

In the name of Jesus. Amen.

Yom Kippur had arrived—the Day of Atonement. The priest made the usual preparations. He washed and put on the holy garments. He sacrificed a bull as a sin offering for himself and his house so he could enter the Most Holy Place of the Tabernacle. He also takes two goats from the congregation of the children of Israel and presents them before YHWH at the door of the Tabernacle. The priest then casts lots over the goats; one lot falls for YHWH, the other for Azazel. (cf. Leviticus 16:1-8)

The goat upon which the lot for YHWH fell is sacrificed as a sin offering for the children of Israel. The blood of this goat is sprinkled on the cover of the Ark of the Covenant and all around the Ark. "So he shall make atonement...because of the uncleanness of the children of Israel, and because of their transgressions, for all their sins...." (Leviticus 16:16a)

But that goat upon which the lot of Azazel fell, what of it? It is led into the wilderness and let go—allowed to live for the sake of the first goat. It is removed from the camp of the Children of Israel—a sign to them that their sins are removed from them, and they are atoned for before YHWH.

This goat's lot has come into modern Hebrew usage in a phrase—*lekh la-azazel*—which corresponds to "go to hell." This is what the Children of Israel wanted done with their sins. Blood is sprinkled in the Tabernacle and the second goat is put away from the camp into the wilderness. Their sins are removed from them—gone to hell in their place—and they are redeemed, forgiven, and renewed on Yom Kippur.

Now, Jesus stands with Pilate in the temple courtyard. Beside them is another man. It's as if the priest stands in the temple of Roman authority with two goats. He inquires of the people, "Whom shall I release?" The people cry out for the other man. And the lot is cast!

Pilate asks sarcastically, "What about the King of Jews? What shall I do to Him?" The Jewish priests incite the people to ask for the first man again. Pilate urges once more, "What shall I do with the man you call the King of the Jews?" "Crucify Him," they shout. And the lot is cast!

The priest of Roman authority, Pilate, even washes his hands (cf. Matthew 27:24), as if the priest were washing in preparation of entering the Most Holy Place.

Pilate has his guard scourge and mock Jesus. He is decked in royal-like garb, even crowned with thorns and given a scepter of reed. And they led Jesus away, carrying a beam of wood, to the altar of Roman authority—a hill outside of Jerusalem. On that hill, Jesus will be nailed to that beam which is united to a second beam, upon which Jesus is also nailed. Each pound of the hammer sprinkling Jesus blood upon the altar and the new Ark of the Covenant, the cross, as well as the people gathered to view the gruesome spectacle.

But, Jesus sheds His blood, not as some mere goat that is a sin offering, but like that and so much more. There, at Skull, Jesus is bled out for the people—for all people, not just the ones sprinkled at Golgotha. This is the new Yom Kippur. The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses from all sin, once for all. (cf. 1 John 1:7; Hebrews 9:12) With His blood—the shedding of His blood—Jesus Christ made atonement for all men, the remission of all sins. (cf. Matthew 26:28; Hebrews 9:22) By His blood, Jesus is the propitiation for the sins of the world. (cf. 1 John 2:2)

The blood of the goat upon which the lot fell to YHWH cleansed to the people of their sins for that day—for that year. Time and again, Yom Kippur would be observed, and a priest would wash, sacrifice a bull for his sins and that of his household, sacrifice a goat and sprinkle its blood in the Most Holy Place, and send another goat into the wilderness—Azazel.

So, what of that second goat—the lot of Azazel? Well, look to the man standing beside Pilate and Jesus. His name is Barabbas, and he is a criminal, a murderer and a terrorist. It would seem likely that Jesus is crucified on the cross meant for this criminal, that he was supposed to be executed with the other two criminals. But Jesus took His place. As a result, Barabbas gets to go free.

Was he recaptured and later executed for his crimes? Was he vilified among the people? Did he amend his life and come clean? We don't really know, though many have speculated. The custom that brought about his release is a historical anomaly, for that matter. All we know is that a criminal is set free—let loose into the wilderness—and an innocent man, who is none other than God-in-the-flesh, is crucified in his place.

Barabbas...his name translates from Aramaic to "son of the father." That's like you, isn't it dear hearers? Jesus takes your place in death, and you get to go free. You are covered in the blood of Jesus, YHWH's goat, or more precisely, "The Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world," (John 1:29) and by that blood your sins are forgiven, and you are made a son of the Father in heaven. He dies, and you get to live and are made a son of His Father and co-heir with Jesus of eternal life. You are Barabbas, a terrorist or murderer in your own right, made a son of the Father and alive in His Christ. You are the goat allotted to Azazel—the scapegoat who is atoned for by the blood of the Lamb.

So, like Barabbas in the text, we could ask the same questions of you. Are you captured again and executed for your sins? Are you vilified among the people? Do you amend your life and come clean?

The answer is simple. As long as you live on this side of eternity, you are in a constant struggle with your Old Man. The demons of your sins are constantly eating away at you, nagging you, seeking to convince you that you are not a son of the Father and that you do not have eternal life for the sake of Jesus Christ. *Lekh la-azazel*; to hell with them—and that's exactly where Jesus put them: away from you, and out of the presence of the Father. Jesus was already executed for your sins—every last one of them. Yes, you are vilified among the people, because you are forgiven. No, you don't amend your sinful life, not of yourself, but it is forgiven of you and will finally be done away with eternally when Jesus returns and the dead are raised, and you are raised to life eternal for His sake!

Christ was executed for you, and you are made clean for His sake. This is the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ for you.

Jesus was incarnate, was born, was scourged and mocked, was crucified, and was buried for you. His death for sin is your death to sin. The forgiveness He won on the cross as He spilled His blood covers your sin, every last one of them and every last bit of it, and you are set free to live as a son of the Father in heaven. To you, the blood of the Lamb was applied for life, and you were declared righteous as you were washed in the water and the Word, and it is your daily sign and seal of a life redeemed for Christ's sake. For by that water, blood, and Word, you are the righteousness of God. You are forgiven for all of your sins.

In the name of Jesus. Amen.