> *“He is to cast lots for the two goats—one lot for the Lord and the other for the scapegoat.”*

Some Bible versions, like the KJV, use the term *Azazel* instead of “scapegoat.” So what does it really mean?

Answer:

Azazel is not a person, angel, or demon (as some traditions or interpretations suggest), but rather the name used to identify one of the two goats involved in Israel’s annual Day of Atonement (*Yom Kippur*) ceremony, described in Leviticus 16.

On this sacred day, observed on the 10th day of the 7th month of the Hebrew calendar (Leviticus 16:29, NIV), the High Priest performed a special ritual to atone for the sins of the entire nation of Israel.

Two Goats, Two Purposes (Leviticus 16:7–10, NIV):

> *“Then he is to take the two goats and present them before the Lord at the entrance to the tent of meeting. He is to cast lots for the two goats—one lot for the Lord and the other for the scapegoat (Azazel). Aaron shall bring the goat whose lot falls to the Lord and sacrifice it for a sin offering. But the goat chosen by lot as the scapegoat shall be presented alive before the Lord to be used for making atonement by sending it into the wilderness as a scapegoat.”*

One goat was sacrificed—its blood sprinkled on the mercy seat in the Most Holy Place to atone for sin (Leviticus 16:15-16).

The second goat (Azazel) remained alive. The High Priest laid his hands on its head and confessed over it all the sins of the Israelites, symbolically transferring the nation’s guilt to the animal.

Symbolism and Theological Significance:

Leviticus 16:21-22 (NIV):

> *“He is to lay both hands on the head of the live goat and confess over it all the wickedness and rebellion of the Israelites—all their sins—and put them on the goat’s head. He shall send the goat away into the wilderness... The goat will carry on itself all their sins to a remote place; and the man shall release it in the wilderness.”*

This ceremony was a profound picture of removal and separation from sin, as the goat bore the people’s sins “into a solitary place.”

In Hebrew, the word *Azazel* could mean “the goat of removal” or “complete removal.” The NIV and many modern versions translate this as *scapegoat*, highlighting the symbolic act of the goat taking on the community’s sin and being sent away—never to return.

Christ: The Fulfillment of the Scapegoat (Azazel)

This Old Testament ritual foreshadowed Jesus Christ, who perfectly fulfilled both roles of the two goats:

1. As the sacrificial goat—Christ died as a sin offering.

> “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” — *2 Corinthians 5:21 (NIV)*

2. As the scapegoat (Azazel)—Christ bore our sins and removed them.

> “He was led like a lamb to the slaughter... and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.” — *Isaiah 53:6–7 (NIV)*

3. Carried outside the camp—Jesus, like the scapegoat, was taken outside the city to die:

> “And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood.” — *Hebrews 13:12 (NIV)*

Unlike the ritual that had to be repeated annually (Hebrews 10:1-4), Jesus offered Himself once for all time:

> “But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God.” — *Hebrews 10:12 (NIV)*

Conclusion:

Azazel represents the powerful image of sin being completely removed from the people. In the New Testament, this image is fulfilled in Christ, who not only paid for our sins but also removed them permanently. Through Him, we are not just ceremonially clean—we are eternally forgiven.

What joy to know that in Christ, your sins are not only forgiven—they’re forgotten.
“As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.” — Psalm 103:12 (NIV)

Be encouraged. Be free. Be blessed.

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