through God's Spirit and His influence that we are able to make the selection between good and evil, the things that are of God and the things that are of Satan the great deceiver. The ability to truly separate the things that are evil from those that are good is not always so easy; remember Satan can transform himself into an angel of light as we are told in 2 Corinthians 11:14. He is the great deceiver and the father of lies.

It is very interesting that one of the terms, from the bible, that has endured in our society is this word "scapegoat". In fact you hear it used quite frequently. In the form in which it is used in our society, one who is a scapegoat is actually relieved from guilt. A person who bears the blame for someone else is called a scapegoat. They are not actually guilty, but they are blamed for the wrongs, or sins, that someone else committed.

That is technically correct, the goat that was chosen as the scapegoat in this service was not guilty of anything. What people fail to take into account though, is who and what this scapegoat actually represented. This goat had a role and was representative and played a very important part in this service. The goat was not meant to portray someone who was innocent.

Merriam Webster's Online Dictionary defines scapegoat as:

Main Entry: ¹scape·goat

Pronunciation: \ˈskāp-,gōt\

Function: *noun*

Etymology: ¹scape; intended as translation of Hebrew *'azāzēl* (probably name of a demon), as if *'ēz 'ōzēl* goat that departs—Lev 16:8(Authorized Version)

Date: 1530

1: a goat upon whose head are symbolically placed the sins of the people after which he is sent into the wilderness in the biblical ceremony for Yom Kippur
2 a: one that bears the blame for others b: one that is the object of irrational hostility

scapegoat. (2008). In *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary*. Retrieved September 14, 2008, from <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/scapegoat>

The second definition that is given here is the way that this word is used and understood in our society. We are made to feel that a scapegoat deserves our sympathy and our forgiveness, that they are blameless. Satan fools man into believing that he does not exist and that he is not responsible for the evil in this world. That he is blameless and falsely accused. The word used here that is translated as scapegoat, is Azazel; there is no correct translation for this word into English.

The word scapegoat is merely an interpretation. Some commentaries say that Azazel is another name for Satan and some of them say it is the name of a demon. The point is that this Azazel is not a harmless, blameless, entity that has falsely had blame placed upon it and that is not the role that it served in the Day of Atonement service either.

The Moffat version renders the same verse as follows:

Leviticus 16:8

8 Aaron shall cast lots for the two goats, one lot for the Eternal and the other for Azazel the demon;

The high priest had a very special role to play on this day. The actions that he took allowed him to enter a very special place that was reserved for God only. It was a very holy and sacred place that existed within the tabernacle and no one was ever allowed there. God warned Moses to tell Aaron not to enter this place whenever he wanted.

Leviticus 16:2

2 and the LORD said to Moses: "Tell Aaron your brother not to come at *just any time into the Holy Place* inside the veil, before the mercy seat which *is on the ark*, lest he die; for I will appear in the cloud above the mercy seat.

This was a very special place inside the tabernacle, there was the Holy Place and then there was the Most Holy Place and it is the Most Holy Place that God is speaking of and warning about here.

Some versions translate this as the Holy of Holies and that is a more accurate translation of the original Hebrew wording. The Hebrew here literally means the holiest of holy and can refer to a place, or thing. The translators added the word "place" for clarity, because it is a special section, or place inside the tabernacle that is being spoken of here. The actual word place is not in the original wording. This was the most holy and sacred place that existed at that time.

Exodus 26:31

³¹ "You shall make a veil woven of blue, purple, and scarlet *thread*, and fine woven linen. It shall be woven with an artistic design of cherubim. ³² You shall hang it upon the four pillars of acacia *wood* overlaid with gold. Their hooks *shall be* gold, upon four sockets of silver. ³³ And you shall hang the veil from the clasps. Then you shall bring the ark of the Testimony in there, behind the veil. The veil shall be a divider for you between the holy *place* and the Most Holy. ³⁴ You shall put the mercy seat upon the ark of the Testimony in the Most Holy.

It was the very dwelling place of God, when He chose to be there among the people. Aaron had to perform a very special service in a very specific manner and there was special preparation involved.

Leviticus 16:9

⁹ And Aaron shall bring the goat on which the LORD's lot fell, and offer it as a sin offering.

Leviticus 16:15-16

¹⁵ "Then he shall kill the goat of the sin offering, which *is* for the people, bring its blood inside the veil, do with that blood as he did with the blood of the bull, and sprinkle it on the mercy seat and before the mercy seat. ¹⁶ So he shall make atonement for the Holy *Place*, because of the uncleanness of the children of Israel, and because of their transgressions, for all their sins; and so he shall do for the tabernacle of meeting which remains among them in the midst of their uncleanness.

