

# A Goat for Azazel

## *Transference of Sin to the Realm of Evil*

Leviticus 16:7 Then [Aaron] shall take the two goats and set them before the LORD at the entrance of the tent of meeting.

<sup>8</sup> And Aaron shall cast lots over the two goats, one lot for the LORD and the other lot for Azazel.

<sup>9</sup> And Aaron shall present the goat on which the lot fell for the LORD and use it as a sin offering,

<sup>10</sup> 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 ...

<sup>15</sup> "Then he shall kill the goat of the sin offering that is for the people and bring its blood inside the veil and do with its blood as he did with the blood of the bull, sprinkling it over the mercy seat and in front of the mercy seat.

<sup>16</sup> Thus he shall make atonement for the Holy Place, because of the uncleannesses of the people of Israel and because of their transgressions, all their sins. And so he shall do for the tent of meeting, which dwells with them in the midst of their uncleannesses ...

<sup>20</sup> "And when he has made an end of atoning for the Holy Place and the tent of meeting and the altar, he shall present the live goat.

<sup>21</sup> And Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goat, and confess over it all the iniquities of the people of Israel, and all their transgressions, all their sins. And he shall put them on the head of the goat and send it away into the wilderness by the hand of a man who is in readiness.

<sup>22</sup> The goat shall bear all their iniquities on itself to a remote area, and he shall let the goat go free in the wilderness.

<sup>23</sup> "Then Aaron shall come into the tent of meeting and shall take off the linen garments that he put on when he went into the Holy Place and shall leave them there.

<sup>24</sup> And he shall bathe his body in water in a holy place and put on his garments and come out and offer his burnt offering and the burnt offering of the people and make atonement for himself and for the people.

(Lev 16:7-10, 15-16, 20-24)

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## The Blame-Game

What do [Bill Buckner](#), [Chris Webber](#), [Steve Smith](#), [Jackie Smith](#), and [Andres Escobar](#) all have in common? If you know your history, you will know that they are all sports figures. But this isn't what I'm looking for. Buckner let a simple ground ball pass through his legs during the World Series; Webber called a timeout when his team didn't have one in the last minute of the NCAA Finals; Steve Smith knocked the puck into his own goal during the Smythe Division finals, Jackie Smith dropped a wide open pass in the end zone during the Super Bowl. Escobar kicked the ball into his own goal during the World Cup. All the teams eventually lost.

What happened because of their mistakes? They each joined an infamous club of famous [scapegoats](#), which includes the likes of [Yoko Ono](#) (for breaking up the Beatles), [Pandora](#) of Greek mythology (for opening the box that

caused all the troubles on earth), and [Mrs. O'Leary's Cow](#) (for burning down Chicago ... he didn't do it, it was caused by a careless pipe-smoking neighbor of O'Leary).

Most times, being the scapegoat is [a terrible thing](#). Usually, the person has to live with the stigma for the rest of their life, especially if what they did was public. Sometimes, as in the case of Escobar, it can be deadly. He was murdered when he returned home by a crazed fan who was utterly distraught that his team lost the Cup "because of him." Once in a while, [it can be good](#) for the person, like it was for O. J. Simpson when his defense argued that a corrupt and, of course, racist Los Angeles police force was making him the scapegoat for two murders committed by someone else.

How is this term being used here? It is essentially [a blame-game](#). The scapegoat is to blame. Whether he should be or not is another story. While not equally true with every scapegoat above, we might define the word this way, "*When something bad happens, it's always someone else's fault.*" We see this kind of scapegoating in the Bible right at the very beginning. [Eve blames the serpent](#). "It's his fault, not mine. He deceived me." [Adam blames Eve](#). "The woman you gave me, she made me eat it." We'll come back to that story in

due time, because it is yet again relevant to our purposes in Leviticus 16.

You should know that this way of viewing the English word is **modern**. The meaning, “**One who is blamed or punished for the mistakes or sins of others**,” which is similar to what we are talking about here, is only first attested in 1824.<sup>1</sup> Yet, the word appears in English Bibles as early as 1530 when **William Tyndale** translated **Leviticus 16:8** as, “**And Aarō cast lottes ouer the.ij. gootes: one lotte for the Lorde, ād another for a scapegoote.**”<sup>2</sup> Is Tyndale trying to **pin the blame on the goat**? If he is, it would be ironic, since Tyndale himself was himself a scapegoat when Thomas More blamed him for the Peasants’ War of 1525 in Germany.<sup>3</sup>

Today I want to look more at the “**scapegoat**” part of the Day of Atonement ceremony. We’ve looked at this story before. Aaron is to take **two goats** and set them before the LORD at the entrance of the tent of meeting (**Lev 16:7**). He casts lots over the two goats (**8**). **One** becomes a sacrifice of atonement, its blood is sprinkled on the Mercy Seat (**9, 15**).

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<sup>1</sup> “Scapegoat (n.),” *Online Etymology Dictionary*. <https://www.etymonline.com/word/scapegoat>.

<sup>2</sup> **William Tyndale**, *The Pentateuch*, Early English Books Online (Imprinted at Malborow in the lande of Hesse i.e. Antwerp: By me Hans Luft i.e. Johan Hoochstraten, 1530), xxix.

<sup>3</sup> **John Perritano**, “10 Scapegoats Still in the Crosshairs,” *HowStuffWorks*, <https://history.howstuffworks.com/historical-figures/10-scapegoats-still-in-crosshairs.htm>.

**The other** is let go into the wilderness or desert after Aaron lays his hands on its head and confesses over it all the sins of the people (9, 21-22).

The imagery is not well understood because the historical interpretation of it in Jewish and Christian circles is not well known. But it adds some tantalizing clues as to what is really going on in the two-goats part of this ritual. My aim is to help us understand that always just **below the surface** in the Bible, especially where sin is lurking, there is also supernatural evil. This is not to create a blame-game (the devil made me do it). It is to explain the relationship between the supernatural, our sins, and God's forgiveness towards us. *All* evil must be overcome and conquered by someone greater than yourself. This is precisely what Christ has done in the new covenant as he fulfills the totality of the ritual of the Day of Atonement.

