

Exodus

A tale of 2 goats

Did the intro to the video **capture your attitude** toward the book of Leviticus that we are now hip deep in? **Is your head spinning** with all the blood, sacrifices, rituals etc.? I have a confession; **mine is too**. Trying to make sense of all that is being **described in great detail centuries later** is very difficult. That is why we are going to **focus on what is the center** of this section of scripture, **a tale of two goats**. I know that's clever, but I didn't come up with it on my own.

When **calling someone a goat**, it used to mean the one blamed for things going wrong. Now the goat is the **Greatest Of All Time**. In today's story, goats are not only **better than good, they take front and center**.

Not only are the goats the center of the story, but **chapters 16-17 are the very heart** of the book of Leviticus. This section is covering what is called, "**The Day of Atonement**." I want to read a few sections of chapter 16, **focusing on these two goats and not getting lost in all the sprinkling of blood, purifying, and burning carcasses**.³ **"When Aaron enters the sanctuary area, he must follow these instructions fully. He must bring a young bull for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering.**⁴ **He must put on his linen tunic and the linen undergarments worn next to his body. He must tie the linen sash around his waist and put the linen turban on his head. These are sacred garments, so he must bathe himself in water before he puts them on.**⁵ **Aaron must take from the community of Israel two male goats for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering.**⁶ **"Aaron will present his own bull as a sin offering to purify himself and his family, making them right with the Lord.** We have already heard that **priests have died** who go into God's presence unprepared. Aaron must do it in a way that God provides that is safe.⁷ **Then he must take the two male goats and present them to the Lord at the entrance of the Tabernacle.** The tabernacle is this tent God has designed for his home on earth where he can be in the midst of his people.⁸ **He is to cast sacred lots to determine which goat will be reserved as an offering to the Lord and which will carry the sins of the people to the wilderness of Azazel.** We will get to this **strange name** later.⁹ **Aaron will then present as a sin offering the goat chosen by lot for the Lord.**¹⁰ **The other goat, the scapegoat chosen by lot to be sent away, will be kept alive, standing before the Lord. When it is sent away to Azazel in the wilderness, the people will be purified and made right with the Lord.** Leviticus 16:3-10

Let's jump ahead to verse 15, back to focusing on these goats. ¹⁵ "Then Aaron must slaughter the first goat as a sin offering for the people and carry its blood behind the inner curtain. There he will sprinkle the goat's blood over the **atonement cover** and in front of it, just as he did with the bull's blood. Remember the **bull was for Aaron and his family's sins**, the goat is for all the sins of God's people, to **cover or pay for them**. These animals take the punishment for those sins. He sprinkles the blood on the "**Atonement cover**," which means the blood covers or pays the penalty for their sin. ¹⁶ Through this process, he will purify the **Most Holy Place**, and he will do the same for the entire Tabernacle, because of the defiling sin and rebellion of the Israelites. ¹⁷ No one else is allowed inside the Tabernacle when Aaron enters it for the purification ceremony in the **Most Holy Place**. No one may enter until he comes out again after purifying himself, his family, and all the congregation of Israel, **making them right** with the Lord. They are now in right standing before God, righteous, able to enjoy his presence without fear. ¹⁸ "Then Aaron will come out to purify the altar that stands before the Lord. He will do this by taking some of the blood from the bull and the goat and putting it on each of the horns of the altar. ¹⁹ Then he must sprinkle the blood with his finger seven times over the altar. In this way, he will cleanse it from Israel's defilement and make it holy. ²⁰ "When Aaron has finished purifying the **Most Holy Place** and the Tabernacle and the altar, he must present the live goat. ²¹ He will lay both of his hands on the goat's head and confess over it all the wickedness, rebellion, and sins of the people of Israel. In this way, he will transfer the people's sins to the head of the goat. Then a man specially chosen for the task will drive the goat into the wilderness. ²² As the goat goes into the wilderness, it will carry all the people's sins upon itself into a desolate land. Leviticus 16:15-22

Aaron, the high priest, enters God's presence; therefore he does everything exactly as God has directed him. He wants to live to talk about it. He sacrifices one goat for the sins of the people of Israel. Then he does another strange thing by placing his hands on the second goat, confessing Israel's sin over it and, **like a sponge, it absorbs that sin.** Next, he has a guy who takes the goat into the wilderness and returns it to Azazel, whoever that is. What we have is...**two goats with different purposes.**

You can decide for yourself which goat won or lost the coin toss. One is killed immediately, the other gets let loose in the wilderness with no experience on how to survive outside of a domestic farm situation. **I have chosen to give them clever names, Goat #1**, which is the one that is sacrificed immediately after the coin toss. And **goat #2** is the one sent on a life-or-death camping trip in the wilderness.

