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THE SCAPEGOAT OF LEVITICUS SIXTEEN

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INTRODUCTION

It is admitted on all hands that Leviticus 16 is one of the mountain peaks of the Scriptures. With striking clarity and force the ceremonies and ordinances of the Day of Atonement are depicted by Moses. Delitzsch has well called the Day of Atonement the Good Friday of the Old Testament. No more significant truths could possibly engage the mind of the believer than those set forth in this chapter of Leviticus (C. H. Mackintosh, Notes on Leviticus, pp. 277-302). Mackintosh says: Notes on rank the sixteenth chapter of Leviticus amongst the most precious and important sections of inspiration. . . . " (ibid., p. 277). The Day of Atonement was the most important in the Mosaic system, because on that day the removal of sin was given its highest expression. The situation can best be explained thus. In Israel many sins were committed wilfully and unwittingly. For the first kind there was no sacrifice possible (Ps. 51:16); for the second type trespass and sin offerings were specified according to the nature of the offense, when the sinner was aware of his sin. However, when the sinner remained unaware of his guilt, no offering was brought and those sins remained in a sense unaccounted for. If this condition were to be unrelieved, the sacrificial system would fall short of its ultimate purpose. To meet this pressing and everpresent need in Israel the Lord instituted the Day of Atonement with its impressive ritual (cf. Keil and Delitzsch, *The* Pentateuch in Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament, II, 394-95). Kellogg has stated with clarity: "In it the sacrificial law of Moses attains its supreme expression;

the holiness and the grace alike of Israel's God, their fullest revelation. For the like of the great day of atonement, we look in vain in any other people. If every sacrifice pointed to Christ, this most luminously of all. What the fifty-third of Isaiah is to his Messianic prophecies, that, we may truly say, is the sixteenth of Leviticus to the whole system of Mosaic types,—the most consummate flower of the Messianic symbolism. All the sin-offerings pointed to Christ, the great High Priest and Victim of the future; but this. . . with a distinctness found in no other" (S. H. Kellogg, *The Book of Leviticus*, p. 272).

At the heart of the ceremonies of the Day of Atonement was the ritual of the sin offering of the two goats. This ceremony, which is described with such fulness, is never mentioned again in the Old Testament (E. Langton, *Essentials of Demonology*, p. 44). As a matter of fact, it has no parallel in the Mosaic legislation or in the heathen world. It is unique, most singular, and impressive (Kellogg, op. cit., pp. 263, 265). But what the exact meaning of this ritual was, continues to be one of the most vexing questions in the exposition of the entire book. The answer lies in the significance attached to the term" scapegoat" (from escape goat) or the more accurate, azazel (ibid., p. 266. Apart from the etymological discussion later, diacritical marks will be omitted in the spelling of the word).

THE RITUAL

Only one person ministered in the priestly office on the Day of Atonement, Aaron himself. Bathed and properly attired (v. 4), he took the designated offerings. "And he shall take of the congregation of the children of Israel two he-goats for a sin-offering, and one ram for a burnt-offering. And Aaron shall present the bullock of the sin-offering, which is for himself, and for his house. And he shall take the two goats, and set them before Jehovah at the door of the tent of meeting. And Aaron shall cast lots upon the two goats; one lot for Jehovah, and the other lot

for Azazel. And Aaron shall present the goat upon which the lot fell for Jehovah, and offer him for a sin-offering. But the goat, on which the lot fell for Azazel, shall he set alive before Jehovah, to make atonement for him, to send him away for Azazel into the wilderness" (Lev. 16:5-10, ASV, margin of which reads "removal" for "Azazel"). The bullock of the sin offering Aaron offered for himself and his house; in the incense-filled holy of holies he sprinkled of the blood of the bullock on the mercy seat seven times, an indication of complete atonement. The goat for the Lord was then slain, and the same ritual was carried out with its blood in the holiest of all, this time for the sins of the children of Israel. After the sacrifice of the first goat, Aaron laid both his hands on the head of the live goat, confessing over him the sins and transgressions of Israel. Then the goat was sent away into the wilderness by a man ready for the occasion.

