

A MATTER OF JUDGMENT

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What kind of reputation are you providing for your name to be remembered in years to come? The name Hitler is used today as a synonym for 'dictator' while the name Einstein is used as a synonym for 'genius'. Judas Iscariot betrayed Jesus almost 2000 years ago. But the name Judas is still used today as a synonym for 'traitor'. Imagine suffering the stigma of an evil name that lasts forever. This is a far worse than suffering even a lifelong jail sentence. Adolf Hitler and Judas Iscariot deserved an evil name because of their deeds. But what if you knew someone who suffered an evil name without proof that he deserved it? Would you stand up against the enormous tide of popular belief to defend him?

There is one whom we all in the Sabbath-keeping Churches of God have branded with the most evil of all names, yet without a shred of proof that he deserves this - the Scapegoat of the Day of Atonement. Hundreds of thousands of the Lord's tithe money is spent on literature that teaches the meaning of the Day of Atonement - that the scapegoat of Lev 16 represents Satan. Year after year ministers of the Churches of God preach to their congregations on the Holy Day of Atonement that the Scapegoat represents Satan.

When you closely examine the Church literature, the only proof presented concerning the Scapegoat's identity is quotes from commentaries that ASSUME him to be Satan. But opinions and assumptions are not proof! There is no Biblical statement that he represents Satan.

Circumstantial evidence is also presented as proof. The Scapegoat must represent Satan because washing was required after contact with him. But Lev 16:27-28 states that they must also wash who handle the SLAIN goat. And we believe he represents Christ! This is judging according to outward appearance! The azazel goat was cast out into the wilderness! People had to wash after contact with him. He MUST be evil - right? But no Bible statement can be found that he DID any evil.

Another supposed proof involves time sequence. The Day of Trumpets, they say, pictures the return of Christ. After Trumpets in time sequence is the Day of Atonement. In Revelation the next event after Christ returns is that Satan is shut up into the pit. Therefore, the Scapegoat must represent Satan. Sounds right, but notice another theory of time sequence. On the Day of Atonement one goat representing Christ was killed and the other sent away. Christ was the lamb killed on Passover in Egypt. Afterwards the entire nation of Israel was cast out of Egypt into the wilderness. So here, the scapegoat would represent the entire nation of Israel. You see how this time sequence gives an entirely different identity to the scapegoat, yet is just as possible. The point is, should we determine his identity through time sequence assumptions or through actual proof of guilt?

Having already assumed the Scapegoat represents Satan, claims are then made that the reason the sins of the congregation were confessed over his head is that Satan is the author and instigator of

the sins. THIS IS AN ASSUMPTION. There is no Bible statement that the goat was responsible for the sins. The Bible ONLY SAYS, "The sins OF THE PEOPLE were put on his head." (Lev16:21)

Strong evidence showing that the Scapegoat does NOT represent Satan is the similarity between the sacrifice for cleansing infected houses or lepers and the Day of Atonement sacrifice. In Lev14:4-7,49-53 one bird is slain and one sent into the open field. Both birds are CLEAN (Verse 4). Could Satan represent a clean bird (or goat, a clean animal)? Also notice, the living bird is dipped in the blood of the slain bird. Therefore, the living bird COULD NOT be evil because the blood of the slain bird (symbolic of Christ) is applied to it. In Lev16 the living GOAT is not dipped in the blood of the slain one, but it does say the sacrifice of the slain goat is for cleansing the entire congregation and that would include the live goat who was taken from the congregation. (Lev16:5)

Although the word Azazel SOUNDS like a name for Satan, the Hebrew shows that it is not. It occurs only in Lev 16 (v.8, 10, 26) and is a combination of two words, `ez, meaning "goat," and 'uzel, meaning "to go away.", simply, the "goat that goes away". Green's Interlinear translates it 'complete removal'. Strong's defines it, "the goat of departure". This is also supported by the LXX. I heard in a sermon that this indicates departure from God's control. But remember the goat did not depart of its own will. It was forcibly cast out. (Lev. 16:21)

The Day of Atonement, rather than picturing the putting away of Satan, could show that there are two penalties for sin depending on the type of sin. One penalty is death, and the other is separation from the congregation. Jesus paid both penalties. He could be considered both the sacrificial lamb and the Scapegoat because he is the 'lamb of God' who 'takes away' the sins of the world (John1:29, 36) It could also show how we might be participants in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ especially if we are unjustly cast out. As his sacrifice took place outside the camp, we follow him "without the camp" bearing his reproach. (Heb13:11-13)

Christians are training to be judges of the world and duty bound to JUDGE RIGHTEOUSLY. So I challenge all to study Lev 16 and prove whether or not the scapegoat represents Satan. Because this is not just a GOAT, but a MAN, and not just a MAN, but a BROTHER since both goats were taken from the congregation! What kind of judges are we if we cast out a brother's name as evil and believe it and preach it year after year without any proof that he deserves an evil name?. God says, "He that justifies the wicked, and he that condemneth the just, even they both are ABOMINATION to the Lord." (Pr17:15)

As Jesus said to the Pharisees who were condemning him, "If you had known what this means, I desire mercy and not sacrifice, you would not have condemned the guiltless." To apply this MERCY to the SACRIFICE of the Day of Atonement, is to see that the Scapegoat committed no sin worthy of being cast out and we should not condemn the guiltless. If this mercy had prevailed at the trial of the first goat - Jesus Christ, he would not have been slain would he? I say of Azazel then, as Pilate said of Jesus:

* I FIND NO FAULT IN HIM *