Quick quiz to see if you've got it. I say the name of a goat and you say "dead" or "released."

So, what are their different purposes? If you've been raised in church, you are more familiar with the goat and other animals that are sacrificed for the forgiveness of the people's sins. This is what is happening in what is called **the tabernacle**. Because the people have not entered their permanent homeland in Canaan, **they need a place for all this that is mobile**. The tabernacle can be **disassembled** and carried to their next stopping place. **Later in the story, King Solomon will build** the permanent dwelling for God and all these sacrifices to him, which is called the temple in Jerusalem.

Let's start with the more familiar part of the story...**Goat #1**: His purpose is...**Sacrifice for sin...a substitute.**

Keep in mind that sin and wickedness have a price tag. And if God is going to be just, he can't just let it slide. That would not be fair. **If a judge allows a criminal to go free** just because, and his crime isn't paid for through some sort of penalty, then **what happens next is the responsibility** of the judge. **It's on him** as far as God is concerned.

This is like a stunt double in the movies. The stunt double does certain things that the actor cannot do, but his character demands. **The people of Israel cannot pay the price for their sin and still be in relationship with God.** It will kill them. Now, because the **sentence for their sin is placed upon this goat**, God's justice remains and his forgiveness can happen.

We can very easily see that **this is what Jesus did on the cross**, once and for all. The goat thing is an **annual event**, but with **Jesus sacrificing himself for us by being the substitute for the punishment we rightfully have coming**, it is a once for all proposition.

This is the **substitutionary work** that Jesus did on the cross, making a right relationship between a holy, pure, righteous God and sinful, broken, fallen people like us. **This is the part of the story that makes sense to a lot of us.** "Jesus paid it all, all to him I owe. Sin has left a crimson stain. He washed it white as snow." **Now we owe nothing for our sin, the books are balanced, but we owe everything to God who only wants to be in relationship with us.** For that we give our loyalty, our allegiance, no matter the cost.

That seems like **all that's necessary** doesn't it? **Jesus paid it all.** After all, on the cross Jesus said, **"It is finished."** In my mind finished means, that's it, the end, caput.

So why the need for this second goat? What is the purpose? Is it a back up goat in case the first goat gets into some sort of scandal. Is it like the vice president who doesn't do much other than break ties and clap when the president speaks, but if the president can't do the job, he or she steps in.

Goat #2: Elimination of sin...restoring relationship with God.

Goat #2 is the garbage truck for sin. He collects all the stuff that stinks or will start stinking if not taken away to the dump.

But where is this metaphorical dump and who is Azazel? There are many different theories about what the name means, none is better or more likely than the other. Let's think about this logically. Who would they return the sin to? Who will ultimately still pay the price in hell for all of that?

The implication of the story of the live goat is that Azazel is an enemy of God. There are two parties that are culpable or responsible for sin, the person who committed it and Satan, who directed and encouraged this sin. The first goat deals with my culpability, while the second deals with Satan's, by returning to him what is his. This will doom him to hell for eternity.

There is a principle in the Bible that says, evil comes back on those who cause it. First, to the person who does it. Whoever digs a pit will fall into it; if someone rolls a stone, it will roll back on them. Proverbs 26:26 NIV

This principle is more recently than the Bible stated it this way. "Chickens come home to roost" or "what comes around goes around." Eventually your sin will catch up to you.

But what about the other person who is responsible, or culpable, for the sinful thing I did? Secondly, to the one who schemed it. ¹¹ so that Satan will not outsmart us. For we are familiar with his evil schemes. 2 Corinthians 2:11

I think this quote helps me understand this. "Confession of a crime by an accomplice implicates the mastermind who instigated it. Thus the high priest, representing the community of Israelites (who are already forgiven), placed responsibility for instigation of evil where it belonged and banished it from the camp. In this way the priest severed any residual, nominal ties to the nefarious Azazel and thereby cemented the security of Israel's relationship with the Lord." The NIV Application Commentary Leviticus, page _____.