Aaron alone had witnessed atonement in the innermost sanctuary; now he must set it forth in another manner. In order to leave no doubt that sin had been taken away, there must be a removal of it which all Israel could witness (Andrew A. Bonar, *A Commentary on the Book of Leviticus*, p. 311). It is basic to our entire discussion to realize that the two goats together constituted one sinoffering. Verse 5 of our chapter leaves the matter beyond dispute (R. Govett, *The Scapegoat*, p. 4). Analogous to this ritual was the one with the two birds (Lev. 14:4 ff.) in the purification of the leper. The Talmudic Tractate Yoma (6:4) reveals the great popularity of the goat ritual. The people cried, "Take (them) and get out" (according to this Talmudic portion the goat was ultimately pushed over the cliff).

Some scholars seek to find the origins of the ritual among Israel's pagan neighbors. Albright feels that "In order to obtain a clear perspective for Deutero-Isaiah's concept of vicarious suffering, a brief survey of pertinent germinal conceptions and of the development of belief in theodicy is necessary. Among these germinal concepts may be noted in the first place the wide-spread primitive custom of charging some object, animal, or person with

the sin or suffering of a group, after which the object, animal, or person is sacrificed or driven away in order to carry the sin and suffering of men away with it . . . The Hebrew ceremony of the 'scapegoat for Azazel' may perhaps have had a Canaanite origin. Sumerians and Babylonians also believed that man was created by the sacrifice of a god or gods, who were killed that man might live" (W. F. Albright, From the Stone Age to Christianity, p. 252; cf. J. G. Frazer, The Golden Bough, p. 540, for the transference of evil to goats and other animals. On scapegoats in general--although he does not treat the Biblical material--compare Frazer's work, pp. 574-77, and his extended material in *The Scapegoat*.). If one finds the origin of the ritual in these sources, his interpretation of the entire transaction and the parties involved will inevitably be colored thereby. We may admit outward similarities among other peoples, but the objective of Moses, and the Spirit of God behind him, was entirely different. At the most, the practices of the heathen can be explained as perversions of an objective originating in the mind of God alone.

The manner in which the regulations for the scapegoat were carried out in Israel, is of interest to the Bible student. When the Second Temple was in existence, the two goats chosen had to be alike in value, in size, and of the same color. The lot which was to decide the goat for the Lord and that for Azazel, consisted of two small tablets of box or ebony wood, later of gold, kept in a wooden chest. On one tablet were inscribed the words, "For Yahweh" and on the other, "For Azazel." After shaking the chest, the high priest put his hands into the urn and drew out both tablets, one in each hand. The tablet in his right hand was placed on the goat at his right, while that in his left hand was laid on the goat at his left (C. D. Ginsburg, *Leviticus*, pp.149-50). Josephus makes mention of the ceremony in this statement: "And besides these, they bring two kids of the goats; the one of which is sent alive out of the limits of the camp into the wilderness for the scape goat, and to be an expiation for the sins of the whole multitude" (F. Josephus, Antiquities

of the Jews, Book 3,10,3; the statement is noncommittal as to the problems involved in the ceremony). It must not be overlooked that this is the only passage in the Bible where the significance of the imposition of hands on the head of an animal is clearly explained as the symbolical transference of the people's sins to the victim (R. Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and D. Brown, Commentary, I, 480). As for the conclusion of the ritual Volck informs us: "According to the Talmudic tractate, Yoma, the high priest, knew by a sort of telegraphic communication between Jerusalem and the wilderness,--the waving of cloths by set watchers, at regular distances,--whether and when the goat arrived in the wilderness, as was necessary, for the other sacrifices were not to be offered until it arrived there (Lev. 16:23-24)" (W. Volck, "Azazel," in Schaff-Herzog, Encyclopedia of Religious *Knolwedge*, I, 183). That the goat was accompanied by someone and was led to a desert place was meant to show that there was absolutely no possibility for its return. Thus the guilt of the nation was symbolically forgiven and carried away. All this was executed with a manifest objectivity difficult to forget (W. Moeller, "Azazel," in *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, I, 344).

