

AZAZEL IN EARLY JEWISH TRADITION

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The term "Azazel," which appears four times in the prescriptions for the Day of Atonement (Lev 16:8, 10, 26), has elicited much debate. Although many scholars have identified Azazel with a demonic figure to whom the sin-laden scapegoat was dispatched,¹ the term remains undefined in the biblical text. This article will attempt to demonstrate that two noncanonical Jewish works, *I Enoch* and the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, reveal a tradition in which Azazel was regarded as a demon, and in which the scapegoat rite was utilized as a symbol of demonic expulsion. Hence it will be argued that a segment of ancient Jewish apocalypticists found a symbol of eschatological victory over demonic forces in the rite involving Azazel and the scapegoat.

Azazel in I Enoch

Although *I Enoch* is attributed to the antediluvian prophet by that name, its pseudonymous nature is readily apparent. In reality, it is a composite work, produced by several authors who probably wrote during the three centuries preceding the Christian era.² In its current form, *I Enoch* is a collection of five smaller documents: "The Book of Watchers" (chaps. 1-36), "The Book of Parables" (chaps. 37-71), "The Astronomical Book" (chaps. 72-82), "The Book of Dreams" (chaps. 83-90), and "The Epistle of Enoch" (chaps. 91-108).³ It is not known

¹ The following works are examples of literature to this effect: Bernard J. Bamberger, *The Torah: Leviticus, A Modern Commentary* (New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1979), 160; M. M. Kalisch, *A Historical and Critical Commentary on the Old Testament* (London: Longmans, Green, Reader, and Dyer, 1872), 2:328; Nathaniel Micklem, "The Book of Leviticus," *IB* (1953), 2:77-78; Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, AB (1991), 1021; Martin Noth, *Leviticus*, trans. J. E. Anderson (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1965), 125.

² *The Apocryphal Old Testament*, ed. H. F. D. Sparks (Oxford: Clarendon, 1984), 173-177. However, some scholars assign "The Book of Parables" to the first century of the Christian Era, or possibly even later.

³ *Ibid.*

when these five "books" were combined, nor is it entirely clear in what language or languages they were originally composed.⁴ The complete text of *1 Enoch* is known only in Ethiopic, although Greek, Latin, and Aramaic fragments survive as well.⁵

In common with the general tenor of apocalyptic literature, the view of reality presented in *1 Enoch* consists of a sharp contrast between the present evil age, which will end in judgment, and the new age of bliss that is to follow.⁶ The book also stresses the relationship between the locus of human activity and the cosmic or heavenly realm.⁷ Thus it contains both temporal and spatial dimensions.⁸ The spatial dimension becomes evident in the narrative of Semyaza (chaps. 6 and 7), in which Semyaza leads his angel cohorts into rebellion by cohabiting with the daughters of men, thus giving birth to giants and defiling the earth. The background for this story is obviously Gen 6:1-4.

The figure of Azazel is abruptly introduced in *1 Enoch* 8:

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 of beautifying the eyelids, and the most precious and choice stones, and all kinds of colored dyes. And the world was changed. And there was great impiety and much fornication, and they went astray, and all their ways became corrupt. (*1 Enoch* 8:1-3)⁹

This sudden interruption of the Semyaza narrative is usually attributed to the editorial fusion of two independent traditions.¹⁰ However, Hanson offers an alternative hypothesis. He takes it to be a case of

⁴ It is generally believed that *1 Enoch* was composed in Aramaic. See D. S. Russell, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha. Patriarchs and Prophets in Early Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 26. However, Charles argues that "The Astronomical Book" was originally written in Hebrew; see *The Apocryphal Old Testament*, 176.

⁵ *Apocryphal Old Testament*, 170-173. Also see John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination* (New York: Crossroad, 1984), 33.

⁶ George W. E. Nickelsburg, "The Apocalyptic Construction of Reality in 1 Enoch," *Mysteries and Revelations*, Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha Supplement Series 9, ed. John J. Collins and James H. Charlesworth (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991), 58.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 54.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 53.