This is a situation that occurred at no other time of the year. It was a very special and symbolic act, with a very important meaning. The priest entered the Holy of Holies to make atonement for the congregation of Israel.

Exodus 30:10

10 And Aaron shall make atonement upon its horns once a year with the blood of the sin offering of atonement; once a year he shall make atonement upon it throughout your generations. It is most holy to the LORD."

There were even special articles of clothing that Aaron had to wear, holy garments, and he had to cleanse and purify himself with water, before he put on the special clothing. He was clothing himself with purity and righteousness, because the clothing was holy. This clothing had to be worn in order to enter the Holy of Holies.

Flesh cannot inherit the kingdom of God; flesh cannot cross over to eternal life. This special clothing represented the glorified spiritual state and the washing and purifying with water, represented the cleansing and purifying we must go through, before we are able to put on our spiritual bodies. When Aaron put on that clothing, it represented the spiritual body that Christ has attained and that we will attain.

Leviticus 16:4

4 He shall put the holy linen tunic and the linen trousers on his body; he shall be girded with a linen sash, and with the linen turban he shall be attired. These are holy garments. Therefore he shall wash his body in water, and put them on.

Further evidence can be found by looking at another scripture in Leviticus.

Leviticus 16:23

23 "Then Aaron shall come into the tabernacle of meeting, shall take off the linen garments which he put on when he went into the Holy Place, and shall leave them there.

Aaron had to remove the special clothing and leave it behind. He had to leave it in the tabernacle, because he was returning back to his normal physical life, after this service was complete. We cannot have a glorified spiritual body in this physical life; it is only after we enter the kingdom of God that we will receive our spiritual bodies. Since the clothing represented the spiritual body, it had to remain behind and not even leave the tabernacle. The tabernacle was representative of God's kingdom and the Holy of Holies His throne.

Exodus 28:2

2 And you shall make holy garments for Aaron your brother, for glory and for beauty.

This very special place in the tabernacle, the Holy of Holies, represented God's dwelling place, God's throne. The priest here was clearly serving as a type of Christ in this role, the blood of the sin offering representing Christ's blood that he shed, to atone for our sins. The priest entered the Holy of Holies and was out of sight of the people, just as Christ returned to the throne of the Father and is out of sight to us physically at this time. When the priest re-appeared, after taking the blood of the sin offering for Israel into the Holy of Holies, he now represented the risen Christ when he returns triumphantly to reclaim this earth having atoned for all of us with His blood.

Aaron had to offer the blood of the bull first, inside the Holy of Holies. The blood of the bull was to atone for himself and his household. This had to be done before Aaron could bring the blood of the sacrifice that represented the people. The blood of the bull offered by Aaron the high priest, was symbolic of Christ overcoming and qualifying in his physical form. He had to overcome and qualify to be the sacrifice, before He could provide atonement for our sins. The priest had to qualify and make atonement for himself, before he could offer the sacrifice for Israel.

Leviticus 16:10

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

Leviticus 16:20

20 "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. 21 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.

Here we see the priest, in serving as a type of Christ, placing sin back on the one who is responsible for it. Notice the priest confesses all the sins of Israel on the head of the goat. Showing that Satan is indeed responsible for all sin and God knows where sin comes from and who is responsible for it. Satan will not be held blameless; he will answer for what he has done.

In one commentary, there was an interesting comment about the confession of sins on the head of the goat. In later years, as the Jewish church began to degenerate, there was a set group of sins that were to be confessed over the goat by the priest. In the beginning, the priest had such an intimate relationship with the people (Israel) that he knew all of their sin. God knows all of our sin, even before we confess it; nothing is hidden from Him, or His Son.

Leviticus 16:21

²¹ 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. ²² The goat shall bear on itself all their iniquities to an uninhabited land; and he shall release the goat in the wilderness.

Notice the goat was to be sent away by the hand of a fit man. A righteous or capable man, a man who had the power and the authority over the goat and could drive it away. The goat was to bear all the sin of Israel and be driven into the uninhabited wilderness where no man dwelled. The sin was to be separated and removed from the people. On this day the people were symbolically cleansed and purified and had all of their sin removed and taken away from them. Sin was driven into the wilderness; it was made as far away as the east is from the west. We can contrast this with a similar account that is found in Revelation.

Revelation 20:1

¹ Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. ² He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is *the* Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; ³ and he cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal on him, so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished. But after these things he must be released for a little while.