## **Scapegoat?**

Tyndale has an older definition in mind. His word comes from “scape,” a shortening of “**escape**” + goat. So, it is really the “escape-goat.” His translation comes from the Latin *capro emissario*—the **emissary goat**. An emissary is a

diplomatic representative *sent out* on a mission by someone higher. The Greek translation (*apompaios*) means “**carrying away**,” although, it can also refer in Classical Greek specifically to “**a demon who averts evil**.”<sup>4</sup> The point is, “scapegoat” for Tyndale does not mean blame, but rather a goat that escapes or goes out. This is a good translation of the Hebrew word used here. That word is *azazel*, which seems to come from two words meaning **goat** (‘ēz) + “**to go away, disappear**” (’ozēl).<sup>5</sup>

*Azazel* appears in Leviticus 16 four times (**Lev 16:8, 10x2, 26**) and many English translations follow Tyndale with “scapegoat.” But this word has been the subject of much scrutiny. Like Tyndale’s English word, the Hebrew word’s meaning is **not entirely clear**. This is why the ESV and other translations simply transliterate it. However, all of the transliterations do something you would not expect from the

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<sup>4</sup> Editorial note in Cyril of Alexandria, *A Commentary upon the Gospel according to S. Luke*, trans. **R. Payne Smith** (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1859), Sermon 53, p. 239 n. 14 (s). This note cites several authorities looking at classical Greek a few centuries ago. Modern Lexicons do not give this definition, but neither do they go into how the word was used classically either. For more, see the connection made to Dionysus in **Spencer Elliott**, “Dionysus, Azazel, and Processionals: The Influence of the Dionysian Cult in LXX Leviticus,” SBL Annual Conference, 2018, [https://www.academia.edu/37831564/Dionysus\\_Azazel\\_and\\_Processionals\\_The\\_Influence\\_of\\_the\\_Dionysian\\_Cult\\_in\\_LXX\\_Leviticus](https://www.academia.edu/37831564/Dionysus_Azazel_and_Processionals_The_Influence_of_the_Dionysian_Cult_in_LXX_Leviticus).

<sup>5</sup> **B. Janowski**, “Azazel,” ed. Karel van der Toorn, Bob Becking, and Pieter W. van der Horst, *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible* (Leiden; Boston; Köln; Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge: Brill; Eerdmans, 1999), 128.

word “scapegoat,” which is just an ordinary noun. They all capitalize it—Azazel (“scapegoat” is not capitalized). They all see it as a proper noun, that is, as someone’s name.

Now, one of the possible meanings of *azazel* as an ordinary noun is “precipitous place” or “rugged cliff.”<sup>6</sup> This accords with the later tradition told to us by the Rabbis. When the designated man would take the goat many miles outside of Jerusalem, he would take some scarlet thread, bind it to the head of the scapegoat, and turn it towards the desert (m. *Yoma* 4.2). This thread became what scholars call his “clothing,” which is red to represent the sin of the people (ala *Isaiah* 1:18).<sup>7</sup> Then he would tie one side to a rock, the other to the goat’s horns and push it over backward where it would roll down a jagged ravine to its death (m. *Yoma* 6:6). The idea here seems to have been rooted in an OT truth. They didn’t want that goat wandering back into the city with all of its sins thereby making everything unclean again.

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<sup>6</sup> “‘Jagged rocks/precipice,’ derived from the Semitic root ‘zz, from which also comes the Arabic word ‘azâzu (n), ‘rough.’”<sup>6</sup> John H. Walton, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary (Old Testament): Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 306; summarizing G. R. Driver, “Three Technical Terms in the Pentateuch,” *Journal of Semitic Studies* 1 (1956) 97–105, esp. 97–100.

<sup>7</sup> Andrei A. Orlov, “The Curses of Azazel,” *Divine Scapegoats: Demonic Mimesis in Early Jewish Mysticism* (Albany, NY: Suny Press, 2015), 14-15 [9-36].

The problem is, we are not in Jerusalem in Leviticus 16. We are wandering around in a vast wilderness and only God's presence in Israel's camp keeps them from being considered part of that wilderness. Further, [the law of Leviticus 16 does not tell them to kill the goat](#). In fact, it is supposed to [remain alive](#)! And so, curiously, there was [another tradition](#) among the Rabbis. These taught that the word was not a noun, but a proper noun, some kind of a supernatural entity.

Before getting into this, it is probably worth mentioning that the Jewish Encyclopedia tells us that, "[Azazel enjoys the distinction of being the most mysterious extrahuman character in sacred literature.](#)"<sup>8</sup> Thus, anything we may say is only [speculative](#) in terms of reality. Nevertheless, there are some compelling things here and more importantly, even if they do not correspond to reality (which I think they do), they are still very helpful in getting us to understand something about the supernatural world that many will never ordinarily see.

## Who is Azazel?

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<sup>8</sup> "Azazel (Scapegoat, Lev. 16, A. V.)," Isidore Singer, ed., *The Jewish Encyclopedia: A Descriptive Record of the History, Religion, Literature, and Customs of the Jewish People from the Earliest Times to the Present Day, 12 Volumes* (New York; London: Funk & Wagnalls, 1901–1906), 365.



That being said, the Mishna states, “**The school of Rabbi Yishmael** [Ishmael, b. 90 A.D.] **taught: Azazel** is so called because **it atones for the actions of Uzza and Azael**. These are the names of “sons of God” who sinned with “daughters of men” (Genesis 6:2) and thereby caused the world to sin during the generation of the Flood” (**m. Yoma 67b**). **Genesis 6:2** says, “The sons of God saw that the daughters of man were attractive. And they took as their wives any they chose.” There is no mention made here of an “Uzza and Azael.” But it does mention the “sons of God.”