Any explanation of the ritual must necessarily incorporate three basic facts. First, both of the goats, as already stated, are called "a sin-offering," a term applicable to the one as well as to the other. Secondly, the live goat was as much dedicated and set apart to the Lord as the sacrificial goat. No interpretation of the facts relative to the second goat dares to overlook that it is meant for the use of the Lord. Most explanations ignore this significant factor. Finally, the live goat was meant to picture to Israel the complete removal of their transgressions from the presence of the Lord (S. H. Kellogg, *op. cit.*, p. 266).

ETYMOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

This phase of our subject will not detain us long, because all students of the Scripture readily admit that

the etymology of the word 'az'azel is obscure (E. Langton, op. cit., p. 44. F. W. Grant, Numerical Bible, I, 341, states: "Azazel is mere adoption of the Hebrew word, as to the meaning and application of which there have been so many different thoughts, that some are content to leave it as an insoluble enigma."). The French translation is "pour Azazel" which is a transliteration of the Hebrew term. Luther renders it "der ledige Bock" (the free goat). The Aramaic Targum Onkelos on Leviticus reproduces the Hebrew exactly. It has been suggested that the word is probably for 'azalzel in the sense of removal, to be related to the Arabic' azala, to remove. The difficulty is increased, because the name occurs nowhere else in Hebrew. In the Syriac version it is pronounced 'azaza' il, and interpreted by the lexicographers as a name for the archangel Michael (E. Nestle, "Azazel" in J. Hastings, Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, II, 283). In the discussion below other etymologies will be given as they are related to various interpretations as to the identity of Azazel.

A PLACE

The word" Azazel" has been variously interpreted, both impersonally and personally. It has been explained, as a place, a thing, a person, and an abstraction. If a special spot was intended, that place would have served a very limited purpose for a people constantly on the march, as Israel was during the years of the wilderness wanderings (F. Meyrick, *Pulpit Commentary*, II, 239-40). The Talmud explains, "Azazel means the hardest of the mountains" (Yoma, 67 b; cf. M. Jastrow, A Dictionary of the Targumim, II, 1060, col. 2, who explains the term as "a rough and rocky mountain"). A solitary place in the desert or a distinct locality in the wilderness has been suggested, but this interpretation is not tenable, because constant change in campings was surely taken into consideration when the regulations of Leviticus 16 were given. No specific place or locality has been offered by any advocates of this view (*Westminster Dictionary of the Bible* p. 52; cf. W. Moeller, *op. cit.*, p. 343).

A THING

There are many who favor the position that Azazel refers to a thing, specifically, the live goat or the escape goat. According to some authorities, the Azazel of Leviticus 16 is to be classed with demonic animals. T. K. Cheyne has come forward with an elaborate theory which explains that the object of the ritual, partially at least, was to do a way with the cultus of the impersonal and dangerous se 'irim, mentioned in Leviticus 17:7; Isaiah 13:21; 34:14 (Encyclopedia Biblica, I, col. 394 ff.; with this S. R. Driver agrees; cf. J. Hastings, Dictionary of the Bible I, 207; E. Langton, op. cit., p. 46). The view is said to be supported by the form of the name, supposedly altered from 'zz' l ("God strengthens") to its Biblical form 'z' zl (goat departs). The Vulgate renders the term caper emissarius, and, as has been seen, Luther offers "der ledige Bock." It is possible, however, that these renderings intend only to give the sense of the context instead of a translation of the word *azazel* (W. Moeller, op. cit., p. 343). The second goat has on occasion been called hircus redivivus. Bonar, after discussing objections to rendering azazel as scapegoat (a translation which he favors), says: "If the clause, 'the one lot for the Lord,' intimate that the goat is appropriated to a person, so should the next clause, 'the other lot for . . . Azazel, also signify appropriation to a person. But the answer to this is, that the proper sense is not appropriation to, or designation for, persons. The proper sense is *designation for use*, viz., the one for the purpose of being killed at the *Lord's altar*; the other the purpose of being sent away to the wilderness" (A. Bonar, op. cit., p. 303; italics by Bonar). With the exposition of the LXX, the mediate Greek versions of Symmachus, Aquila, and Theodotion, the Vulgate, Luther's version, and the King James version, Meyrick favors the interpretation that makes azazel the live goat. Says he:

