

FANTASTIC FEASTS... & WHERE WE FIND THEM

If you're a fan of SyFy or horror or fantasy, you've probably heard the name Azazel.

- The X-Men comics and movies feature a mutant named Azazel.
- In the Denzel Washington film *Fallen*, Azazel is a fallen angel that is able to possess people.
- In the CW TV series *Supernatural*, Azazel, a demon, is the main antagonist in seasons one and two.
- In the mini-series *Fallen*, Azazel appears in the second part.

What you might not know is that Azazel is in the Bible; these films and shows are knock-offs of the Word of God. They get the name from the Bible.

I thought we were studying the feasts of the Lord? We are. I'm talking about Azazel because he is especially associated with the Day of Atonement - the sixth calendar feast, and the second of the three fall feasts.

Let me give you a quick review of that feast, then return to Azazel.

Lev 23:26 And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying:

Lev 23:27 "Also the tenth *day* of this seventh month *shall be* the Day of Atonement. It shall be a holy convocation for you; you shall afflict your souls, and offer an offering made by fire to the LORD.

Lev 23:28 And you shall do no work on that same day, for it *is* the Day of Atonement, to make atonement for you before the LORD your God.

Lev 23:29 For any person who is not afflicted *in soul* on that same day shall be cut off from his people.

Lev 23:30 And any person who does any work on that same day, that person I will destroy from among his people.

Lev 23:31 You shall do no manner of work; *it shall be* a statute forever throughout your generations in all your dwellings.

Lev 23:32 *It shall be* to you a sabbath of *solemn* rest, and you shall afflict your souls; on the ninth *day* of the month at evening, from evening to evening, you shall celebrate your sabbath."

The precise rituals for the Day of Atonement are described in chapter sixteen of Leviticus. I'll summarize them in a moment.

You might know the Day of Atonement by its other name, Yom Kippur. The term Yom Kippur is actually written in the plural in the Bible, *Yom Ha-Kippurim*. The rituals performed by the high priest on that day cleansed from a multitude of transgressions, iniquities, and sins.

Yom Kippur fell on the tenth day of the month Tishri. You might recall from our last study that the so-called Feast of Trumpets was the day that two witnesses determined the full moon had begun, and it was therefore the first day of Tishri. Once that announcement was made, the Jews had ten days to repent of their sins, leading up to Yom Kippur.

One commentator noted the following regarding the timing of Yom Kippur:

According to the Jewish sages, on the 6th of Sivan, seven weeks after the Exodus (i.e., *exactly* 49 days), Moses first ascended Sinai to receive the Law. Just forty days later, on the 17th of Tammuz, the tablets were broken. Moses then interceded for Israel for another forty days until he was called back up to Sinai on Elul 1 and was given the Second Tablets and returned to the camp on Tishri 10, which later was called Yom Kippur.

The root for the word "Kippur" is *kafar*, which probably derives from the word *kofer*, meaning "ransom." This word is parallel to the word "redeem" (Psalm 49:7) and means "to atone by offering a substitute."

Thus The "Day of Atonement" was Israel's annual cleansing from sin by the offering of substitutes.

Specifically, The Day of Atonement ritual required a ram, a bull and two goats (Leviticus 16:3-5).

- The ram was for a burnt offering, a general offering aimed at pleasing God.
- The bull, taken from "the herd," served as a sin offering for Aaron, the high priest, and his family. The purpose of the sin offering was purification - restoring an individual to ritual purity to allow that person to occupy sacred space, to be near God's presence.
- Two goats taken "from the congregation" were needed for a single sin offering (v5) for the people.

Yom Kippur was the only time when the High Priest could enter the Holy of Holies and call upon the Name of YHWH to offer blood sacrifice for the sins of the people. This life-for-a-life principle is the foundation of the sacrificial system and marked the great day of intercession made by the High Priest on behalf of Israel.

One Yom Kippur ritual stands out, because it was so odd. Remember I said that there were two goats. The high priest would cast lots over the two goats, resulting in one being chosen for sacrifice "for the Lord." The blood of that goat would purify the people.

The second goat was not sacrificed and was not “for the Lord.” It was for someone else.

Lev 16:8 Then Aaron shall cast lots for the two goats: one lot for the LORD and the other lot for the scapegoat.

This goat symbolically carried the sins away from the camp of Israel into the wilderness.

Lev 16:20 "And when he has made an end of atoning for the Holy *Place*, the tabernacle of meeting, and the altar, he shall bring the live goat.

Lev 16:21 Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goat, confess over it all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions, concerning all their sins, putting them on the head of the goat, and shall send *it* away into the wilderness by the hand of a suitable man.

