

On the Day of atonement and its symbolism

Yom kippur or the Fast – Leviticus 16:29–31 and 23:27–32

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This article belongs to a series on the Old Covenant's holy days. Colossians 2:17 records how the apostle Paul noted that they were “a shadow of things to come” – that is, types and symbols of future things. Literally, many of them pointed to things that happened to the ancient Israelites, but they also pictured things and events that were to come. Because of that prophetic symbolism, those days are an interesting object of study.

This present study concentrates on the Yom kippur, the Day of atonement or the Fast, which is mentioned for instance in Leviticus 16:29–31 and 23:27–32. Among the things considered here are the two goats in that day's ritual and what was done to them, the identity of Azazel or Asasel, the misleading word “scapegoat” which appears in some bible-translations, the trumpet-sounding on that day when it began a Jubilee year, the fasting – and more, such as the mercy seat in the holy of holies in the temple, and the curtain which separated it from the rest of the temple.

Casual bible-readers might not have noticed this, but many New Testament passages refer to the Day of atonement. In fact, a number of things in the NT cannot be fully understood, if one does not know certain things concerning the Day of atonement. Some of the scriptures in question will be discussed here.

This article contains translation-related notes. If you have been subjected to dogmas which claim that some particular bible-version has all things right and has no errors, make sure to read the article [esa034.htm](http://www.biblepages.net/esa034.htm).

The Day of atonement in Leviticus 16 and 23.

Many people have seen or heard the phrase Yom kippur. It is a Jewish name for the day which in the English language is called “the Day of atonement”. Below are two of the passages which record some of the instructions the ancient Israelites were given concerning that day.

Leviticus 16:29 This shall be a perpetual statute for you: In the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, you shall afflict your souls, and do no work, whether a native or a stranger who sojourns among you. 30 For on that day the priest shall make atonement for you, to cleanse you from all your sins, that you may be clean before Jehovah. 31 It is a sabbath observance of rest for you, and you shall afflict your souls. It is a perpetual statute. (VW06)

(“Seventh month” – the Israelites' religious year began in the spring, and so, their seventh month was in the autumn, around September–October in our reckoning. The words “afflict your souls” refer to fasting.)

Leviticus 23:27 [...] the tenth day of this seventh month shall be a Day of atonement. It shall be a holy convocation for you; you shall afflict your souls, and bring an offering by fire unto Jehovah. 28 And you shall do no work on that same day, for it is a Day of atonement, to make atonement for you before Jehovah your God. 29 For any soul that is not afflicted on that same day shall be cut off from his people. 30 And any soul who does any work on that same day, that soul I will destroy from among his people. 31 You shall do no work; it shall be a perpetual statute throughout your generations in all your dwellings. 32 It shall be to you a Sabbath observance of rest, and you shall afflict your souls; on the ninth day of the month at evening, from evening to evening, you shall observe your sabbath. (VW06)

What was that day all about, what was its symbolism? And, what do the words “atonement” and kippur really mean and refer to? Read on, for more on this.

The origin of the word ‘atonement’.

It appears that the English verb “to atone”, whence “atonement”, was invented in the early 1500s, probably as a translation of the Latin verb *aduno* which was a combination of the preposition *ad* and the numeral *unus* which meant “one”. This had to do with causing to be “at one”, which is to say, reconciling. (The word “reconcile” in its turn refers to reuniting, bringing back together again.)

And yes, that was one part of the meaning and symbolism of the Day of atonement – on that day, the by sins caused breach between the Lord and the nation Israel was repaired, through symbolic rites and sacrifices by which the Israelites were “purged”, cleansed from their sins, and thus reconciled with God.

Early English translations used such phrases as ‘the day of cleansings’ and ‘the day of reconciling’.

Many early English bible-translations did not contain the phrase “day of atonement”. In for instance Leviticus 23:(26–)27, the 1395 Wycliffe version has “the day of clensyngis”, the 1535 Coverdale “the daye of reconcylyng”, the 1560 Geneva bible “a day of recôciliation”, and the 1568 Bishops’ bible “a day of reconcilyng”.

It could be that it was William Tyndale (c. 1494–1536) who coined the phrase “the day of atonement”. The Tyndale New Testament was published in 1525, but he had been translating even parts of the Old Testament. Apparently, those translations had in Leviticus 23:26–27 “a daye of an attonement”, and “the daye of attonement” in Leviticus 25:9. (Tyndale was a latinist. This affected heavily the text which he produced. – Again, the word “atone” is based on the Latin verb *aduno* which referred to “uniting”, “making one”.)