"The interpretation is founded on sound etymological grounds, it suits the context wherever the word occurs, it is consistent with the remaining ceremonial of the Day of Atonement, and it accords with the otherwise known religious beliefs and symbolical practices of the Israelites. The two goats were the single sin offering for the people; the one that was offered in sacrifice symbolized atonement or covering made by shedding of blood, the other symbolized the utter removal of the sins of the people, which were conveyed away and lost in the depths of the wilderness, whence there was no return. . . . The eighth verse should be translated as it stands in the Authorized Version, or, if we ask for still greater exactness, And Aaron shall cast lots upon the two goats; one lot for the Lord, and one lot for the remover of sins" (F. Meyrick, op. cit., pp. 239-40; italics by Meyrick).

Is this interpretation tenable? Buxtorf in his Hebrew Lexicon derived the word from 'ez a goat, and 'azal, to depart. Thus he referred it to the goat itself. This is scarcely possible when the goat itself is sent to Azazel. It is Ginsburg who has the sufficient answer to this position. He states: "The rendering, scapegoat, is contrary to the manifest antithesis of the verse. . . the translation scapegoat cannot be admitted in the next verse but one, where, if adopted, it would literally be 'to send the goat to the scapegoat in the wilderness' (see v. 10), or in verse 26, where it is, 'and he who taketh away the goat to the scapegoat' " (C. D. Ginsburg, op. cit., pp.150-51). This rendering, too, is inadmissable.

A PERSON

The majority of the expositors, both orthodox and liberal, prefer to understand Azazel as a person. However, there is no agreement as to what person is meant. It has been said: "After Satan, for whom he was is some degree a preparation, Azazel enjoys the distinction of being the most mysterious extrahuman character in sacred literature. Unlike other Hebrew proper names, the name itself is obscure" (*Jewish Encyclopedia*, II, 365).

One view takes the goat as a personification of wickedness in contrast with the righteousness of God. The rite is thus said to resemble somewhat the vision of Zechariah (Zech. 5:6-11; *Jewish Encyclopedia*, II, 366). From the concept of personified wickedness it was easy to move on to the idea of a person generally feared, and even further, to the thought of the head of the supernatural beings of the desert (*ibid.*, pp. 366-67). A number of lexicons define the name as that of an evil spirit (Gesenius-Buhl, *Lexicon*; German, S.V.: "Wahrscheinlich bezeichnet er einen in der Wueste hausenden boesen Geist." E. Koenig, *Lexicon*; German, S.V.: "boesen Geist, der als in der Wueste hausend gedacht wurde. . . . ").

In the apocryphal Book of I Enoch 6:7; 9:6; 10:4-6, Azazel is portrayed as the leader of the fallen angels. In the Apocalypse of Abraham he is an unclean bird, which is the embodiment of ungodliness. He is supposed to have been one of the sons of God mentioned in Genesis 6:1 ff. As the leader of the rebels in the time before the flood, he taught men how to wage war, he instructed them in the art of making swords, knives, shields, and coats of mail, and he revealed to women the art of deception by ornamenting the body, dyeing their hair, and painting the face and eyebrows. He disclosed to the people the secrets of witchcraft, leading them astray into wickedness and immorality. Finally, at the command of God he was bound hand and foot by the archangel Raphael, and chained to the rough rocks where he awaits in darkness the day of judgment (the place in the desert where he is cast is designated Dudael; on the day of judgment he will be cast into the fire. Cf. Jewish Encyclopedia, II, 366. Also R. H. Charles, ed., Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha, II, 191, 193-194.).

Because Azazel occupied a place in Mandaean, Sabean, and Arabian mythology, it has been maintained that it is probable that Azazel was a degraded Babylonian deity (*Jewish Encyclopedia*, II, 366). Too often students of the Old Testament are satisfied to equate features of the Old Testament with the religion and mythology of Israel's pagan neighbors. The pages of the Old Testament are strikingly free of any trace of pagan mythology (G. E.

