

Perspective Digest

Volume 9 | Number 1

Article 8

1-1-2004

Azazel

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Recommended Citation

Shae, William H. (2004) "Azazel," *Perspective Digest*: Vol. 9 : No. 1 , Article 8.
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/pd/vol9/iss1/8>

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AZAZEL

More than you wanted to know about a very unsavory character

For some reason, the very name evokes a shudder. Put it in the company of Timothy, Paul, Peter, Joel, Adam—even Maher-shalalhashbaz—and it casts a shadow over the companion monikers. One cannot think of saying it with a smile; rather, it is best enunciated with teeth clicking or grinding.

Ah-zzzzay-zzzzzel.

Go to Calvary. Hear nails being pounded—tearing flesh, splattering blood. There the name belongs with all its phonetic rancor:

Azzzayzzzzel.

You'll find it in only one biblical passage—Leviticus 8-10. A male goat is selected to represent Yahweh (God) and another to represent Azazel (a demonic being).¹ The goat for Yahweh is sacrificed and its blood taken into the sanctuary. But the goat for Azazel is not sacrificed. Instead, the symbolic record of sins taken out of the sanctuary is placed on the head of Azazel's goat. It is

taken to the wilderness and released “to Azazel” (Lev. 16:10, RSV). One can almost hear someone saying, “The guilt belongs to you, Azazel. Here, take it!”

Some evangelicals see both the Lord's goat and Azazel's as types of

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Christ, a conclusion rejected by Adventist theologians, who see in Azazel the very antithesis of Yahweh. The fact that this strange goat was not slain and its blood not shed indicates it had no part in the forgiveness of sins. The death of the Lord's goat prefigures Christ's death on the cross. Azazel's goat symbolizes Satan, to whom the responsibility for sin is ultimately attributed. His fate during the millennium is prefigured by the live goat wandering in the wilderness (Rev. 20:1-3) before he is thrown into the lake of fire at the end of that period (vs. 10).

Early Century Concepts

A number of texts written between 200 B.C. and 200 A.D. offer further insights into Azazel. Though falsely attributed to biblical characters or times, they have some value in conveying early-century concepts. Let's examine two such works: 1 Enoch and The Apocalypse of Abraham.

1 Enoch

This work, with segments dated to the first half of the second century B.C.,² has eight references to an evil angel named Azazel.

1. "And Azazel taught men to make swords, and daggers, and shields and breastplates. And he showed them the things after these, and the art of making them: bracelets, and ornaments, and the

art of making up the eyes and beautifying the eyelids, and the most precious and choice stones, and all kinds of coloured eyes. And the world was changed. And there was great impiety and much fornication, and they went astray, and all their ways became corrupt."³

In this passage, Azazel belongs to a class of evil angels known as the Watchers, a long list of whom are named in chapter six. Here Azazel exercises his evil talents on both men and women. He instructs the men in production of weapons of war; he teaches the women to beautify themselves so that they can seduce men. The result, according to this source, is "much fornication." Combine the two, and you have much impiety and corrupted humans.

"See then what Azazel has done, how he has taught all iniquity on the earth and revealed the eternal secrets which were made in heaven" (9:6).

The reference to the "secrets in heaven" is not clear; we can conclude, however, that Azazel was not supposed to reveal them on Earth, but did so anyway.

10:4 "And further the Lord said to Raphael, Bind Azazel by his hands and feet and throw him into the darkness. And split open the desert which is in Dudael, and throw him there. And throw on him jagged and sharp stones and cover him with darkness and let him stay

there for ever, and cover his face that he might not see light, and that on the great day of judgment he may be hurled into the fire.”

Here, as in the Bible, Azazel (Satan) faces judgment for his evil works. He is to suffer the same fate as in Leviticus 16; he is cast into a wilderness, or desert, but now that desert splits open to launch him into a world of darkness—the abyss. There he is to be covered up “for ever”—that is, to the full time allotted. After this punishment comes the second phase of judgment, in which he is cast into the fire on the great day of judgment. Thus the account in 1 Enoch parallels the account in Revelation 20, where Satan is imprisoned in the abyss at the beginning of the millennium and cast into the lake of fire during the great white throne judgment. 1 Enoch continues parallel to Revelation, asserting in 10:7 that the Earth, which has been ruined by evil angels, will be restored by God:

“And the whole earth has been ruined by the teaching of the works of Azazel, and against him write down all sin.”

Leviticus 16:21 is more limited in scope, saying that Aaron was to confess, over Azazel’s goat, “all the iniquities of the people of Israel, all their transgressions and all their sins.” This reference from 1 Enoch is more comprehensive. All the sins of the Earth are in view, and they are to be

written down and recorded against the account of Azazel, the one responsible for the whole sin problem.

13:1-3 “And Enoch went and said to Azazel, You will not have peace. A severe sentence came out against you that you should be bound. And you will have neither rest, nor mercy, nor the granting of any petition because of the wrong that you have taught and because of all the works of blasphemy and wrong and sins which you have shown to the sons of men.”