The popular interpretation in many Christians circles since the days of **Augustine** and **Chrysostom** is that these “sons of God” refer to the **descendants of Seth**, the son of Adam. In this interpretation, they began to marry the “**daughters of Cain**,” even though the actual language here is “the daughters of *men*” (are not the sons of Seth men?) or more literally, “the daughters of *Adam*.” In this view, all there is to see here is the perfectly normal, but evil, marrying of Christians to non-Christians.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> For a rebuttal of this argument, see *Douglas Van Dorn, Giants: Sons of the Gods* (Erie, CO: Waters of Creation Publishing, 2013), Introduction.

Unbeknownst to these Pillars of the Faith, they had unwittingly adopted a form of desupernaturalization,<sup>10</sup> the seeds of which had been planted by the Rabbis sometime in the second century after Jews began converting to Christianity *en masse* because someone named Jesus Christ was claiming to be a supernatural heavenly “Son of God” and proved his heavenly origin to them.<sup>11</sup> Back in those days, the only interpretation of this text was that these “sons of God” were heavenly beings called Watchers (Gk: *Gregoroi*) or, sometimes, angels.<sup>12</sup> These Rabbis, to save their religion, began to teach that the “sons of God” were “sons of nobility” (kings) and simultaneously pronounced a curse upon anyone who identified them as “sons of God.”<sup>13</sup> This kind of desupernaturalization found its way into the mainline thinking of the church sometime only just prior to

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<sup>10</sup> See W. A. van Gemeren, “The Sons of God in Genesis 6:1–4 (An Example of Evangelical Demythologization?),” *Westminster Theological Journal* 43 (1981): 320–348.

<sup>11</sup> “Mid second century C.E., one of the most important pupils of Akiva. Cf. *EncJud* 18:593–594.” In Jacob Johannes Theodoor Doedens, “The Sons of God in Genesis 6:1–4” (Ph.D. diss. Theologische Universiteit Kampen, 2013): 92, n. 20.

<sup>12</sup> Doedens, Dissertation, 89–180; also Robert C. Newman, “The Ancient Exegesis of Genesis 6:2,4,” *Grace Theological Journal* 5:1 (1984): 13–36.

<sup>13</sup> “Jacob Neusner, *Genesis Rabbah: The Judaic Commentary to the Book of Genesis: A New American Translation* (BJS 104; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985), 282. “Because ‘sons of God’ is a literal translation of the Hebrew text, the curse must have been addressed at adherents of the angels interpretation,” in Doedens, Dissertation, 115 n. 152.

Chrysostom and Augustine writing at the turn of the 5<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>14</sup>

Early Jews and Christians talked much about this, and they were **all unified** in their thinking in the early days. They did not desupernaturalize this passage. Probably the best-known writing of this is found in **1 Enoch**, a book positively quoted and alluded to many times by Jude in his short letter. This is the story as told in that ancient book that predates Christianity.

<sup>1</sup> In those days, when the children of man had multiplied, it happened that there were born unto them handsome and beautiful daughters. <sup>2</sup> And the angels, the children of heaven, saw them and desired them; and they said to one another, “Come, let us choose wives for ourselves from among the daughters of man and beget us children.” <sup>3</sup> And Semyaz, being their leader, said unto them, “I fear that perhaps you will not consent that this deed should be done, and I alone will become (responsible) for this great sin.” <sup>4</sup> But they all responded to him, “Let us all swear an oath and bind everyone among us by a curse not to abandon this suggestion but to do the deed.” <sup>5</sup> Then they all swore together and bound one another by (the curse). <sup>6</sup> And they were altogether

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<sup>14</sup> See **Doedens**, “The Indecent Descent of the Sethites: The Provenance of the Sethites-Interpretation of Genesis 6:1-4,” *Sárospataki Füzetek* 16:3-4 (2012): 47-57.

two hundred and they descended in the days of Jared [“Jared” means “descend”] into 'Ardos, which is the summit of Hermon. And they called the mount *Armon*, for they swore and bound one another *by a curse*.

(1 Enoch 6:1-6)

It then proceeds to give us **the names** of several of these fallen creatures. Azazel, or in some copies, Azael (Ishmael above) is the tenth in that list.<sup>15</sup>

There are a couple of things to know about the geography before moving on to Azazel. The place of their landing is Mt. Hermon, the highest summit in Israel (ancient Canaan), **the bottom of which dwelt the goat-demon Pan**, the location of which just so happens to be the only place on earth where the 33<sup>rd</sup> degree longitude connects to the 33<sup>rd</sup> degree latitude (Moses will soon stare it down as he enters the Promised Land from that region). If you know anything about “**secret**” illuminated numbers, you know that 33 is basically “The” number. As you will see in a moment, secret knowledge is part and parcel of this story.

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<sup>15</sup> The texts that we have say at this point Asael. However, just two chapters later, we have copies that read both Asael and Azazel. This is the same creature. Thus, Targ. Jonathan 6:2 refers to the two leaders as Schamchazai (Semyaz) and Azazel (sometimes Uzziel). For a midrash on this story see Jeremy Kapp, “Midrash of Shemhazai and Azazel,” <https://www.academia.edu/2483408/Midrash-of-Shemhazai-and-Azazel>.

Enoch tells us that it was on Mt. Hermon that these Watchers took [an oath or made an evil covenant](#). It says they swore a curse and thus named the place Hermon. Curiously, in the 1860s, Sir Charles Warren discovered an ancient temple on top of Mt. Hermon and a huge stone plaque written in Greek that read, “*According to the command of the greatest and holy God, those who take an oath proceed from here.*”<sup>16</sup> Hermon (*khermon*) means “curse” or “anathama” and from this word we get the phrase “[devote to destruction](#)” (*kharam*), also known as [the ban](#) where Israel is commanded to utterly destroy certain people groups that are actually related to this place; those people being the giant tribes and all associated with them.

