



Kippur and the Enemy

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Our entire world is a war zone. We see people suffering and dying all around us. God is working to save us, but evil does not easily let us go. What or who is this evil power? Who is the enemy? Is there a person or supernatural being behind all this carnage? If so, what does he want? The Bible answers these questions.

On the Day of Atonement, the Israelite community provided “two male goats for a sin offering”

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(Lev 16:5; my translation). To determine what the functions of these goats would be, the high priest (Aaron) cast lots:

... and Aaron shall cast lots on the two goats, one lot for the Lord and the other lot for Azazel. Aaron shall present the goat on which the lot fell for the Lord, and offer it as a sin offering; but the goat on which the lot fell for Azazel shall be presented alive before the Lord to make atonement over it, that it may be sent away into the wilderness to Azazel (Lev 16:8-10).

Before the high priest cast lots, the goats were interchangeable. They looked the same and either one could be for the Lord or for Azazel. But once the lots were cast, the roles of the goats were fixed.

The high priest did not decide between the two goats. Casting lots was a way to let the Lord decide. Compare the way lots were cast when the Lord designated Saul as the first king of Israel (1 Sam 10:19-24).

One goat was “for the Lord” and the other was “for Azazel.” This expression means that one goat belonged to the Lord and the other belonged to Azazel. The same type of expression, including “for” plus a proper name, was engraved on ancient stone seals that Israelites and people of neighboring countries used to identify objects as belonging to them.

When I studied ancient inscriptions at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Professor Naveh brought a bag of seals like this to class every day so that we could read them.

There is a close relationship between the Lord’s goat and Azazel’s goat. Each had an owner. Since the Lord is a being who could own a goat, Azazel must be some kind of being who could also own a goat.

The goat for the Lord was offered to the Lord as a sin offering to cleanse God’s sanctuary. The goat for Azazel was not offered as a sacrifice at all. It is true that Leviticus 16:5 refers to Azazel’s goat as a “sin ritual” along with the Lord’s goat. The Hebrew word here for “sin ritual” is elsewhere

translated as “sin offering.” But in the case of the scapegoat, the ritual was not an offering/sacrifice because the goat was not given to God as an offering. Rather, according to verse 10, it was sent *away* from God and His sanctuary “into the wilderness to Azazel.”

Azazel must be an enemy of the Lord. The Lord directed the Israelites to transport their sins on a goat to Azazel, who ended up with this noxious load. This would be like sending someone a truck full of chemical waste or dumping a load of reeking, maggot infested chicken manure all over his front lawn—not a friendly gesture. Here, Azazel, get a load of this!

If Azazel is an enemy of the Lord, why does Leviticus 16:10 say that the goat functions “to make atonement upon it” (NASB), that is, upon the goat? Sacrificial animals make atonement for people or for the sanctuary. But here atonement is made on the animal itself “that it may be sent away into the wilderness to Azazel.” Atonement on the goat does not make atonement for the goat. Rather, it removes sins of the Israelites away from their camp. It is atonement for the Israelites by placing their sins on the goat. By

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sending evil to destruction, they are freed from that which disturbs their relationship with God. Atonement on Azazel’s goat is atonement in the basic sense of restoring at-one-ness with God by destroying the evil that comes between human beings and God. Compare Numbers 25, where Phinehas, the son of the high priest, made atonement for the Israelites (verse 13) by destroying Zimri and Cozbi, who were flagrantly sinning (verses 6-8). The couple did not receive atonement. Atonement for Israel’s benefit was done *on* the man and woman in the sense that they were destroyed. Their actions were coming between Israel and God. When these people were eliminated, God stopped His deadly plague on the Israelites (verse 8).

Ultimately God will destroy sin by destroying all sinners who have not allowed Him to separate their sins from them. But before God destroys

sin, He removes all responsibility for it from Himself, as represented by the cleansing of His sanctuary, and He sends the responsibility away from Himself and His people to someone represented by the name “Azazel.”

Azazel is an enemy of the Lord and His people who has the sins of the people come to him. By the time the goat for Azazel is sent away, the people have already been forgiven and the sanctuary has already been cleansed through sacrifices.

The Lord takes away my responsibility, but Satan, represented by the goat for Azazel, bears his own liability for punishment

The Lord’s goat belonged to the Lord and was offered to the Lord, but it also *represented* the Lord. So the goat that belonged to Azazel and was sent to him *must also represent Azazel*.

The Lord bore the sins of His people by His sacrifice in order to free them from punishment for their sins. Azazel also bears the sins of God’s people, but he bears them in a different way.

Some have suggested that Azazel is some kind of demon. If so, his personality is not revealed in Leviticus, perhaps to avoid the danger that people in Old Testament times would have been tempted to worship him. Although Azazel is a shadowy figure in Leviticus, his overall profile is clear and there is only one being in the universe who fits it: Satan.

The name “Satan” is a Hebrew word meaning “adversary.” In the Bible, he is God’s great enemy. Satan has a lot to do with the sins of God’s people. He originated sin in the universe, he caused the human race to fall into sin by tempting Eve, and he tempts us to sin. Satan is the mastermind behind our sins. My sins are also Satan’s sins. The Lord takes away my responsibility, but Satan, represented by the goat for Azazel, bears his own liability for punishment.

Suppose I belong to a gang that robs a bank. All of us are responsible for the same crime, including

the gang leader who directs the operation, those who actually go into the bank, tie up the tellers, and open the vault, and the driver of the getaway car. The same is true when I sin. When I sin, I belong to Satan's "gang." I am responsible for making my own mistakes, but Satan is responsible for tempting me.