Lev 16:22 The goat shall bear on itself all their iniquities to an uninhabited land; and he shall release the goat in the wilderness.

I read this in a Jewish encyclopedia:

The second goat had to be led away by a designated man to the designated location called “wilderness” (there was a distance of five sabbath’s days’ journey to that place). Different precautions were taken to make sure that the goat was led there and would never return. At equal intervals along the road, from the Mount of Olives, to the designated location, ten stations were set up. After the man and the goat reached the tenth station, the man would push the goat over a cliff, so that it would fall to its death.

This second goat is typically called the “scapegoat.” But here is where we can return to Azazel.

I'm going to quote Dr. Michael Heiser:

The word "Azazel" in the Hebrew text can be translated *the goat that goes away*. This is the justification for the common "scapegoat" translation (NIV, NASB, KJV). The scapegoat, so the translator has it, symbolically carries the sins of the people away from the camp of Israel into the wilderness.

However, "**Azazel**" **could also be a proper name**. In Leviticus 16:8 one goat is "*for Yahweh*" while the other goat is "*for Azazel*." Since Yahweh is a proper name and the goats are described in the same way, Hebrew parallelism suggests Azazel is also a proper name, which is why more recent translations, sensitive to the literary character of the Hebrew text, read "Azazel" and not "scapegoat" (ESV, NRSV, NJPS).

Here is where it gets interesting. Azazel is the well-known name of a demon in the Dead Sea Scrolls and other ancient Jewish books. In fact, in one scroll Azazel is the leader of the angels that sinned in Genesis 6:1-4. The same description of him as that lead fallen angel appears in the book of First Enoch.

One source noted, "Azazel enjoys the distinction of being the most mysterious extrahuman character in sacred literature."

Azazel is obviously the better translation, and was understood by the original Jewish audience to be a powerful demon. We try to downplay Azazel, because, quite frankly, we shy away from the supernatural. And we think these ancient people were superstitious, whereas we are scientific.

The goat for Azazel wasn't a payment for ransom or redemption. It was to banish the sins of Israel outside the camp, to the wilderness.

The wilderness can be understood a type of the world ruled by Satan and his fallen angels. For example: It was in the wilderness that Satan exerted his authority by tempting Jesus.

We therefore see Israel, declared holy by the substitutionary sacrifice of the goat, while Israel's sins are sent away from them, acknowledging a realm of evil ruled by a demon, and then into a pit.

It is our belief that the three fall feasts communicate the Second Coming of Jesus. We saw last week how Jesus, in Matthew 24, used a Jewish idiom that indicated He'd be returning on Tishri 1 as the Great Tribulation ended.

The Second Coming will be the Day of Atonement for the Jewish remnant when they "look upon Him whom they have pierced," repent of their sins, and receive Him as their Messiah (Zechariah 12:10 and Romans 11:1-6, 25-36).

But there is something else, something we normally overlook because we think of the scapegoat rather than Azazel.

One of the first things that Jesus does upon His return to earth is bind the devil and incarcerate him in the bottomless pit for one thousand years. We see in this the fulfillment of the second goat ritual. Just as that goat is sent away, banished, so Satan is sent away, banished, for the duration of the Millennial Kingdom.

Something else weird, but that points to Azazel. Listen to this; it's Leviticus 17:7. (In fact, navigate there).

Lev 17:7 They shall no more offer their sacrifices to demons, after whom they have played the harlot. This shall be a statute forever for them throughout their generations."

It seems that the Israelites, while in Egypt, had acquired the practice of offering sacrifices to demons. The particular words used indicate a “demon living in the desert” - like Azazel.

Now let me read that verse as it is translated in the Amplified Version:

Lev 17:7 So they shall no more offer their sacrifices to goatlike gods or demons or field spirits after which they have played the harlot. This shall be a statute forever to them throughout their generations.

It's another confirmation that the Jews at the time of the Exodus, who came out of Egypt, were familiar with wilderness demons.

One final thought. I said that the wilderness can typify the world - the rule of Satan. In our age, Satan is called “the god of this world.”

In the New Testament, there is an episode in the church at Corinth in which the apostle Paul suggests a discipline for a believer living in sin. The man is fornicating with his father's wife. Paul wanted the man removed from the fellowship. He said,

1Co 5:5 deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

Inside the church, the man was enjoying spiritual protection. Outside, in the wilderness of the world, it was Satan's territory.

We sometimes miss things the Bible is telling us because of what might be called our ‘modern sensibilities.’ If the Bible mentions a demon, but we can find some other way to translate his name - we go for that every time. Let's instead read it as written,

understanding the original audience and what they would have received from it.