Back to the story. It goes on to tell us that they took wives to themselves and began to go in to them and defile themselves, producing giants.<sup>17</sup> These Watchers then began to teach them the “[secret](#)” (see [10:6](#)) things about the cutting of roots and plants, about [sorcery and charms](#) ([7:1-2](#)), and about [astrology](#) and signs and seeing the [stars](#) and doing [astronomy](#) ([8:3](#)), hence the curious longitude and latitude of the mountain.

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<sup>16</sup> See my sermon on Psalm 68 for the story.

<sup>17</sup> See also 4Q180-81.

Azazel is the first renegade named. It tells us he taught the people the art of making swords and knives, and shields, and breastplates and every instrument of war (think “violence” on the earth in **Genesis 6:11-13**). He showed them metals of the earth and how to work gold and fashion it suitably.<sup>18</sup> Here, this particularly relates to teaching them the arts of making bracelets, decorations, shadowing of the eye with antimony, ornamentation, the beautifying of the eyelids, all kinds of precious stones, and all coloring tinctures and alchemy (**8:1-2**). It makes me think of Jezebel and her worship of (**2Kg 9:30**) as she prepared to meet her god Baal in her immanent death. It also makes me wonder if that isn’t what is behind Peter’s statement not to let a

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<sup>18</sup> **Going Deeper:** Nickelsburg notes the great overlap here between Azazel and the Greek myths about **Prometheus**, which makes this discussion more ironic, since it was Prometheus who brought about the creation of **Pandora**, the first great scapegoat of Greek mythology (see the third footnote of this sermon). Both cultures describe revelation of aspects of culture and civilization that comes from divine (heavenly) origin. Metallurgy, particularly the mining of copper, iron, silver, and gold) is the connection of Azazel to Prometheus. Eventually, Prometheus is bound by Zeus where he is taken into the wilderness and is chained hand and foot to the side of a cliff. Later, he is entombed until a distant time when he will be subjected to terrible torment. A difference in the stories is, Azazel (and his cohorts) is viewed as a villain, while Prometheus is a hero. See **George W. E. Nickelsburg**, *1 Enoch: A Commentary on the Book of 1 Enoch*, ed. Klaus Baltzer, Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2001), 191-193. Margaret Barker makes an important observation (made earlier by Origen, *Against Celsus* 6:43), that Nickelsburg and others assume that the Greek material comes first and the Jews were copying it over to Azazel. Therefore, the Azazel Watcher interpretation cannot have been the original meaning. But marshals good arguments in favor of it being the original, including the rabbinic source (Ishmael) was himself credited with keeping the old temple traditions alive. See **Margaret Barker**, “Atonement: The Rite of Healing,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 49.1 (Feb 1996): 1-20. <https://www.marquette.edu/maqom/atonement.html>.

woman's adorning be external with gold jewelry and so on (1Pet 3:2), since he so clearly knew the story of Enoch (compare 2 Peter with Jude) and in fact begins to talk about this very event by the end of this chapter.

But we are thinking about Azazel, who, when we see him next it says he “has taught all forms of oppression upon the earth” (1En 9:2) and again, “The whole earth has been corrupted by Azaz’el’s teaching of his own actions” (10:8). Or, perhaps a better translation, “All the earth was made desolate by the deeds of the teaching” of Azazel (Nickelsburg). Desolate places are waste places, wilderness, desert.

Curiously, Azazel meets his fate here. Enoch tells us that the Lord commanded the angel Raphael, “Bind Azazel hand and foot and throw him into the darkness!” and he made a hole in the desert which was in Duda’el and cast him there; he threw on top of him rugged and sharp rocks” (10:4-5). Then we find Enoch speaking to the creature. He said, “There will not be peace unto you; a grave judgment has come upon you. They will put you in bonds, and you will not have (an opportunity for) rest and supplication, because you have taught injustice and because you have shown to the people deeds of shame, injustice, and sin” (13:1-2). And a Dead Sea

Scroll fragment adds, “He punished not us(?) but Azazel” (4Q203). Hopefully you can hear in this story echoes of the Day of Atonement ritual with things like a desert, the placing of sin on Azazel and not on the people, the sharp rocks like those that are found at a cliff, and so on.<sup>19</sup>

But his story does not stop here in Jewish thought. A lesser known book called *the Apocalypse of Abraham* says quite a bit more about him. This is an imaginative expansion of Genesis 15 where Abraham sees God (The author of the Apocalypse is careful to make sure we know that Abraham never sees God, only a created angel, contrary to Scripture), is taken outside, and then told to collect a series of animals for a sacrifice that will confirm God’s choosing of him. The story is filled with the worship of false gods by his father and brother.

During the ceremony, Abraham is transported through a vision to the Garden of Eden. He wonders what he is seeing, and he is told, “This is disgrace, this is Azazel! Shame on you Azazel for Abraham’s portion is in heaven, and yours

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<sup>19</sup> Andrei A. Orlov, “Eschatological Yom Kippur in the Apocalypse of Abraham: Part I. The Scapegoat Ritual,” in *Dark Mirrors: Azazel and Satanael in Early Jewish Demonology* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2011), 36 and n. 42 [27-46] lists several scholars who have made these connections. [https://www.academia.edu/255622/The\\_Eschatological\\_Yom\\_Kippur\\_in\\_the\\_Apocalypse\\_of\\_Abraham\\_Part\\_I\\_The\\_Scapegoat\\_Ritual](https://www.academia.edu/255622/The_Eschatological_Yom_Kippur_in_the_Apocalypse_of_Abraham_Part_I_The_Scapegoat_Ritual), p. 94-95.



is on earth, for you have selected here, and become enamored of the dwelling place of your blemish” (ApAb 13:6-8). Later, Abraham is commanded to tell the creature, “Go, Azazel, into the untrodden parts of the earth. For your heritage is over those who are with you, with the stars and with the men born by the clouds, whose portion you are, indeed they exist through your being” (14:5-6), and with those words the creature must flee the Garden into the desert beyond, for he is trying to tempt Abraham.