These “sons”—kings and other great men—are to be thrown into a burning valley, where the evil angels are sentenced to join them. As the “hosts of Azazel,” they share the judgments that are to fall on him. First they are thrown into the abyss, the lowest level of Hell, and subsequently into the fire on the great day of judgment. The identity of Azazel as Satan is clear:

54:5 “These [instruments of chain] are being prepared for the hosts of Azazel, that they may take them and throw them into the lowest part of Hell; and they will cover their jaws with the rough stones as the Lord of Spirits commanded. And Michael and Gabriel, Raphael and Phanuel—these will take hold of them on that great day, and throw them on that day into the furnace of burning fire, that the Lord of Spirits may take vengeance on them for

“He [the angel] said, This is Wickedness, Azazel, for Abraham’s lot is in the heavens, but yours on the earth. He said to him, Shame upon you ‘Azazel’; for you have chosen and have loved to live in your uncleanness here. This is why the Eternal Ruler, the Mighty One, has appointed you to be a dweller upon earth. And through you the evil and deceitful spirit works among men, and through you retribution and misfortunes fall on the generations of the unrighteous.”

their iniquity, in that they became servants of Satan and led astray those who dwell upon the dry ground.”

I Enoch returns to the obligatory view the kings shall “enjoy”:

55:5 “You powerful kings, who dwell upon the dry ground, will be obliged to watch my Chosen One sit down on the throne of my glory, and judge, in the name of the Lord of Spirits, Azazel and all his associates and all his hosts.”

The final reference to Azazel in 1 Enoch places him among the evil angels, or Watchers (69:3). Here they are numbered, with Azazel last, No. 21. The text proceeds to identify the various evil angels who direct subgroups of their evil colleagues.

The Apocalypse of Abraham

This work appears to be a Jewish apocalypse with Christian interpolations. The Jewish portions appear to be from after the destruction of

Jerusalem and the temple, referred to in chapter 27. Thus the copy may date to the second century A.D., with interpolations still later. Azazel is mentioned six times in the book.

13:7-11 “He [the angel] said, This is Wickedness, Azazel, for Abraham’s lot is in the heavens, but yours on the earth. He said to him, Shame upon you ‘Azazel’; for you have chosen and have loved to live in your uncleanness here. This is why the Eternal Ruler, the Mighty One, has appointed you to be a dweller upon earth. And through you the evil and deceitful spirit works among men, and through you retribution and misfortunes fall on the generations of the unrighteous.”

The setting here is the scene of Genesis 15, where Abraham offered the animal sacrifices by dividing their parts and laying them in opposite directions. The bird used here becomes a symbol for Azazel. He is synonymous with wickedness and is

It was Azazel who caused the fall of Adam and Eve, thus it was he who set them on the road to perdition from which, graciously, God rescued them. Once again, clear connection exists between Azazel—the serpent-devil-Satan—and the fall of humankind, as recorded in Genesis 3.

condemned to dwell on the Earth in the bird's uncleanness. He has brought retribution and misfortune upon the wicked through the evil and deceit he has introduced among them, another evidence that Azazel is Satan.

Chapter 14: "The angel said to Abraham, Say to him, May you be a burning coal of the earthly furnace. Azazel went into the inaccessible parts of the earth."

In this case, the angel gives Abraham the words of a curse to speak to Azazel. He is to burn like a coal in the furnace and go to an inaccessible place, just as the Azazel goat was to do in Leviticus 16. Azazel tries to get Abraham to continue the conversation (for the purpose of temptation?), but the angel warns Abraham not to talk further.

20:5-7: ". . . so I will appoint for your descendants a race of people—a people set apart for me in my heritage with Azazel. And I said, . . . Behold, before thou didst raise me up here, Azazel reviled me: so how now, when he is not before thee, hast thou joined thyself to him."

Picture Abraham going out to count the stars in the night sky. He is seeking to number his descendants. The Lord tells him that some of the people of Azazel will, some day, be numbered among Abraham's descendants.

22:5-7: "Those on the left side are the many people who have existed in the past, and after you are appointed, some for judgment and restoration, some for vengeance and perdition, until the end of the age. And those on the right side of the picture, they are the people set apart for me from the people of Azazel. These are the people who are going to spring from you and will be called my people."

Here we see the final judgment, but instead of the righteous on the right hand and the wicked on the left, the people on the left are divided between righteous and wicked. Those on the right include some who once belonged to Azazel but are now among the descendants of Abraham. It is not clear whether this segment refers to the conversion of the Gentiles or the reconversion of some

Jews. In either case, Azazel loses and Abraham gains.

22:9-12: "And he said, This is the human world. This is Adam, and this is their desire upon the earth: this is Eve. And what is between them is the wicked path they started on towards perdition, namely Azazel."

It was Azazel who caused the fall of Adam and Eve, thus it was he who set them on the road to perdition from which, graciously, God rescued them. Once again, clear connection exists between Azazel—the serpent-devil-Satan—and the fall of humankind, as recorded in Genesis 3. In this dimension, the Apocalypse of Abraham is more complicated than that in 1 Enoch, and at the same time, more comprehensive, traversing, as it does, the time from Eden to the final judgment.

29:5-8: ". . . And some of them mocked that man, and some assaulted him, but some of them worshiped him. I saw them worshipping him; and Azazel ran up and wor-

shipped, and after kissing his face turned and stood behind him. And I said, Eternal Mighty One, who is this man who has been mocked and assaulted, but yet is worshiped by the heathen and Azazel?"

The answer, of course, is God's Suffering Servant. Other questions hint at tantalizing answers, particularly when one notes the "last days" setting. The scene in which Azazel worships the Mighty One may represent his final subservience to the Messiah and the kingdom of God.

One thing is certain in Scripture and apocryphal literature alike: Azazel is not a "good guy." Whether called Azazel or devil or Satan, he is evil personified. □

Notes and References

¹ Azazel appears in sources cited as Azazil and Azazel; from whatever source, the spelling in this article is Azazel.

² On the basis of fragments found among the Dead Sea Scrolls.

³ Translation by M. A. Knibb. All quotations from 1 Enoch are from this translation.