⁹ *Apocryphal Old Testament*, 190-191.

¹⁰ Leonhard Rost, *Einleitung in die alttestamentlichen Apokryphen und Pseudepigraphen einschliesslich der grossen Qumran-Handschriften* (Heidelberg: Quelle und Meyer, 1971), 103. See also Paul D. Hanson, "Rebellion in Heaven, Azazel, and Euhemeristic Heroes in *1 Enoch* 6-11," *JBL* 96 (1977): 220.

paronomasia, in which the name of one of Semyaza's subordinates, Asael, invited a comparison with the Azazel of Lev 16.¹¹ Regardless of which of these positions is favored, it is apparent that the appearance of the name "Azazel" in the Enoch passage functions as a significant link with the Day of Atonement ritual described in Lev 16.

It must be admitted that the demonic nature of Azazel is only implicit in Lev 16. However, 1 Enoch 8:1-3 depicts him in terms that are explicitly demonic. In fact, his characteristics approach the satanic in this passage, although he is never identified as Satan.¹² Nevertheless, he is portrayed as a corrupter and tempter of humanity, and the main source of antediluvian impiety.

First Enoch 10:4-6 describes the eschatological punishment of Azazel:

And further the Lord said to Raphael, Bind Azazel by his hands and his 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 forever, and cover his face, that he may not see light, and that on the great day of judgment he may be hurled into the fire.¹³

This quotation is worthy of careful consideration, as Hanson finds a direct link between the binding of Azazel in *1 Enoch* 10 and the rite of purgation associated with the scapegoat in Lev 16.¹⁴ These two passages do indeed exhibit a number of striking parallels.

First, it should be noticed that just as a man was appointed to lead the scapegoat away to the desert (Lev 16:21), so the angel Raphael was directed to bind Azazel and banish him to the desert which is in Dudael (*1 Enoch* 10:4). Second, both passages are concerned with purification from sin. Hanson rightly recognizes the close relationship between Lev 16:21 and *1 Enoch* 10:8.¹⁵ According to Lev 16:21, the sins of Israel

¹¹ Hanson, 221.

¹² The terms "demon" and "demonic" are to be distinguished from "Satan" and "satanic." A "demon" is any malevolent spirit being. However, in Judeo-Christian tradition, Satan is regarded as the demonic leader of the angels who fell from heaven, God's primary adversary, and the chief tempter of humanity, including Adam and Eve. *First Enoch* 8:1-3 contains a description of Azazel's masterful temptation of the entire world; in this, his characteristics approach the satanic. Also *1 Enoch* 69:1-2 lists him among the fallen archangels. See *Apocryphal Old Testament*, 190-191, 251.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 194-195.

¹⁴ Hanson, 221-222.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 224.

were transferred to the scapegoat through the laying on of hands.¹⁶ Thus the removal of the goat resulted in cleansing and renewal for the entire camp. Likewise in *I Enoch* all sin was to be "written down" against Azazel; his expulsion would usher in the restoration of the earth, which had been ruined by the angel rebellion.

Notice God's command to Raphael:

And restore the earth which the angels have ruined, and announce the restoration of the earth, for I shall restore the earth, so that not all the sons of men shall be destroyed through the mystery of everything which the Watchers made known and taught to their sons. And the whole earth has been ruined by the teaching of the works of Azazel, and against him write down all sin. (*I Enoch* 10:7-8)¹⁷