Many later English bible-versions have then copied the latinism “atonement”, but not by any means all. Here are some examples of other wordings in Leviticus 23:27: “The great day of forgiveness” (CEV), “the day of cleansing” (NCV), “the day of reconciliations” (JB).

On the old Hebrew word *kippur*, as in *Yom ha-kippurim*.

Where a number of English translations have “day of atonement”, Leviticus 23:27–28 and 25:9, the Hebrew text has *yom ha-kippurim* which apparently meant something like “the day of reconciliations”.

Some writers have, on the basis of the noun *kippur* and the related words *kaphar* and *kopher*, suggested that the meaning of the Day of atonement might have been that the Israelites’ sins were “covered” (as if with pitch, cf. Genesis 6:14 where the Hebrew text has *kopher*). But, the symbolism was not that the Israelites’ sins were “tarred over”, as if to remain there, concealed under a layer of pitch. Obviously, the concept was that their sins were washed away – removed. So, in the case of the Day of atonement (Hebrew *Yom ha-kippurim*), the word *kippur* must have referred to cleansing.

Putting that in other words: On that day, the Israelites’ sins were forgiven. There took place a reconciliation between them and the Lord. It was a “day of reconciliations”, just as the earlier quoted JB has it.

The rituals on the Day of atonement pictured and foreshadowed things that were to come.

In the Old Covenant’s ritual, a goat was sacrificed on the Day of atonement (Leviticus 16:7–15). But of course, the killing of that goat could not cleanse anyone of guilt on the spiritual level.

Hebrews 10:4 [...] it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. (NCV)

In other words: The killing of the “goat for the Lord” on the Day of atonement did not open the way to everlasting life for anyone. But, it pointed to something that was to come. It was a symbol, a prophetic type of the sacrifice which Jesus then came to make, giving his life in place of others.

(There was also another goat, but it was not sacrificed and it did not bring reconciliation. There is more on those two goats, later in this article.)

More details: In the Old Covenant’s rituals on the Day of atonement, the blood of the sacrificial goat was taken into the “most holy” part of the sanctuary, behind the separating curtain, and sprinkled by the mercy-seat there. But again, those rituals were types, shadows and symbols which pointed to Jesus and his sacrifice which made it possible for the New Covenant to be launched. The apostle Paul wrote about this, to the Jewish saints ^[a] (this is a translation, of course):

Hebrews 10:16 “This is the agreement I will make with them at that time, says the Lord. I will put my teachings in their hearts and write them on their minds.” 17 Then he says: “Their sins and the evil things they do – I will not remember anymore.” 18 Now when these have been forgiven, there is no more need for a sacrifice for sins. 19 So, brothers and sisters, we are completely free to enter the Most Holy Place without fear because of the blood of Jesus’ death. 20 We can enter through a new and living way that Jesus opened for us. It leads through the curtain – Christ’s body. (NCV)

Verse 16, “agreement” = covenant. Verses 16 and 17 refer to the New Covenant. The apostle was citing Jeremiah 31:33, “But this is the new covenant I will make with the people of Israel on that day,” says the LORD. “I will put my instructions deep within them, and I will write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.” (NLT04)

Verse 19, “to enter the most holy place” – on the earthly level this referred to entering the innermost part of the sanctuary (this was done on the Day of atonement), but here, Paul was talking about the House of God in Heaven, which the saints were to enter. (The articles [eba044.htm](#) and [exa105.htm](#) have more on the matter of Heaven.)

Verse 20 mentions a curtain. Clarification: The innermost part of the earthly sanctuary, the “holy of holies” or “most holy place”, was separated by a curtain (“veil”), and it could be entered only once a year, on the Day of atonement, and only by one person, the high priest. But, when Jesus made his sacrifice (by giving his life in place for others), the separating curtain in the sanctuary was torn in two. We read:

Matthew 27:50 Then Jesus cried again with a loud voice and breathed his last. 51 **At that moment the curtain of the temple was**

torn in two, from top to bottom. The earth shook, and the rocks were split. 52 The tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised. 53 After his resurrection they came out of the tombs and entered the holy city and appeared to many. (NRSV, highlighting added)

That event is recorded also in Mark 15:37–38 and Luke 23:45–46.