This only makes sense if two things happen. The goat needs to live to return the sin to its creator. Secondly, the goat must be taken to a place where it can't wander back home.

This goat isn't a sacrifice to cover, atone for the people's sin. It is the garbage truck taking what stinks to the dump. This is the sin and its residue. This

second goats' job is not to die for anyone. It can live or die, but it must first take the sin of the people back to Satan.

Later, in Jewish tradition after the temple is built, the priests started to get lazy and started to miss the point. They would toss this goat off a cliff. I guess if you don't see it hit the bottom, you can say, "I didn't kill it and for all I know it survived." What happens at the bottom isn't my responsibility.

But can you imagine if the goat was like the dog in that movie that finds its way back home months later. What would the priests face look like if a couple of days later he sees goat #2 wandering back into the camp. That means there's a load of rotting garbage about to be dumped on your front lawn. Tag, you're it. For this reason, they had to take the goat to a place over water or mountains where it could not possibly return.

Let's go back to the first goat. If this goat is the..._Sacrifice for their sin, a substitute that receives the just punishment for their sin, then...Goat

#1: Accomplishes forgiveness.

The people can receive forgiveness from their just and holy God. He didn't just let it go, he rightly forgave their many sins, both acknowledged and hidden. Nothing is left to chance. And the point of forgiveness is that they can be in relationship with God again, a right relationship where they belong.

Again, we are familiar with this idea of forgiveness. It is God's grace to allow our sins to be forgiven or covered by someone else, paid for out of someone else's bank account.

After all, we have been asking people to pray a prayer for the forgiveness of their sins for decades in America. Just say this prayer and you're forgiven. Which doesn't make sense if you don't think you're a sinner and no one is keeping track of that sort of thing. After all we are all just people, with feet of clay. We forgot that this forgiveness was free, but not cheap. It cost Jesus his life and a lot of suffering and pain.

Again, aren't we done here? Is there really anything important after being forgiven? Is this second goat really necessary?

If Goat #2 is about the Elimination of sin which, like forgiveness, is about restoring relationship with God, then... Goat #2: Allows God to forget. God now not only forgives, but he forgets. How? Because it is gone, sent into the wilderness back to the one who will now have to pay for his part, which is orchestrating the sin. He is now to bear the punishment for his side of this corruption.

The problem with forgiving and forgetting is that as broken sinful people, we can't seem to forget sins against us and ones we've committed. All it takes is someone to remind us of that hurt, that offense, and it is back in our minds. This makes it almost impossible for us to completely forget, but thankfully, we are not God.

From this point on, that sin I committed, as far as God is concerned, no longer exists. Yes, I may still have consequences in this world that remind me, but it has no effect on my relationship with God...unless I allow it.

The prophet Jeremiah, which we will get to later in the story, says it this way. Within what he calls a new covenant that is to come this is how our sin is taken away. ³³ "But this is the new covenant I will make with the people of Israel after those days," says the Lord. "I will put my instructions deep within them, and I will write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. ³⁴ And they will not need to teach their neighbors, nor will they need to teach their relatives, saying, 'You should know the Lord.' For everyone, from the least to the greatest, will know me already," says the Lord. "And I will forgive their wickedness, and I will never again remember their sins." Jeremiah 31:33-34

This is a foreshadowing of the new covenant through Jesus. The instruction deep within them and the "write them on their hearts," language is talking about how the Holy Spirit, the presence of Christ, will live within his people. And if that isn't enough because of Jesus, there will no longer need to be a scapegoat because Jesus will have done the part of both goats, meaning that God has forgiven and forgotten our sin.

The commentator from The NIV Application commentary says it really well. "...the logic of the covenantal relationship between God and Israel, requires that sins be more than merely 'forgiven'. It is a known fact that, despite the proverbial expression, it is impossible really to 'forget' offenses one has supposedly 'forgiven.' The memory of the crime remains as a shadow on future relations. When two people begin to quarrel, each soon resurrects the full inventory of 'sins' the other has committed in the past. For the covenant to remain effective, God must wipe out completely this residual effect of sin...and so renew the pristine nature of the bond." *The NIV Application Commentary Leviticus*, page ____.