Hanson argues for the existence of a further parallel between *I Enoch* 10 and the rendition of Lev 16 in *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* (also known as Jonathan Ben Uzziel or *Targum of Palestine*).¹⁸ He believes that the formulation, ". . . split open the desert which is in Dudael, and throw him there" (*I Enoch* 10:4), is related to *Pseudo-Jonathan's* use of פִּטַּר (send or cleave) instead of שְׁלַח (send), in reference to the expulsion of the scapegoat from the camp of Israel (Lev 16:22).¹⁹ Inasmuch as פִּטַּר can denote "to cleave" or "break open," as well as "to send,"²⁰ Hanson suggests that the author of the Enoch text employed a subtle paronomasia by playing alternate word meanings over against each other, thus attaining the notion of the desert being opened to receive Azazel.²¹ It is of interest that in certain Akkadian texts, demons are said to inhabit desolate wastelands after leaving the netherworld through a crack or hole in the ground.²² Hence this Akkadian literature

¹⁶M. C. Sansom, "Laying on of Hands in the Old Testament," *ExpTim* 94 (1982-1983): 324.

¹⁷*Aprocryphal Old Testament*, 195.

¹⁸According to Hanson, this particular Targum "bears close affinities with *I Enoch*" (223). Although the date of Pseudo-Jonathan has been debated, its foundations apparently go back to pre-Christian times. See Ernst Würthwein, *The Text of the Old Testament*, trans. Erroll F. Rhodes (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 78. Thus it is likely that both *I Enoch* and the original form of Pseudo-Jonathan were approximately contemporaneous in development.

¹⁹Hanson, 223.

²⁰*Ibid.* Also see "פִּטַּר" in BDB.

²¹Hanson, 223.

²²Hayim Tawil, "Azazel the Prince of the Steppe: A Comparative Study," *ZAW* 92 (1980): 48-50.

may represent an ancient source parallel to the thought expressed in both Lev 16 and *1 Enoch* 10.

These foregoing comparisons suggest that the imagery associated with Azazel's punishment in *1 Enoch* 10 is adapted from the description of the scapegoat's expulsion in Lev 16. But why does the author of the Enoch text link the goat designated "for Azazel" with Azazel himself? That the scapegoat was regarded as the focus of evil, a visible representative of the demonic, is a probable solution to this problem. It should be recognized that the Hebrew **שְׂעִיר** can denote either a male goat or a demon.²³ Perhaps this fact influenced the author of the Enoch text in his perception of the scapegoat as a demonic figure. Also, the possibility that **לְעִזְאֵזֶל** can be understood as "in behalf of Azazel" is worthy of consideration.²⁴ If this rendition of the Hebrew noun and its inseparable preposition is accepted, the scapegoat may be regarded as representing Azazel himself. Thus the expulsion of the goat from the camp would serve as a model for the banishment of sin and its demonic source.

Several additional references to Azazel also appear in *1 Enoch*.²⁵ However, they all describe him as fulfilling the role of a fallen archangel, intent on deceiving the human race. Thus *1 Enoch* confirms the fact that "Azazel" was understood in demonic terms by a segment of Jewish apocalypticists. Furthermore, it appears that they regarded the scapegoat rite of Lev 16 as a representation of Azazel's eschatological punishment.

It is possible that the authors of *1 Enoch* developed the Azazel tradition directly from data contained in Lev 16. Alternatively, it may be that a larger, unpreserved tradition served as a source for certain elements appearing in both Lev 16 and *1 Enoch*. That the figure of Azazel is introduced without explanation in Lev 16 suggests the existence of some type of background source.

Gen 6:1-4 is another source which may underlie the references to Azazel in *1 Enoch*. The "sons of God," described in the Genesis pericope as cohabiting with the "daughters of men," are interpreted in the Enoch material as fallen archangels, including Semyaza and Azazel (cf. *1 Enoch* 6; 69:1-2).²⁶ Also, the fact that Azazel is portrayed in

²³ See BDB.

²⁴ Gerhard Hasel, "Studies in Biblical Atonement II: The Day of Atonement," in *The Sanctuary and the Atonement*, ed. Arnold V. Wallenkampf and W. Richard Leshner (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1981), 122-123.

²⁵ See *1 Enoch* 13:1-2; 54:1-6; 55:4; 69:2 in *Apocryphal Old Testament*, 199, 233-234, 235, 251.