Wright, *Biblical Archaeology*, pp. 102-3). In this direction the meaning of the ritual of the live goat cannot be gleaned.

A large number of Bible scholars feel that Azazel is simply a demon whose habitat was in the desert and who predated the Mosaic religion. He is to be classed with the se 'irim or satyrs, the worship of whom was expressly forbidden (Lev. 17:7). Those who favor the view argue that the ritual does not contradict Leviticus 17:7, because Azazel played only a passive part in the ceremony. Cheyne, as already seen, supposed that the objective of the ritual of the Day of Atonement was to give the people a visible evidence of the removal of their sins, and to abolish the cultus of the 'irim (Encyclopedia Biblica, I, col. 394 ff.; other relevant Scriptures are 2 Chron. 11:15; Isa. 13:21; 34:14). There is no instance in the Old Testament where God abolished one unlawful practice by the substitution for it of another unlawful ceremony. This is contrary to the genius of the entire Old Testament. Heinisch reasons for this position thus: "But since Azazel was given a goat he must have been regarded as a personal being; and since the sins of the people were consigned to him, a demon. He stands opposed to Yahweh as Satan does in Job 1 and 2 and the serpent in Genesis 3. Because the people thought that demons dwelt in desert places, the scape goat was driven out into the wilderness. And because it was a goat that was given to Azazel, Azazel was believed to be goatlike in form similar to the Se 'irim. Animal sacrifices necessarily required the sprinkling of blood, a fact which would exclude the notion that the scapegoat was a sacrifice to Azazel; besides the law had condemned such practice" (P. Heinisch, Theology of the Old Testament, p.137; this is the position of G. F. Oehler, Theology of the Old Testament, p. 159, although he also favors an identification with Satan, p. 450).

Many interpreters have followed Origen's identification of Azazel with Satan (*Contra Celsum*, 6:43). Since the one referred to as Azazel is an antagonist of the Lord, it is claimed he must be the devil (R. Govett, *op. cit.*, p. 7; cf. *Encyclopedia Biblica*, I, 395-96; S. H. Kellogg, *op*.

cit., pp. 269-70--who explains the ritual as a sending of the goat to Satan to announce symbolically that he has no power over forgiven Israel; C. D. Ginsburg, op. cit., pp. 150-51; Keil and Delitzsch, op. cit., p. 398; Nestle, op. cit., p. 283, is sure that "if one reads Lev. 16 with an open mind, the impression is that Azazel must be a being related to Jahweh in something of the same way as Ahirman to Ormazd, or Satan--Beelzebub-to God"). If one were to judge the case before us on the basis of the number of eminent expositors favoring this view, the position now under consideration would carry the argument. But Biblical matters are not decided by a counting of aye votes. Is this view consistent with the general testimony of the Scriptures? There are weighty arguments against taking Azazel as a name for Satan. It cannot be shown that the name Azazel occurs in the Old Testament as the name of Satan or any evil spirit for that matter. There is proof that a Jewish belief in the existence of a demon called Azazel reaches back to the days of Moses. The rabbis themselves are for from agreement in assigning the name to Satan, many of them rejecting it on traditional grounds (S. H. Kellogg, op. cit., p. 266; cf. Volck, op. cit., p. 183). Another cogent argument against this interpretation is that the goat can have nothing whatever to do with Satan, for the Scriptures state clearly that the live goat, equally with the sacrificial goat, was a sin offering to the Lord. The first goat set forth the means of reconciliation with God, whereas the second goat represented the effect of the sacrifice in removing the sins from the presence of the holy God, thus illustrating Psalm 103:12 and Micah 7:19 in a striking manner (Kellogg, *loc. cit.*). Meyrick has marshalled pertinent evidence against the view that Satan is referred to. He argues: "The objections to the theory that azazel means an evil spirit are of overwhelming force. It will be enough to name the following. 1. The name azazel is nowhere else mentioned. This could not be, if he were so important a being as to divide with Jehovah the sin offering of the congregation of Israel on the great Day of Atonement. 2. No suitable etymology