(Regarding the above-quoted verses 52–53 in Matthew 27, the mention of people who after Jesus' resurrection were raised from the dead – the article [eba084.htm](#) has some notes on that matter, and on the subject of resurrection.)

Back to what the apostle Paul wrote to the Jewish saints, Hebrews 10. Here is a translation which perhaps makes verse 20 easier to understand:

Hebrews 10:20 This is the new, life-giving way that Christ has opened up for us through the sacred curtain, by means of his death for us. (NLT96)

After his resurrection, Jesus ascended to Heaven and entered his Father's house there, as a "forerunner", opening the way for others who would follow after him. Here is another passage where the apostle mentioned that matter:

Hebrews 6:19 This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast and one which enters within the veil, 20 where Jesus has entered as a forerunner for us, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek. (NASB95)

(Verse 19, "veil" = curtain. Verse 20, "forerunner" – the Greek text has *prodromos*, with the same meaning.)

It is God's dwelling in Heaven that Jesus entered, as a forerunner who opened the way there for others. (In the earthly sanctuary, the high priest entered the holy of holies behind the curtain, on the Day of atonement.)

The goat which was sacrificed on the Day of atonement (Leviticus 16:7–15) and whose blood then was sprinkled by the mercy seat behind the curtain, obviously symbolised Jesus and his sacrifice, just as the Passover lambs in the spring did. Thus, Hebrews 6:19–20 and 10:19–20 are connected to both the Passover and the Day of atonement. (Consider even the above-quoted Matthew 27:50–51 which records how the separating curtain was torn in two, when Jesus made his Sacrifice on the cross.)

^a In this article, the word "saints" refers to those who received the Holy Spirit in biblical times, first century CE or earlier.

The way to the holy of holies in Heaven.

When Jesus knew that he would be crucified, he spoke to his disciples about his Father's house in Heaven, and the way there. He told them that he is the way, and he told them to put their trust in him.

John 14:1 Let not your heart be troubled: have faith in God and have faith in me. 2 In my Father's house are rooms enough; if it was not so, would I have said that I am going to make ready a place for you? 3 And if I go and make ready a place for you, I will come back again and will take you to be with me, so that you may be where I am. 4 And you all have knowledge of where I am going, and of the way to it. 5 Thomas said, Lord, we have no knowledge of where you are going; how may we have knowledge of the way? 6 Jesus said to him, I am the true and living way: no one comes to the Father but by me. (BBE)

Those who carefully consider that passage, may notice that even it has a Day of atonement connection. Again: After his resurrection, Jesus entered God's dwelling in Heaven, as a "forerunner", and opened the way there for others (Hebrews 6:20). Here, John 14, he promised his disciples, "I go and make ready a place for you, I will come back again and will take you to be with me, so that you may be where I am".

In that connection, let us consider even this passage:

John 3:16 For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him. (RSV)

A note: Some writers have caused people to think that it was God the Father who demanded the death penalty which Jesus then paid, on behalf of humans. But, that is not so. As even the above-quoted John 3:16–17 shows, God ransomed mankind, by sending his own Son to death. That was also the symbolism of the "goat for the Lord" which was sacrificed on the Day of atonement. It was the same with the Passover lambs. – Yes, someone demanded that a price had to be paid. Obviously, that someone must have been Satan the Accuser. Consider Hebrews 2:14 which says, regarding Jesus, "that through death he might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil", NKJV.

As you know, many New Testament passages mention Jesus' blood, as a symbol of his death in place of others. See John 6:53, Ephesians 2:13, 1 Peter 1:2, 1 John 1:7, Revelation 1:5 and Hebrews 12:24. And, the earlier quoted Hebrews 10. Here are verses 19–20 one more time; they record something the apostle wrote to the Jewish saints:

Hebrews 10:19 So, brothers and sisters, we are completely free to enter the Most Holy Place without fear because of the blood of

Jesus' death. 20 We can enter through a new and living way that Jesus opened for us. It leads through the curtain – Christ's body. (NCV)

Verse 20, “through the curtain” – as you can see, the apostle Paul referred to the Old Covenant's rituals on the Day of atonement. A central part of them had pointed to Jesus. For more clarity, let us read a passage in the preceding chapter:

Hebrews 9:6 Such then were the arrangements. Into the outer tent the priests enter continually in the performance of their duties; 7 but into the inner tent the high priest only goes alone, once a year, and that not without blood, which he offers for himself and for the ignorances of the people. 8 The Holy Spirit teaching by this that the way into the Holiest has not yet been disclosed while the first tent is still standing. (CT)

(Verse 8 – here, the word “tent” refers to the temple in Jerusalem. ^{b1} When the apostle wrote that letter, that temple was literally “still standing”, but it was destroyed a few years later.)