²⁶ *Apocryphal Old Testament*, 188-189, 251.

I Enoch 8:1-3 as corrupting humanity by teaching certain arts of civilization probably reflects the influence of the culture-hero myth, which was widespread in ancient society.²⁷ The culture-hero myth posits the appearance of supernatural beings in early history, who taught the arts of civilization to humanity. In most versions of the myth, the culture-heroes act as the beneficiaries of human beings. However, negative versions also exist, which describe the teaching of destructive arts, as in *I Enoch*.²⁸ It seems likely that a combination of elements derived from these diverse sources explains the enlarged role played by Azazel in the Enoch material.

Azazel in the Apocalypse of Abraham

The origin of the Apocalypse of Abraham is even more obscure than that of *I Enoch*. Currently, it is only represented in the Codex Sylvester and in certain manuscripts of the Palaea interpretata, all of which are in the Slavonic language.²⁹ Some scholars believe that the Apocalypse was first composed in Hebrew and later translated into Slavonic, in the 11th or 12th century A.D. However, this has been disputed.³⁰ Charlesworth proposes A.D. 80-100 for the period of its composition,³¹ but these dates are likewise uncertain. The fact that the burning of the temple is mentioned in chapter 27 probably indicates that at least a portion of the book is to be dated after A.D. 70.³² In any case, it seems apparent that the book existed in its present form by the fourth century A.D., as it is mentioned in the Clementine Recognitions.³³

Uncertainty also exists in regard to the authorship of the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, although it is usually considered a composite work. Most of the material in the Apocalypse derives from Jewish

²⁷ For the relationship between the culture-hero myth and the development of the Azazel tradition in *I Enoch*, see Hanson, 226-231.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 229.

²⁹ *Apocryphal Old Testament*, 364.

³⁰ R. Rubinkiewicz, "The Apocalypse of Abraham," *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. James Hamilton Charlesworth (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983), 1:682-683.

³¹ James Hamilton Charlesworth, *The Pseudepigrapha and Modern Research with a Supplement*, SBL Septuagint and Cognate Series 7S, ed. George W. E. Nickelsburg and Harry M. Orlinsky (Chico, CA: Scholars, 1981), 68.

³² *Apocryphal Old Testament*, 366.

³³ *Ibid.*

sources.³⁴ However, Charlesworth and others posit chapter 29 as a Christian interpolation.³⁵

A number of references to Azazel appear in the *Apocalypse*.³⁶ The first of these is introduced in chapters 13 and 14, where Azazel is described as an unclean bird which flies down on the carcasses of the animals that Abraham has sacrificed (cf. Gen 15:9-11).³⁷ But he is no ordinary bird, for he enters into a verbal dispute with Abraham. His demonic character soon becomes evident, as an angel refers to him as "wickedness" (*Apocalypse of Abraham* 13:7).³⁸ The angel goes on to utter an interesting rebuke against him:

Listen fellow, be ashamed of yourself and go. For you were not appointed to tempt all the righteous. Leave this man alone: you cannot beguile him for he is your enemy, and the enemy of those who follow you and dote on what you want. The garment that of old was set apart in the heavens for you, is now set apart for him; and the corruption that was his has been transferred to you. (*Apocalypse of Abraham* 13:12-15)³⁹

These verses depict Azazel as an evil spirit who tempts the righteous. Furthermore, they imply that he has fallen from heaven, and that his celestial office is subsequently to be given to Abraham. Particular attention should be devoted to the last part of v. 15, as the transference of Abraham's corruption to Azazel may be a veiled reference to the scapegoat rite (cf. Lev 16:21).