This fit man then, must represent the angel who comes down and locks Satan away and the uninhabited wilderness the bottomless pit. There has been a lot of speculation as to who exactly this angel is that is talked about here. Some say it is an archangel, perhaps Michael, or Gabriel. Matthew Henry, in his commentary, states that this angel is the returning Christ and that it is He alone that has conquered Satan and now has power over him.

That is true; Christ has conquered Satan and has power and authority over him and his demons. It is also true though, that because Christ has conquered Satan, He also can set others to have authority over him, just as we are able to overcome Satan's influence in our lives by Christ living in us and the power we receive from that indwelling presence. So, it is possible that Christ can set an angel over Satan to bind him and put him away.

If we look at the example of the service that was performed on the Day of Atonement, we can see that the high priest, who represented Christ, was not directly responsible for sending the goat away. He placed all the sins on the goat, but it was someone else that actually performed the driving out of the goat. The goat was to bear all of their iniquity and take it into a land uninhabited. Satan will be made to bear all of the iniquity he is responsible for and he will be bound and placed into an uninhabited place.

By examining the symbolic way in which these days were observed in the past, we can gain new insight into future events that are yet before us. God laid out his plan of salvation for mankind and ordained annual days of observance to keep us constantly in remembrance of his plan. What a wonderful loving Father we have and how amazing and incredible that He has given us the understanding to realize the events these days picture!

So, how are we to observe this special day now? A portion of this ritual, that was performed on this day anciently, has been fulfilled. Christ has qualified and overcome. He has become our sin offering and He has atoned for our sins. But, we are still looking forward to the day of His appearing and to finally becoming at one with Him and the putting away of Satan for a time.

There is no longer a physical Holy of Holies that can be entered into. When Christ became our sin offering, the veil that covered that special place in the tabernacle that represented the throne of God, was torn in two from top to bottom. Access to God was opened to us by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Christ is our high priest. He is our intercessor providing a way to God the Father and providing a way for us to enter God's kingdom.

Mark 15:37

³⁷ And Jesus cried out with a loud voice, and breathed His last.

³⁸ Then the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.

We still afflict our souls on this day, because there is nothing to show that the requirement was removed. God still wants us to afflict ourselves on this day for a reason. Afflicting ourselves is a form of purification. We cleanse ourselves spiritually and when we fast it also helps to cleanse us physically.

It is a physical reminder. When the Israelites afflicted themselves, it kept them in remembrance of the importance of that day. The high priest was offering an atoning sacrifice for every one of them and they needed to keep themselves clean and pure all of the time, not just on that one day. Today, this day serves as the same reminder for us. Christ, our High Priest has made an atoning sacrifice for us; He has put on the Holy Garments permanently.

Hebrews 9:11

¹¹ But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. ¹² Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption.

We afflict ourselves so that we are reminded of our dependence on God and so that we are reminded of the access we have to the Father, through the sacrifice of Christ. We afflict ourselves so that we do not think more highly of ourselves than we ought and so that we remain humble and teachable and willing to change. We afflict ourselves, so that we are reminded to become cleansed and purified and so that we are reminded to become holy and put away all the sin in our lives; that we may also put on our holy garments, our spiritual bodies, for all time. We need to be prepared always, to meet Christ when He returns.

Hebrews 9:13

¹³ For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, ¹⁴ how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? ¹⁵ And for this reason He is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.

There is so much more waiting out there ahead of us. In a very real sense, our lives have not even begun. We cannot even conceive of the lives we will live at that time and things that we will be doing. We cannot even imagine the incredible things that God has in store for us and all of the work that we will do with Christ. Just as Paul said, we really do see through a glass darkly. It is a limitation of our flesh and the minds that we have right now in these physical bodies. We are hindered in what we can comprehend, but through God's spirit and the understanding He brings, we can catch a little foretaste of what is in store.

This very day that we are observing at this very time, will be an incredible day in the future, a day of celebration! Having been cleansed and purified we will have put on the holy garments of our spiritual bodies forever! At that time of Christ's return, after the evil world system and those who fought against Christ are removed, those who have loved his appearing will finally become one with their savior.

The final barriers will have been removed; death will be forever vanquished and the fleshly body will become a glorified spiritual body that will never perish, never tire, never grow old and the influence and power that Satan has, to cause man to do evil and to sin, will be removed. As you go through the Day of Atonement and you are reminded physically...as you hunger and you thirst, think about hungering and thirsting for God's Kingdom. Think about cleansing and purifying yourself, so that you can be made ready to enter that kingdom. Think about that day when we will change...we will truly be at one, at long last, with Jesus Christ. The bride will have made herself ready and the marriage will proceed.

(All scriptural references cited from the New King James Edition of the Holy Bible)

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