But who exactly is this creature and why is he in the Garden? We learn later, “Who is the one who seduced Eve?” (23:1). “I saw there a man ... entwined with a woman ... and they were standing under a tree of Eden ... And behind the tree was standing something like a dragon in form, but having hands and feet like a man’s, on his back six wings on the right and six on the left” (5-7). When Abraham asks who these are he is told, “This is Adam ... this is Eve. And he who is between them is the impiety of their behavior unto perdition, Azazel himself” (10-11). In other words, the Apocalypse identifies Azazel as none other than Satan.<sup>20</sup>

It isn’t just Jews. Irenaeus writes in the second century from Lyons (modern France) against the heretics of his day by

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<sup>20</sup> On these connections between Azazel and Satan (Satanel) see Orlov, *Dark Mirrors*.

quoting “that divine elder” (perhaps Pothinus, 87-177 A.D.) who was writing against Marcion. Marcion is known for having the first canon containing almost none of the books we have today, because he was a heretic. But he was much worse than some kind of proto-Ultra-Dispensationalist that doesn’t like half of Paul’s letters. The text says **Marcion was using the dark and black arts of magic, consulting the stars** to confirm his “doctrines of error,”<sup>21</sup> using wonders of power utterly severed from God. He was an apostate, “**Which Satan, thy true father, enables thee still to accomplish, by means of Azazel, that fallen and yet mighty angel**” (**Irenaeus**, *Against Heresies* 1.15.6). It is possible that Azazel here is a lieutenant of Satan. But because it is a poem, Satan and Azazel could be in parallelism, thus, the same entity. Whichever, he is certainly a fallen heavenly being.

**Origen** is similar. He says, “**Moreover (the goat), which in the book of Leviticus is sent away (into the wilderness), and which in the Hebrew language is named Azazel, was none other than [the “serpent” who became “the cause of man’s expulsion from the divine Paradise”]**” (**Origen**, *Against*

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<sup>21</sup> The text has been called, “The Hymn Against Marcion.” See Editorial note in Cyril of Alexandria, *A Commentary upon the Gospel according to S. Luke*, trans. R. Payne Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1859), Sermon 53, p. 239 n. 14 (s).

*Celsus* 6.43).<sup>22</sup> Clearly, he sees Azazel as the creature of Eden. So this was a mainline view in both Jewish and Christian circles.

Is any of this right? Well, the Bible doesn't say explicitly. Modern scholars are fairly convinced that this is a supernatural creature of some kind. Some think he is Satan. Some that he is a desert-goblin. Others think he may be the evil satyr Pan who lived at the base of Mt. Hermon at the literal "gates of hell."<sup>23</sup>

The Scripture itself does give us some tantalizing clues that it certainly could be. For example, in the very next chapter, we have the only certain mention of a demon in Leviticus. It says, "So they shall no more sacrifice their sacrifices to goat demons, after whom they whore. This shall be a statute forever for them throughout their generations" (Lev 17:7). That sounds too similar to what we are talking about with a goat that goes to Azazel to be a coincidence.

Second, Leviticus has lots being cast over two living goats. One goat goes "for Yahweh" (לִיהוָה) and the other "for Azazel" (לְעִזָּאזָל). It's an identical construction, leading

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<sup>22</sup> Origen is saying the goat's name is Azazel, thereby more closely identifying the symbol. This is possible, though not necessary. See Barker.

<sup>23</sup> For these see Aron Pinker, "A Goat to Go to Azazel," *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures* 7.8 (2007): 7, 14-16 [2-24]. [http://www.jhsonline.org/Articles/article\\_69.pdf](http://www.jhsonline.org/Articles/article_69.pdf).

us to think Azazel is an entity like Yahweh is. Since one goat goes to *azazel*, it makes no sense to translate it as “scapegoat.” The goat is sent to the scapegoat? That makes no sense, because the scapegoat is supposed to be the goat upon whom the lot fell. You don’t send the goat to itself.<sup>24</sup> One probably wouldn’t think that a goat “for the precipitous place” or “for the rugged cliff” would really make a lot of sense here either, since it seems to imply ownership and how can rocks own something? So the text itself leads us in this direction.

Third, it is to the wilderness that the living goat goes. “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 16:10). In the Scripture, the wilderness is considered one of the primary abodes of supernatural entities. Isaiah 13:21-22 (cf. 34:11-15) says of the ruined Babylon, “Desert creatures will lie down there, and their houses will be full of howlings (Gk: *echos*), sirens/monsters (Gk: *seiren*) also will live there, and demons/satyrs/goat demons (Hb: *sair*), and centaurs (Gk: *onokentauros*) will howl in their fortified towers and

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<sup>24</sup> John H. Walton, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary (Old Testament): Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 306.

dragons (Hb: *tan*) in their luxurious palaces.”<sup>25</sup> John in Revelation comments on this exact verse saying, “Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great! She has become a dwelling place for demons, a haunt for every unclean spirit...” (Rev 18:2). (We saw this in the sermon on Leviticus 11).

This is ironic, since the Babylonians themselves believed the same thing. “Evil Alu, go to the desert place! | Your dwelling is a destroyed ruin.”<sup>26</sup> Or “O evil spirit—to the desert. | O evil demon—to the desert. | O evil ghost—to the desert | O evil devil—to the desert.”<sup>27</sup> Now Babylon gets the demons because Babylon becomes a waste place.

Given this thought, is it any wonder that in the NT you find things like unclean spirits seizing a man “bound” with chains that he would break only to be driven by the demon into the desert (Luke 8:29; cf. Mark 5:10)? Or that “when the unclean spirit has gone out of a person, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, but finds none” (Matt 12:43)? And still again, where is it that Jesus encounters Satan? In the

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<sup>25</sup> This is my translation, a composite of the LXX and Hebrew as translated by the YLT (howlings), English LXX (mosters, devils), KJV (satyrs), LXX (centaurs), and TNK (dragons).