Again, the Old Covenant's rules said that only the high priest was to go behind the separating curtain, into the “Holy of holies”, and only once a year, on the Day of atonement. What did that symbolise? Well, under the Old Covenant, the way to the true God in Heaven was not open for humans. And again, the New Testament records that when Jesus gave his life in place of others, the curtain in the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom (Matthew 27:50–51, Mark 15:37–38 and Luke 23:45–46). That marked a change. Obviously, that symbolised the fact that Jesus, who paid the death penalty in place of others, opened the way to God the Father in Heaven, for those who belong to Jesus and put their trust in him. His Sacrifice made it possible to launch the New Covenant.

^b Clarification, regarding the term “the tent” in the above-quoted Hebrews 9:6–8. At first, the sanctuary was a portable construction, like a large tent. In the days of Solomon, it was replaced with a more permanent construction, a temple, and later with another one. But, even the temple was, for symbolic reasons, sometimes called “the tent”. – A note: The old Latin word *tabernaculum* simply meant “tent”. Another note: It appears that the phrase “first tent” in the above-quoted Hebrews 9:8 refers to Old Covenant's sanctuary in general. In NT times, it was a temple and no longer a literal tent as it was before Solomon's day. – What was the other “tent”, in contrast to the “first tent” of Hebrews 9:8? Obviously, the House of God in Heaven, where the true “holy of holies” is.

Jesus as the high priest in ‘the Tent’, Hebrews 8:1–2 and 9:11–12.

Again, the Old Covenant's sanctuary was a type, symbol and shadow of the true Dwelling of God which is in Heaven. The apostle Paul wrote to the Jewish saints (regarding the New Covenant):

Hebrews 8:1 Now of the things we are saying this is the chief point: We have such a high priest, who has taken his place at the right hand of God's high seat of glory in heaven, 2 As a servant of the holy things and of the true Tent, which was put up by God, not by man. (BBE)

The point here is that certain rituals in the earthly sanctuary on the Day of atonement had foreshadowed how Jesus would enter the true holy of holies in Heaven, both as a mediator as well as a forerunner for others. More, regarding the heavenly House or Dwelling of God:

Hebrews 9:11 But now Christ has come as the high priest of the good things of the future, through this greater and better Tent, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this world, 12 And has gone once and for ever into the holy place, having got eternal salvation, not through the blood of goats and young oxen, but through his blood. (BBE)

Verse 12, “having got”, that is, having obtained salvation (for humans). By the way, “salvation” is the same as being saved from death – being granted a new, lasting life.

The Old Covenant's priests had to repeat their rite every year on the Day of atonement, and yet, that did not make anyone better, spiritually. Those things were mere symbols, and they did not and could not provide everlasting life to anyone. Salvation is through Jesus. And, when he made his sacrifice by giving his life in place of others, that put an end to those symbolic rituals.

Three nights and three days after Jesus' death, God raised him up, giving him a new life. Then, 40 days after his resurrection, Jesus left this world and went to his Father's house in Heaven. (His ascension is recorded in Acts 1:9.) His entry into the holy of holies in Heaven had been foreshadowed by certain parts of the rituals on the Day of atonement.

And again, as the apostle Paul noted, when Jesus ascended to his Father in Heaven, he did that as a “forerunner” – others were to follow him. (See Hebrews 6:20 which was quoted earlier.) The apostle wrote to the Jewish saints (“Hebrews”), regarding their approach to the mercy seat and God (approach, or “coming near” or “drawing near” as some translations have it). We read:

Hebrews 4:16 Then let us come near to the seat of grace without fear, so that mercy may be given to us, and we may get grace for our help in time of need. (BBE)

(“Seat of grace” – on the earthly scene that would have referred to the “mercy-seat” in the sanctuary's holy of holies where the high priest entered on the Day of atonement, but here, the apostle was talking about God's seat in Heaven.)