The animals used in the Day of Atonement rituals represented either the Lord or the enemy, Satan. There were four sacrificial animals that represented the Lord. The goat for Azazel represented Satan.

The four sacrificial animals that represented the Lord were: a sin offering bull on behalf of the priests, the "Lord's goat," which served as a sin offering for the non-priestly community, a burnt offering ram for the priests, and a burnt offering ram for the community (Lev 16:3, 5, 11-19, 24).

Of the four animals, only the "Lord's goat" has independent significance for the reality to which the Israelite sanctuary pointed. The bull and ram for the priests were necessary because the priests were faulty human beings. The burnt offering ram for the community had no separate meaning. As elsewhere when a burnt offering was coupled with a sin offering on behalf of the same offerer in this way, the burnt offering simply added to the quantity of the Lord's goat sin offering, making what amounted to a greater sin offering (compare Lev 5:6-7; Num 15:24-28).

Of the animals used in the special Day of Atonement rituals, the Lord's goat carried the meaning of what the Lord is doing for us and the goat for Azazel represented Satan. So the cleansing of the sanctuary and camp on the Day of Atonement all boils down to "a tale of two goats." That is the Day of Atonement made simple!

The two goats were indistinguishable until their roles were determined by the Lord (Lev 16:8). They were just Billy the Goat and Billy the Goat (not Billy the Kid; they were grown goats). Just so, human beings are not capable of distinguishing

between the Lord and Satan by themselves, but must rely upon the Lord to identify them.

Azazel's goat stood in the courtyard, where the altar is, as witness to the proceedings. Similarly, Satan remains as witness to what God is doing for us on earth. In addition to his role as tempter, Satan is a witness against us. Having lured us into sins, he condemns us for these same sins (Zech 3:1-2). This is called "entrapment." As the original liar, Satan is not content to correctly point out that people have sinned. He tries to destroy God's people by slandering those who have been justly forgiven.

By accusing us, Satan identifies and implicates himself. He is like a mugger who attacked my wife's cousin when he was a computer science student at the University of California in Berkeley. George was walking home after a late night study session at the library. He heard a sound in the bushes by his apartment and realized that someone was there. In a panic, George told him to go away or he would call the police. At that point the man emerged from the bushes, attacked George, and disappeared.

George went inside and called the police, who rounded up a group of suspects. The next day George was called in to the police department to identify the mugger in a lineup of the suspects.

But since the attack was at night, George couldn't distinguish one suspect from another. The puzzle was broken, however, when one of

the suspects pointed at George and protested angrily to the police: "He threatened me!"

Satan tells the truth when he says that we have sinned. But when we accept forgiveness through the Lord and Satan goes on accusing us of not belonging to God, at that point Satan is lying. Not only is he lying, he is a malicious, false witness, who is trying to destroy us by his lies. In the Bible there is a law that tells what should be done with such a witness:

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If a malicious witness comes forward to accuse someone of wrongdoing, then both parties to the dispute shall appear before the Lord, before the priests and the judges who are in office in those days, and the judges shall make a thorough inquiry. If the witness is a false witness, having testified falsely against another, then you shall do to the false witness just as the false witness had meant to do to the other. So you shall purge the evil from your midst. The rest shall hear and be afraid, and a crime such as this shall never again be committed among you. Show no pity: life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot (Deut 19:16-21).

In addition to the facts that Satan originated sin and commits sins of his own, there are two more good reasons for him to go to hell. First, he tempts people to sin and therefore shares blame for their sins. Second, he is a malicious false witness who will receive the punishment that those whom he falsely accuses would have received if they had not been vindicated (compare Deut 19:16-21; Num 5:31).

Azazel's goat, carrying the sins of the Israelites, represents Satan bearing responsibility with regard to human sins that is *his own responsibility*. The penalty that he will receive as a malicious witness is the penalty that God's true people *would have* received if they had been proven in the judgment to be unforgiven. But the responsibility is his as a false witness; it is not their actual responsibility at all. Satan does not carry a molecule of my own responsibility. Satan is not my substitute in *any* sense whatsoever. Only the Lord is my substitute.

To ignore Satan would be like ignoring Hitler.

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Satan condemns me whether I am saved or lost. If I am lost, he is not a false witness in this case. But if I am saved, he is lying when he says I am not forgiven. So the more people are saved, the greater Satan's responsibility and punishment as a false witness will be. The more people are lost, the less his punishment will be. No wonder Satan is roaring around trying to get people to be lost!

The Israelites got rid of their sins by sending them back to their source. "Chickens come home to roost." "What goes around comes around." "Whoever digs a pit will fall into it, and a stone will come back on the one who starts it rolling" (Prov 26:27). Satan is that source. Once he is put away forever, there will be no more temptations and accusations. Only then will God's people be completely secure and free from evil.

Years ago I was painting a wall with another worker. We passed the time by talking about the Bible. But when I referred to the role of Satan in causing trouble in the universe, he indignantly replied: "To hell with the Devil!" I certainly agree that the Devil belongs in hell and the sooner the better, but we cannot simply dismiss his influence as my fellow worker did. To ignore Satan would be like ignoring Hitler in Europe in 1944.

We know that God is fully able to protect us from Satan, but in the Bible God warns us about the enemy. When you are in a war, you need to know who and what you are up against!

This article is a revised version of Roy Gane, *Altar Call* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Diadem, 1999), 247-255.