<sup>26</sup> Pinker, “A Goat to Go to Azazel,” 4, n. 9.

<sup>27</sup> R. C. Thompson, *The Devils and Evil Spirits of Babylonia* (2 vols., Luzac’s Semitic Text and Translation Series 14-15; London: Luzac; New York: AMS Press, 1903-1904): 1:61, 167 cited in Willoughby C. Allen, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to S. Matthew*, International Critical Commentary (New York: C. Scribner’s Sons, 1907), 140.

desert (**Matt 4:1**).<sup>28</sup> You see, the wilderness is the opposite of God’s good creative activity and covenantal presence. It is the place of evil.

**Finally**, the Greek word means in Classical Greek specifically “**a demon who averts evil**,” and apparently, this was one of the points Emperor Julian the heretic made against Cyril of Alexandria, who was trying to prove that the Jews were offering goats to demons.<sup>29</sup> But Julian is

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<sup>28</sup> See also Tob 8:3; 1 En 10:4-5; 2 Bar 10:8; 4 Macc 18:8; TSol. 5:11-12. See also **Andrei A. Orlov**, “Satan and the Visionary: Apocalyptic Roles of the Adversary in the Temptation Narrative of the Gospel of Matthew,” *Dark Mirrors: Azazel and Satanael in Early Jewish Demonology* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2011), 107-112.

<sup>29</sup> The quote from n. 4 in Cyril of Alexandria, Sermon 53, p. 239 n. 14 (<sup>s</sup>) is worth quoting in full here, even though the author apparently does not opt for Azazel being an evil entity:

This translation of Lev. 16:8 [“Of these, one was called ‘the lord:’ and the other, the ‘sent-away’] was apparently adopted by S. Cyril to escape from an objection brought against the passage by Julian, as proving the existence of a Deus Avertendus, “an evil-averting demon.” For the text is rightly translated by the Sept. κλήρον ἓνα τῷ κυρίῳ, καὶ κλήρον ἓνα τῷ ἀποπομπαίῳ: “one lot for the Lord, and “the other lot for the scapegoat,” as the A. V. renders it. But as ἀποπομπαῖος in classical Greek signifies a “demon who averts evil,” Julian inferred from it the existence of these inferior powers, unto one of which he supposed the second goat was offered: and therefore Cyril, not being acquainted with Hebrew, gives it another meaning, of which the Greek may possibly admit: namely, that two lots were written for the goats, inscribed with these two names, conf. Lib. ix. contra Jul. vi. 301. E. So again in his Epistle to Acacius, V. pt. ii. 224. arguing against a faction, who had adopted the same opinions, he says, “He commanded therefore two goats to be offered, and two lots to be written for them, so as for the one goat to be called Lord, and the other goat ἀποπομπαῖος. These therefore were the names “of the goats.” In modern times, Bochart, Suicer, and Gesenius, all adopt Julian’s view, that ἀποπομπαῖος is equivalent to ἀποτροπαῖος, though it draws but slight confirmation from Josephus, who says, indeed, that the goat was an ἀποτροπιασμὸς, *an averting of evil*, but evidently is referring to v. 21. where Aaron is commanded to lay the sins of the people upon the goat’s head. That Cyril had never heard of this meaning of ἀποπομπαῖος is plain; for he calls it ὄνομα τοῖς μὲν ἱεροῖς νόμοις οὐκ ἐγνωσμένον, ἐντριβὲς δὲ ἴσως ἑαυτῷ, i. e. to Julian: and nothing could be more unsafe than to interpret the language of the Sept. by classical Greek usage. That the Jews of the second century understood it in a passive sense is plain from Aquila, who renders it ἀπολελυμένος, and Symmachus who gives ἀπερχόμενος: while the Greek fathers

mistaken. The goat is not being “offered” to Azazel. It is *going out* to Azazel very much alive. Julian is making a classic blunder, one that not a few Christians have made when reading this passage. There is no sacrifice being made to Azazel. The other goat is a sacrifice; that one that is killed in the tabernacle “for Yahweh.” This goat is “for Azazel,” but it is not a sacrifice. So what then is it? This question gets to the point of the sermon.

## The Two Goats, Jesus, and the Devil

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always treat it as equal to ἀποπεμπόμενος, and the Latins as Emissarius, i. e. the goat sent away. Besides, it is quite impossible to suppose that either the Sept., or Aquila and the other Greek translators of the O.T., meant their renderings as an equivalent of the Hebrew לִזְבָּח, any more than our own translators their word “scapegoat:” for there is not the most distant connection between the Hebrew and any of these significations. They are mere substitutions of the general sense of the passage for a word confessedly untranslatable; for Jonathan, Onkelos, the Samaritan, and most other versions, retain the original word, as does also the A. V. in the margin: or perhaps, they may have supposed it to be explained by חַטָּאת, as it occurs in vv. 10. 21. 22. As regards the meaning of לִזְבָּח, *Azazel*, some consider it to be the name of a mountain; Bochart, “the wastes:” others, one of the four chiefs of the devils, whose names Menachem on Lev. assures us are Sammael, Azazel, Azael, and Machazeel: others, that it is Satan’s lieutenant, so called in the hymn against Marcion cited by Epiphanius from Irenæus:—

ἅ σοι χορηγεῖ σὸς πατὴρ Σατὰν ἀεὶ  
δι’ ἀγγελικῆς δυνάμεως Ἀζαζήλ ποιεῖν.

Upon the whole, I think Ewald’s opinion, *Krit. Gr.* p. 243, is the most defensible, that Azazel means “total separation or removal;” for Gesenius’ objection, that Moses would not have used so hard a word when simpler expressions were at hand, has little force, since possibly Moses may have preserved in this rite some patriarchal observance: and nothing is so retentive of ancient words,—as well as also of customs and ideas,—as the ritual of a nation.