So, Jesus' sacrifice opened the way for humans to God in Heaven. The saints whom Paul was writing to, had received the Holy Spirit, and had thus (after their resurrection or change) the privilege to literally "enter the holy place" (in Heaven), where Jesus had entered before them as a "forerunner" (Hebrews 6:19–20 and 10:19–20).

The two goats on the Day of atonement.

Here are excerpts from the instruction which Moses was given, regarding the rituals on the Day of atonement:

Leviticus 16:7 And he is to take the two goats and put them before the Lord at the door of the Tent of meeting. 8 And Aaron will make selection from the two goats by the decision of the Lord, one goat for the Lord and one for Azazel. 9 And the goat which is marked out for the Lord, let Aaron give for a sin-offering. 10 But the goat for Azazel is to be placed living before the Lord, for the taking away of sin, that it may be sent away for Azazel into the waste land. [...] 15 Then let him put to death the goat of the sin-offering for the people, and take its blood inside the veil and do with it as he did with the blood of the ox, shaking drops of it on and before the cover of the ark. (BBE)

(Verse 15, "inside the veil" = behind the separating curtain in the sanctuary.)

Regarding verse 10, the words "taking away of sin": One translation has, "take away the sins of the people". This must not be misunderstood. Again, the reconciling in the way of "payment for sins" was done by the sacrifice of "the goat for the Lord". That was a symbol which pointed to Jesus who then gave his life in place of others. Through this, he ransomed mankind from the legal powers that Satan the Accuser apparently had. (Cf. Hebrews 2:14, "that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the Devil".) So, in what way did the goat for Azazel "take away" the Israelites' sins? Read on, for more on this.

In one part of the ritual on the Day of atonement, the Israelites' sins were formally placed on the head of the goat for Azazel – that is, the guilt for their sins was placed on its head. And then, that goat was taken away from the Israelites' camp. Obviously, that goat (the one for Azazel) symbolised Satan who ultimately was guilty for those sins; it was he who had caused humans to sin. Verse 21, "and Aaron, placing his two hands on the head of the living goat, will make a public statement over him of all the evil doings of the children of Israel and all their wrongdoing, in all their sins; and he will put them on the head of the goat", (BBE.)

So, there were two goats. One of them was presented as a sacrifice at the sanctuary, but the other one (on whose head the guilt for the Israelites' sins was placed) was taken into a desert. What happened to that latter goat, after this? Many bible-translators have made it seem the goat for Azazel was allowed to live after it had been taken to the desert. But, it was not so. Jewish tradition tells us what actually was done with that goat. There is more on this, later in this article.

What did the name Azazel really mean?

In the Bible, the word Azazel, also spelled Asasel, occurs only in Leviticus 16:8, 10 and 26. Let us read verse 8 one more time.

Leviticus 16:8 And Aaron shall cast lots upon the two goats; one lot for Jehovah, and the other lot for Azazel. (ASV)

The origin and meaning of the word *azazel* is not known with certainty, but the above-quoted passage shows that one of those goats was connected to the Lord (Jehovah), and that the other one was connected to something or someone that was called *Azazel*.

Some have thought that Azazel simply was a name for Satan, or someone connected to him. Some others have taken *azazel* to be a reference to Satan in the meaning "one who has separated himself from El". (El = a name of God; numerous occurrences in the Hebrew OT text.) And, some have thought that the word *azazel* perhaps referred to the precipice from which the "goat for Azazel" was thrown down. (There is more on that matter, below.)

What actually was done with the 'goat for Azazel'.

Regarding what really happened to the goat for Azazel: It was led to a high cliff in a desert and was then thrust down, to its death. Here is an excerpt from the article on "Azazel" in the 1906 edition of the Jewish Encyclopedia:

[...] A man was selected, preferably a priest, to take the goat to the precipice in the wilderness; and he was accompanied part of the way by the most eminent men of Jerusalem. Ten booths had been constructed at intervals along the road leading from Jerusalem to the steep mountain. At each one of these the man leading the goat was formally offered food and drink, which he, however, refused. When he reached the tenth booth those who accompanied him proceeded no further, but watched the ceremony from a distance. When he came to the precipice he divided the scarlet thread into two parts, one of which he tied to the rock and the other to the goat's horns, and then pushed the goat down (Yoma vi. 1–8). The cliff was so high and rugged that before the goat had traversed half the distance to the plain below, its limbs were utterly shattered. Men were stationed at intervals along the way, and as soon as the goat was thrown down the precipice, they signaled to one another by means of kerchiefs or flags, until the information reached the high priest, whereat he proceeded with the other parts of the ritual. [...]