can be discerned. The nearest approach to it is very forced--'the separated one.' 3. The notion of appeasing, or bribing, or mocking the evil spirit by presenting to him a goat, is altogether alien from the spirit of the rest of the Mosaic institutions. Where else is there anything like it? 4. The goat is presented and offered to Jehovah equally with the goat which is slain. To take that which has been offered (and therefore half sacrificed) to God and give it to Satan, would be a daring impiety, which is inconceivable" (E. Meyrick, op. cit., pp. 239-40). We cannot but agree with the position that "it cannot appear otherwise than strange that, in the most sacred rite of the old covenant, Satan should be so formally recognised as, according to this view, he must have been; that he should there be recognised under a name which suggests a quite different idea concerning him than that under which he is elsewhere presented; and that, notwithstanding he was so publicly and so regularly associated with this name, it should never again be employed as a personal designation" (McClintock and Strong, IX, 398; for this same position se O. T. Allis, "Leviticus," in *New* Bible Commentary, p. 149).

Now, since the view that makes Azazel a place leaves it ambiguous and indefinite as to location, and since the position that it refers to the live goat itself confuses the passage in Leviticus 16, and since the theory that interprets it of a person--an evil spirit, a degraded deity, a fallen angel, a demon, or Satan--dishonors the Scriptures and degrades the Old Testament religious institutions, it is imperative that we seek for a solution to the problem in another direction.

AN ABSTRACTION

Could Azazel refer to an abstraction or an abstract idea? Brown-Driver-Briggs gives this definition: "*en tire removal* (redupl. intens.). From 'zl – Ar. 'zl remove, n. pr. of spirit haunting desert, entire removal of sin and guilt from sacred places into desert on back of goat, symb. of entire forgiveness" (*Lexicon*, p. 736).

To regard this word as signifying dismissal or removal (as in the ASV and ERV margins) would preserve the concept of the escape goat, although it would avoid the pitfall of equating Azazel with the live goat which is not possible, as we have already seen above (Westminster Dictionary of the Bible, p. 52). Moeller favors the concept of removal on the basis of the wording of the LXX, apopompaios, diestalmenos, and the renderings of the Aguila and Symmachus (W. Moeller, op. cit., pp. 342 f.) This view is splendidly expressed by Meyrick in these words: "That la-azazel means 'for removal' is the opinion of Baehr, Tholuck, Winer, and others. There is nothing objectionable in this interpretation, but the form of the word azazel points rather to an agent than to an abstract act (the refutation of this statement follows in the latter part of his own quotation). Azazel is a word softened (according to a not unusual custom) from azalzel, just as kokav is a softened form of kav-kav, and as Babel is derived from Balbel (Gen. xi. 9). Azalzel is an active participle or participial noun, derived ultimately from azal (connected with the Arabic word azala, and meaning removed), but immediately from the reduplicate form of that verb, azazal. The reduplication of the consonants of the root in Hebrew and Arabic gives the force of repetition, so that while azal means removed, azalzal means removed by repetition of acts. Azalzel, or azazel, therefore, means one who removes by a series of acts. . . . 'It properly denotes one that removes or separates; yet a remover in such sort that the removal is not effected by a single act or at one moment, but by a series of minor acts tending to and issuing in a complete removal. No word could better express the movement of the goat before the eyes of the people, as it passed on, removing at each step, in a visible symbol, their sins further and further from them, until, by continued repetition of the movement, they were carried far away and removed utterly' (Sir W. Martin, Semitic Languages)" (F. Meyrick, op. cit., pp. 239-40). This position has more to commend it by a process of elimination. Thus, the conclusion is this: Both goats were a sin offering to the Lord; one

was sacrificed, whereas the other was sent off into the wilderness to convey visibly and strikingly the truth of complete removal and dismissal. The escape goat does not represent Christ any more than it stands for Satan. That which was symbolized by both goats pointed to the finished work of Christ on Calvary. Blessed be our sufficient Sin Offering.

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