To understand this, bring the desert as a place for demons to the forefront of your mind. Add to it now Genesis 1:2, “The earth was without form and void...” Form and void are the words *tohu* and *bohu*. Tohu appears only one time elsewhere in the Pentateuch. “[Yahweh] found [Israel] in a desert land, and in the howling waste [tohu] of the wilderness” (Deut 32:10). And what did the LORD do? “He encircled him, he cared for him he kept him as the apple of his eye.” Then, like the hovering spirit over the waters at creation, “Like an eagle that stirs up its nest, that flutters over its young ... the LORD alone guided him, no foreign god was with him” (11-12). In other words, there were foreign gods with Israel when he found him in the wilderness, because that’s the place of evil fallen spiritual beings in what scholars call cosmic geography. But God removes them and places himself in their midst.

The two words together are found in only two other verses. The first shows this clearly. It is parallel to Isaiah 13 that we saw above. Here, unclean animals and demonic entities are present. “But the hawk and the porcupine shall possess it, the owl and the raven shall dwell in it. He shall stretch the line of desolation [*tohu*] over it, and the plumb line of emptiness [*bohu*] ... It shall be a haunt for



monsters/dragons [tan/sieren, YLT, LXX, KJV] ... And desert creatures [NAS] shall meet with devils [LXX]; the satyrs/goat-demons [KJV, TNK] shall cry to his fellow; indeed, there the night-monster/Lilith [NAS, TNK] settles and finds herself a resting place” (Isa 34:11, 13-14).

The second does the same, but in a different way. Jeremiah says, “For my people are foolish; they know me not; they are stupid children; they have no understanding. They are ‘wise’—in doing evil! ... I looked on the land, and behold, it was without form and void ... I looked, and behold, the fruitful land was a desert ... And you, O desolate one, what do you mean that you dress in scarlet, that you adorn yourself with ornament of gold, that you enlarge your eyes with paint? In vain you beautify yourself. Your lovers despise you; they seek your life” (Jer 4:22-23, 26, 30). And who are her lovers? The gods (Jer 3:1-6). Sound familiar?

Jeremiah is saying that God is going to return his adulteress people back to the wilderness where he found them. He is going to abandon them. There will be no more life for them, no more covenant presence. They will feel the heat of the scorching rocks. They will know the thirst of life without water.

The entire story of the 40 years in the wilderness brings this to light, just how full of complaining and thanklessness they were. They needed to know the physical reality quite literally so that they would understand the **spiritual counterpart** which is just as real, but longer lasting. As Amos says, “Behold, the days are coming,” declares the Lord GOD, ‘When I will send a **famine on the land**—not a famine of bread, nor a **thirst for water**, but of hearing the words of the LORD ... in that day the lovely virgins and the young men shall faint for thirst. Those who swear by the **Guilt of Samaria**, and say ‘As **your god lives, O Dan**,’ and, ‘As the **Way of Beersheba lives**,’ they shall fall, and never rise again” (**Amos 8:12, 14**). Or as Hosea says, “Lest I strip her naked and make her as the day she was born, and make her like a wilderness, and make her like a parched land, and kill her with thirst ... for [she] has played the whore” (**Hos 2:3, 5**).

God does not dwell in his special presence in the desert. Rather, he makes for himself a sanctuary, a **lush garden**, a **holy mountain** of profound sacredness. His presence **creates life in the barren places**, while the presence of the “*others*” brings death to living places. This is what he is doing with Israel when he finds him in the *tohu* waste. He takes her from the gods and evil places and brings her to himself, creates a

covenant with her, and makes her swear that she will not go after other lovers again.

So if the desert is a place for demons, and if God cannot and his people must not dwell there, then **what about sin?** The prophets speak to Israel's not caring any longer about the LORD. But the Day of Atonement comes *before* them. It provided their hope. We have seen that all forms of uncleanness are related to the idea of **death**. As such, they **do not belong in the camp** of Yahweh. Rather, they belong, "**outside the camp**" (**Lev 4:12, 21; 6:11; 8:17, 9:11; 13:46; 14:40-41; 16:27**; etc.). This is the point, then, of the so-called scapegoat. This goat goes outside the camp to Azazel and his abode of death. He "escapes." Heiser explains,

This goat is not an offering to Azazel because there's no ritual killing here. The goat is just **a vehicle for the removal of impurity**. Impurity was sent to where it belonged, the realm where Yahweh was not. Yahweh is not associated with impurity, flaws, or imperfections of any kind. Since his domain and his people are holy and sanctified, impurity must be removed. It's not like an offering where Azazel would be appeased. Actually, Azazel is getting the opposite. Azazel was impure by definition, and he's getting this goat which was full of impurity. It wasn't an appeasement. It was

dumping what they didn't want in the place where it belonged.<sup>30</sup>

Sin is transferred from one place to another, from one realm to another, from one *being* to another. The evil one who spawned it takes the sin and the people, through faith and the other goat, take forgiveness. This is represented in the ceremony in the clothing. As I said, the Rabbis put a red thread on the head of the goat and this was its new “clothing.” Sin. This is symbolized by Jeremiah in the wicked women of Israel adorning themselves in the eye make-up and bracelets that we have seen was taught by Azazel. I do not view those things as evil. They are just things. But they can be used for evil.<sup>31</sup> The point is, they were using these things as a covering, like Adam and Eve with their fig leaves. They were hiding their adultery under them. They would not take the righteousness of Christ.

But this righteousness is in fact symbolized in a kind of transference of clothing in Leviticus 16, even as it is in the Apocalypse of Abraham, where Azazel is stripped of his former heavenly dwelling and Abraham gets to ascend in his

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<sup>30</sup> Michael S. Heiser, *Notes on Leviticus: from the Naked Bible Podcast* (BlindSpot Press. Kindle Edition).