Despite this, many bible-translators have, for some reason, used wordings which can cause the readers to think that the goat for Azazel was let go free, alive, into a desert. Even the below-quoted translation might make the reader think so.

Leviticus 16:21 And Aaron shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat, and confess over him all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions, even all their sins; and he shall put them upon the head of the goat, and shall send him away by the hand of an appointed man into the wilderness. 22 And the goat shall bear upon him all their iniquities unto a land which is cut off; and he shall let go the goat in the wilderness. (JPS1917)

That translation says, “he shall let go the goat” (verse 22). The above-quoted encyclopedia excerpt tells us that that “letting go” was actually done by hurling the goat down from a high cliff. The Hebrew verb in question is *shalach*. According to one lexicon which is based on the Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew lexicon, when that verb was used with the *piel* stem as the case is here, it could mean such things as these:

- [...]
- c. (Piel)
- 1. to send off or away or out or forth, dismiss, give over, cast out
- 2. to let go, set free
- 3. to shoot forth (of branches)
- 4. to let down
- 5. to shoot
- [...]

Again: Old Jewish writings show that the goat for Azazel was “let go” in the meaning that it was cast out (thrown down) from a high cliff, to its death. It is said that the cliff which in temple times was used for this, was called Beth-Hadudu (Beth-chadedun), located around 19 kilometres east of Jerusalem.

It appears that that symbolised Satan’s coming fate. (The article [eda044.htm](#) has some notes on what the Bible says about Satan the Devil.)

A note: In verse 22, the JPS1917 has “a land which is cut off” (instead of “a land not inhabited” as many translators have made it to).

Leviticus 16:22 And the goat shall bear upon him all their iniquities unto a land which is cut off [...] (JPS1917)

The Hebrew wording contains the noun *erets* which could mean “earth”, “land”, “soil”, “ground”, and so on. Also: Where that translation has “cut off”, the Hebrew text has the noun *gazerah*, related to the verb *gazar* which meant such things as “to cut”, “to divide”, “to cut in two”, and so on. The question is, in what manner was that land (ground) “cut”? Considering the fact that the goat was actually thrust down from a cliff, it appears that in this case the word *gazerah* must have referred to a major “division” or “cut” in the ground (*erets*) – that is, a deep ravine or a high cliff.

On the misleading translation ‘scapegoat’.

The Hebrew text of Leviticus 16:8, 10 and 26 talks about a “goat for Azazel”. But, some bible-translators have changed that to “scapegoat”, which is misleading. In modern English, the word and concept “scapegoat” means “someone who is [innocently] punished for the errors of others” – but in the ceremony which those verses refer to, the “goat for Azazel” represented someone who indeed is guilty (for causing humans to sin).

The English word “scapegoat” is built around a misunderstanding concerning the meaning of certain things in Leviticus 16. It could be that that comes from an erroneous interpretation of the Latin text of the Catholic Vulgate version. Perhaps someone thought that the Vulgate’s Latin wordings in Leviticus 16:8, 10 and 26 mean that the “goat for Azazel” was let go free, into a desert. But, as was mentioned earlier, it was not so. Instead, that goat was thrown down from a cliff, to its death.

Details: In those verses, the Vulgate has *capro emissario* and *caprum emissarium*. The word *capro*, *caprum* meant “a goat”. The word *emissarium* came from the verb *emitto* which meant such things as “to hurl”, “to let go”, “to send out”, “to let forth”, “to cast”, “to drop”, and so on. And again, Jewish tradition has it that that goat was “let go” in the meaning that it was cast down from a cliff, so that it died.

The “goat for Azazel” was not a “scapegoat” in any way or meaning. It represented (symbolised) someone who was guilty (responsible) for the Israelites’ sins. That is, ultimately Satan who has caused humans to sin. The guilt for the Israelites’ sins was ritually placed on that goat’s head, and it was then taken to a high cliff in a desert and thrust down to its death.

At the sanctuary, the other goat (the one “for the Lord”) was sacrificed and its blood was sprinkled by the mercy seat in the holy of holies behind the curtain. This symbolised the sacrifice which Jesus then made by giving his life in place of others, in order to ransom mankind from the power of Satan the Accuser. Again, consider Hebrews 2:14 which says regarding Jesus, “that through death he might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil”, [NKJV](#).