For his unfailing love toward those who fear him is as great as the height of the heavens above the earth. ¹² He has removed our sins as far from us as the east is from the west. ¹³ The Lord is like a father to his children, tender and compassionate to those who fear him. Psalm 103:11-13

Satan is the accuser or reminder of our sins. He wants us to live as if we aren't forgiven, nor are our sins forgotten, thereby creating a perceived separation from God. He wants us to believe that what Jesus did really wasn't enough.

"If you are really sorry about that, shouldn't you keep your focus on it because at any minute God is going to bring it back and throw it in your face." Satan wants to breathe life into these dead sins so that they create a division between God and his beloved.

"Satan not only tempts us; when he lures us into sins, he then turns around and accuses us (Zech. 3:1-2). This is 'entrapment.' He tells the truth when he says that we have sinned. He knows because it was he who tempted us. But he doesn't stop accusing us when we are forgiven. He is 'the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night' (Rev. 12:10) in his slanderous attempt to make God's people share his fate." The NIV Application Commentary Leviticus, page

To tell the whole story of what Jesus will later do, it takes two goats. We love goat #1. But then we turn around and want to be alone with our sins. After all, they have been a part of how we live and view our lives. How can we send them away? That takes trust, not only in God's ability to forgive, but his willingness to forget. He does that because his goal is to be in an intimate, face to face love relationship with you and me.

I think the American church has forgotten about goat #2. Let's do something together in obedience to what God is saying to us about these two goats and THE GOAT, Jesus.

Steps of Obedience:

Return sin to its creator.

We are going to practice this together. We are in a very real way allowing Jesus to do what that second goat did for the people of Israel. He is going to separate us from our sin, remove it, and return it to Satan, the author and creator of the sin that we committed.

Keep in mind this is practice. You have an enemy who will try to remind you of what God has forgotten. Here's a pattern you can practice.

First, have you truly surrendered putting your trust in Jesus? Do you want to follow him, and him only? This begins with confession and repentance. Not one thing, but the whole thing, your desire to pursue what you want regardless of what Jesus wants for you.

These next steps are for those who allow Jesus to play the role of both goats for you.

Second, we read the truth that contradicts the lie of Satan that I still must hold my sin close and continually pay for it. This is like continually taking poison.

²⁰ "When Aaron has finished purifying the Most Holy Place and the Tabernacle and the altar, he must present the live goat. ²¹ He will lay both of his hands on the goat's head and confess over it all the wickedness, rebellion, and sins of the people of Israel. In this way, he will transfer the people's sins to the head of the goat. Then a man specially chosen for the task will drive the goat into the wilderness. ²² As the goat goes into the wilderness, it will carry all the people's sins upon itself into a desolate land. Leviticus 16:20-22

Let's read this verse together to affirm that this is your reality and our reality. For his unfailing love toward those who fear him is as great as the height of the heavens above the earth. ¹² He has removed our sins as far from us as the east is from the west. ¹³ The Lord is like a father to his children, tender and compassionate to those who fear him. Psalm 103:11-13

Finally, I must do something that helps me practice living in this reality that my sin has been taken away. Here's what I'm going to challenge you to do.

On the card you received, after you read psalm 103, then you get to personalize what it is saying about you and your sin. For his unfailing love toward those who fear him is as great as the height of the heavens above the earth. He has removed _____ as far from me as the east is from the west. Go ahead, be bold, write it down. Even if you use code so that no one knows who might see your card.

Sending the goat means you can release it and can faithfully discipline yourself to continue to live as if it is gone, returned to its originator.

Do you go looking for your goat? There is a comfort in hanging onto your sin. The devil you know is less scary than the devil you don't know. Or maybe you just want to have that sense of controlling your own narrative or how your story is perceived by others.

I want you to take this card to discipline your mind to understand that it has been sent back to its originator, Satan. Use this card when you feel as if you are being reminded of your sin and accused. You are forgiven, innocent and your sin is taken away, which means you are free. Now it's time to act like it, like a person who has been proclaimed innocent and set free.

Now we are ready to...Enjoy communion with your creator and savior! We are to remember what he has done for us, but that means we must affirm that what

he did was effective, that it accomplished both forgiveness and elimination of my sin. Communion is not a time to **remember our sin and wallow in it**.
Come and receive the elements...