<sup>31</sup> Enoch (1En 69:9) talks about how the Watchers taught us to write. Yet, no one would say that writing is a necessary evil.

place.<sup>32</sup> The goat is clothed in Leviticus with sin, while **the priest**, immediately after this transference takes place, has to go into the holy place, take off his clothing, washes, and put in new clean clothes (**Lev 16:23-24**; see **Zech 3:1-5**). This is the clothing of **putting on an alien righteousness**. The people, including the priest, were sinful. Their sin was transferred legally to the goat and send out to Azazel. It is gone. The cleanness of God, his holiness, is then transferred legally to the people through the atoning work of the goats.

Remember, this is **one ceremony** with **two goats**. The goats do different things. One transfers the sins outside the camp. The other sprinklings the holy places and makes the sanctuary clean so that all that are found in it can **catch this contagious holiness**. If they had sin credited to them at that moment, they would die, like Nadab and Abihu. But since the sin is gone, they can have the righteousness and God can dwell with them in peace. This is justification by faith in the OT pictured.

The Day of Atonement was a shadowy hope for Israel and they failed, ultimately, to find the forgiveness it offered. Because **they did not seek it by faith**. Faith in Christ. Christ

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<sup>32</sup> ApocAb 13:4. See **Andrei A. Orlov**, “The Nourishment of Azazel,” *Divine Scapegoats: Demonic Mimesis in Early Jewish Mysticism* (Albany, NY: Suny Press, 2015), 76 [75-102]. [https://www.academia.edu/7974022/The\\_Nourishment\\_of\\_Azazel](https://www.academia.edu/7974022/The_Nourishment_of_Azazel).

their God. But we are doubly culpable if we fail in this. Because we have the promises of the Day of Atonement made sure. Jesus has fulfilled both of these goat-rites.

“But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption” (Heb 9:11-12). Jesus it fulfills the goat for Yahweh. He makes atonement for the holy places.

“Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood” (Heb 13:12). Notice, he suffered there. He didn't die in this verse. He is taken away, outside the camp, to an unclean place, thereby fulfilling the goat for Azazel.

Tertullian stands with many Church Fathers <sup>33</sup> in proclaiming this to you:

If also I am to submit an interpretation of the two goats which were offered at the Fast, are not these also figures of Christ's

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<sup>33</sup> E.g. Barnabas 7:6-11; Hippolytus, *Catena on Proverbs*; Theodoret of Cyr, *Dialogue* 3; also Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 40 and many more. For a discussion of some of these see [Andrei A. Orlov](#), *The Atoning Dyad: The Two Goats of Yom Kippur in the Apocalypse of Abraham*, *Studia Judaeoslavica* 8, ed. Alexander Kulik (Boston: Brill, 2016), 65-80.

two activities? ... One of them however, surrounded with scarlet [his scarlet robe; Matt 27:28], cursed and spit upon and pulled about and pierced, was by the people driven out of the city into perdition, marked with manifest tokens of our Lord's passion: while the other, made an offering for sins, and given as food to the priests of the temple, marked the tokens of his second manifestation, at which, when all sins have been done away, the priests of the spiritual temple which is the Church, were to enjoy, as it were, a feast of our Lord's grace, while the rest remain without a taste of salvation.

(Tertullian, *Against Marcion* 3.7).

Tertullian mentions a feast. In the ritual, it is as if the food for Azazel is the sin-goat. He gets to eat it down to the bones. In the exchange, our food is the body and blood of Christ, that is, his sacrifice, which was to be eaten.<sup>34</sup> As Christ says, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day” (John 6:53-54).

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<sup>34</sup> Orlov has a great discussion on how in the Apocalypse of Abraham, Azazel is eating his food and Abraham is given other food. It is another exchange, just as the transference of one to earth and the other to heaven and the exchange of clothing is also pictured. His discussion reinforces how it probably is in fact a divine being that is in view with the term *azazel*. See Orlov, “Nourishment of Azazel.”

I want you to consider a famous predication in Isaiah that shed even more light on this amazing work of Christ when thought about from the language of the Day of Atonement. Isaiah says of the Suffering Servant. “He shall sprinkle many nations” (Isa 52:15). This is his atoning work sprinkling the Most Holy Place of heaven to purge sins’ impurities from the new earth sanctuary. Like the goat for Azazel, he “carries” our griefs and our sorrows (53:4). He was “pierced” for our transgressions (5). This word *hll* carries both the meaning pierce, as in to kill and defile as in to be made unclean. He pours out his life as a sin offering (53:19). His life was in the blood, thus it was poured out to take care of the sacrilege against the holy things and the violations of the covenant.<sup>35</sup>

In these things, it is not only Jesus’ death on the cross that is part of the fulfillment of the atonement, it is also his passion, his taking upon himself the sins of the people as pictured through spitting, mocking, pulling out hair, whipping, and so on that eventually drove him out of the city where he would suffer to greatly on our account.

But we must never leave it here. Jesus did take our sins upon himself like the goat that goes out. He did die like the

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<sup>35</sup> See Barker.



goat that makes atonement. His spirit then descended to the place of the dead. But his death brought us salvation because it defeated Azazel and the hordes of hell. Jesus proclaimed his victory to them and conquered them. He rose from the dead and ascended to heaven where he is seated above all the powers and principalities in heaven, earth, or hell. He is victorious. Azazel no longer holds power over those Christ calls to life through this gospel.

Therefore, **do not neglect such a great salvation**. Jesus has done it all, taking away the need for this once-a-year ritual through his once-for-all work as the Great High Priest. Don't make him the scapegoat for your sin as so many do when they blame him for evil. For he became the scapegoat, entering into a suffering he did not deserve, so that he could give you pardon for things you do. Give him thanks in the church for his offering and see to it, as Hebrews says, that you eat regularly at the altar that those who served the tent had no right to eat (**Heb 13:10**) and that you go to him outside the camp and bear the reproach he endured (**13**), because he has given you a lasting city, the city that is to come (**14**).

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