Azazel also figures prominently in Abraham's vision of the temptation of Adam and Eve:

And I looked into the picture, and my eyes ran to the side of the garden of Eden. And I saw there a man, immensely tall, alarmingly solid, such as I had never seen before, who was embracing a woman that was the man's equal both in her appearance and her size. And they were standing under one of the trees in Eden; and the fruit on that tree looked like a bunch of dates. And behind the tree there

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 365-366. However, this does not prove indisputably that the author or authors of the *Apocalypse* were Jewish. See p. 366. Nevertheless, it is convenient to classify the work as a part of early Jewish tradition.

³⁵ Charlesworth, 69. Some, however, would argue that this chapter suggests Christian authorship for the entire *Apocalypse*.

³⁶ *Apocryphal Old Testament* makes use of the variant spellings, "Azazil" and "Azazail," in the *Apocalypse of Abraham*.

³⁷ *Apocryphal Old Testament*, 378-379.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 378.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

stood what looked like a snake, with hands and feet like a man's, and wings on its shoulders, three on its right and three on its left. And they held in their hands a bunch from the tree; and they were eating--the two I had seen embracing. And I said, Who are these who are embracing each other? Who is it who is between them? And what is the fruit they are eating, Mighty Eternal One? 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. (*Apocalypse of Abraham* 23:3-9)⁴⁰

Once again, Azazel assumes the role of tempter, appearing in the form of a winged snake, and beguiling the couple into eating the forbidden fruit. Thus his demonic nature is apparent in this passage as well. Additional minor references to Azazel are found in chapters 20, 22, and 29;41 however they are quite incidental and have no real bearing on the issues addressed in this article.

That Azazel is portrayed as a demon in the *Apocalypse of Abraham* cannot be denied. In fact, the *Apocalypse* associates him with two themes which Judeo-Christian tradition applies to Satan, namely, his expulsion from heaven and his temptation of Adam and Eve under the guise of a snake. These constitute further significant developments as the figure of Azazel progressively merges with what might be termed the satanic.

The Influence of the Mishnah and the Targums

Only three direct references to "Azazel" appear in the Mishnah, none of which sheds any light on the meaning of the term.⁴² However, Tractate *Yoma* is helpful in elucidating the practice of the scapegoat rite in early Judaism, as it treats this topic fairly extensively.

Yoma 6:8 has special pertinence to the present discussion, as it identifies *בֵּית דִּדְאֵל* (house of sharpness), the desert location outside Jerusalem to which the scapegoat was driven.⁴³ Hanson and Driver both link *בֵּית דִּדְאֵל* (house of sharpness) with "Dudael," mentioned in *1 Enoch* 10:4 as the place of Azazel's banishment.⁴⁴ Although the

⁴⁰ Ibid., 385.

⁴¹ *Apocryphal Old Testament*, 383, 384, 389.

⁴² These references merely refer to the casting of the lot which was designated "for Azazel." Cf. *Yoma* 4:1; 6:1, *The Mishnah*, trans. Herbert Danby (Oxford: Clarendon, 1983), 166, 169.

⁴³ *Yoma* 6:8; see the variant readings contained in footnote 6. (cf:n. 47)

⁴⁴ See Hanson, 223-224. Also see Godfrey R. Driver, "Three Technical Terms in the Pentateuch," *JSS* 1 (April 1956): 97.

Mishnaic traditions did not exist in written form when *I Enoch* was composed, they probably had an oral history reaching back to that time. Hence it seems likely that a common element exists in both of these passages, in which case yet another connection between the expulsion of the scapegoat and the banishment of Azazel is established.

Targum Onkelos offers minimal relevant data to this study.

However, its rendition of Lev 16:8 deserves consideration: "Then Aaron should place lots upon the two goats, one lot for the Name of the Lord, the other for Azazel."⁴⁵ The use of the Aramaic phrase, "for the Name of the Lord" (or "Yahweh") (לְשֵׁם דְיְיָ),⁴⁶ is interesting and calls for explanation. It is possible that "Name" was inserted into the text to act as a kind of buffer between Yahweh and humanity, as is often done in the targams to minimize anthropomorphism.⁴⁷ This sentence structure no longer contains a direct parallelism between Yahweh and Azazel. This could indicate that the compilers of the Targum regarded the term "Azazel" as denoting something other than a personal being. However, the evidence for this deduction is so scanty that it can hardly be held with any certainty.