The trumpet of the Jubilee was sounded on the Day of atonement.

In Hebrew text of the Old Testament, the word for “trumpet” is often *shofar*, but sometimes also the word *yobel* is used, and even such words as *chatsotserah* (*chatsar*), *teruah* and *taqowa*.

In Leviticus 25:9–10, which is about the Day of atonement, the Hebrew text contains three trumpet-related words, *shofar*, *teruah* and *yobel*.

Leviticus 25:9 Then shalt thou cause the trumpet ^[c] of the jubilee ^[d] to sound, on the tenth day of the seventh month, in the day of atonement shall ye make the trumpet ^[c] sound throughout all your land. 10 And ye shall hallow the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout all the land to all its inhabitants: it shall be a jubilee ^[e] to you; and ye shall return every man to his possession, and ye shall return every man to his family. (WBS, notes signs added)

^c Verse 9, “trumpet” – the Hebrew text has *shofar*, referring to a ram’s horn.

^d Verse 9, “jubilee” – here, the Hebrew text has *teruah*, “shout”, “alarm”, “sound”, “blast”.

^e Verse 10, “jubilee” – in this case, the Hebrew text has *yobel*, “ram”, “ram’s horn”, “trumpet”.

Verse 10: Where the above-quoted WBS has “it shall be a jubilee to you”, the TRC has “it shall be a year of horns blowing unto you”. The very word “jubilee” comes from the Hebrew *yobel* which referred to a ram’s horn, used as a trumpet.

On certain years, the Day of atonement was a day of special trumpet sounding. It was on that day, that the year of Jubilee was declared, by the sounding of trumpets.

It is obvious that even the Jubilee year symbolised future things. This applies also to the trumpet or horn (Hebrew *yobel*) which was sounded on the Day of atonement when the Jubilee began (each fiftieth year). Several things indicate that this probably symbolised the trump of God which will be sounded when Jesus returns.

The Day of atonement was a day of fasting. What did the hungering and thirsting on that day symbolise and point to?

Let us read something that Jesus said to his disciples:

Matthew 5:6 Blessed are they who hunger and thirst after righteousness! For they shall be filled. 7 Blessed are the merciful! For they shall obtain mercy. (LIT)

Verse 6: Jesus spoke about hungering and thirsting for righteousness (or eventually for justice; the Greek word in question, *dikaïosunê*, could be used even in that meaning). Today, this world lacks both righteousness and justice.

Verse 7: Jesus spoke about mercy. The Day of atonement was in several ways a special day of mercy. It was on that day, that the mercy-seat in the holy of holies behind the curtain could be approached. It was on that day, that the Israelites’ sins were forgiven.

It appears that the fasting (hungering and thirsting) on the Day of atonement may have symbolised longing for mercy, and for liberation from the Evil one and evil in general, and also, hungering and thirsting for righteousness and justice.

In other words: The Day of atonement with its fasting and reconciliation ritual pointed to mankind’s great need for a merciful and powerful Deliverer who frees them from captivity and bondage under the wicked powers who today still control this planet. The Day of atonement pointed to mankind’s need for Jesus to come and grant them forgiveness, and to free them from the hands of wicked “principalities and powers”. It is only when that has happened, that true justice and true righteousness will come into effect here on Earth. (Right now, this planet is in rebel hands, and it has to be freed, reconciled and restored, in order to become a part of the [Reign of God](#).)

There is even Revelation 19:11–20, which talks about Jesus coming in power and with righteousness, bringing justice to this planet. That includes the capture and destruction of the wicked powers who today control this planet. It is obvious that that future event – the time when those wicked ones will be destroyed – was symbolised by the fate of the goat for Azazel in the ritual on the Day of atonement.

A note: Some might feel that Revelation 19:11–20 is “scary”, or even “threatening”, but no, it is not that, for normal humans. It talks about the time when Jesus comes to put to nothing the wicked powers who today control this world. This will lead to liberation, for this planet, and for mankind. And again, that is one of the things the rituals on the Day of atonement symbolised and pointed to.

Another note: Again, several things in the New Testament are easier to understand, if one knows certain things about the Day of Atonement and the rituals that were performed on it. This article cited a number of verses which have in one way or another a connection with the Day of Atonement, but the NT contains other passages of a similar kind.

See also the “recommended reading” section, below.

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