Targum Pseudo-Jonathan's use of פָּטַר (send or cleave) in connection with the scapegoat's expulsion has already been considered in the section devoted to the Enoch material.

A quotation from this Targum's version of Lev 16 contains additional data pertinent to the discussion:

And Aharon shall put upon the goats equal lots; one lot for the Name of the Lord, and one lot for Azazel: and he shall throw them into the vase, and draw them out, and put them upon the goats. And Aharon shall bring the goat upon which came up the lot for the Name of the Lord, and make him a sin offering. And the goat on which came up the lot for Azazel he shall make to stand alive before the Lord, to expiate for the sins of the people of the house of Israel, by sending him to die in a place rough and hard in the rocky desert which is Beth-hadurey.⁴⁸

It is clear that *Pseudo-Jonathan's* description of the choosing of the goats is far more innovative than that of *Targum Onkelos*. The insertion of

⁴⁵ "The Targum Onkelos to Leviticus," *The Aramaic Bible*, trans. Bernard Grossfeld, ed. Kevin Cathcart, Michael Maher, and Martin McNamara (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1988), 8:33.

⁴⁶ *Targum Onkelos*, ed. A. Berliner (Berlin: Gorzelanczyk and Co., 1884), 128.

⁴⁷ See footnote 4 in *The Aramaic Bible*, 33.

⁴⁸ "The Targum of Palestine Commonly Entitled the Targum of Jonathan Ben Uzziel on the Book of Leviticus," in *The Targum of Onkelos and Jonathan Ben Uzziel on the Pentateuch*, trans. J. W. Etheridge (London: Longman, Roberts, and Green, 1865), 196.

the phrase, "for the Name of the Lord," appears here as well; however, there are also more significant additions which resemble the Mishnaic and Enoch texts. In particular, *Pseudo-Jonathan* parallels the Mishnah, in that the scapegoat is destined to die.⁴⁹

The reference to the scapegoat's death in "a place rough and hard in the rocky desert which is Beth-hadurey" merits careful scrutiny, as it closely parallels the description of Azazel's punishment in *1 Enoch* 10:4-5. Hanson equates "Beth-hadurey" with the "Dudael" of the Enoch passage.⁵⁰ Moreover, *Pseudo-Jonathan's* "rocky desert" has its counterpart in the "desert which is in Dudael" and "jagged and sharp stones" of Enoch. Thus it is clear that the author of the Enoch passage, in his account of Azazel's banishment, was dependent on certain traditions involving the removal of the scapegoat, which were recorded in Targum Pseudojonathan.⁵¹

Conclusion

From the preceding analysis, it is evident that the authors of the apocalyptic texts known as *1 Enoch* and the *Apocalypse of Abraham* regarded Azazel as a demon. In fact, a number of attributes commonly associated with Satan appear in the depictions of Azazel contained in these works. Furthermore, the author of *1 Enoch* 10 apparently conceived of the scapegoat rite (especially as it is formulated in the Mishnah and in *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan*) as a paradigm of Azazel's banishment. Thus ancient Jewish traditions appear to be in agreement with the interpretation which finds in the expulsion of the scapegoat a type or model of the eschatological defeat of demonic power.

⁴⁹ Compare *Yoma* 6:6, *The Mishnah*, 170, with *The Targums of Onkelos and Jonathan Ben Uzziel on the Pentateuch*, 196, 198. However, *Yoma* 6:6 describes how the scapegoat was pushed over a cliff to its death, while Pseudo-Jonathan specifies that it would be carried to its death by a tempestuous wind.

⁵⁰ Hanson, 223-224.

⁵¹ Hanson also draws attention to *Pseudo-Jonathan's* "close affinities with *1 Enoch*" (223).

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