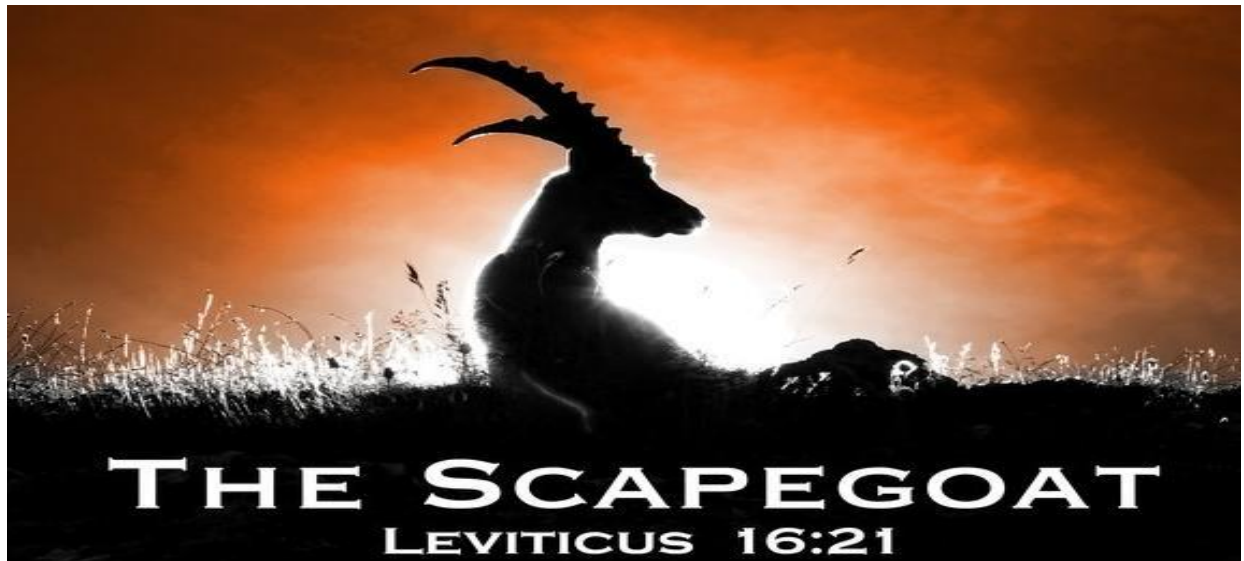


THE DEATH OF CHRIST: LAMB OF SACRIFICE & SCAPEGOAT FOR SIN!

by David Lee Burris









Aaron shall cast lots for the two goats, one lot for the LORD and the other lot for the scapegoat. Then Aaron shall offer the goat on which the lot for the LORD fell, and make it a sin offering. But the goat on which the lot for the scapegoat fell shall be presented alive before the LORD, to make atonement upon it, to send it into the wilderness as the scapegoat. Leviticus 16:8-10

Who is your Scapegoat?

The Day of Atonement

There were two features that distinguished this day of worship. First, it was the one day of the year that the high priest, and only the high priest, entered the Most Holy Place (Holy of Holies) of the Tent of Meeting (tabernacle) where he presented sacrificial blood as atoning sacrifice for the sins of Israel and the purification of the Tent of Meeting.

Inside the Most Holy Place was the Ark of the Covenant (a rectangular box) that represented the resident presence of God. The high priest sprinkled blood on the lid ("mercy seat") of the Ark of the Covenant, achieving the forgiveness of sin for the priest and the congregation.

Next, the high priest sprinkled blood in the outer room of the Tent of Meeting. The blood "decontaminated" the ceremonial impurities accumulated by the sins and the ceremonial uncleanness committed for the year. The purification of the Tent of Meeting was national in scope, giving a comprehensive purging of sins and impurities.

Second, the Day of Atonement included a ceremony that involved the expulsion of a *living* animal from the camp, traditionally translated "scapegoat."

The various aspects of the Day's ritual provide a rich, multi-dimensional understanding and appreciation of the atonement we have in Jesus. NT allusions to this Day give a pictorial anticipation of the death and mediatorial role of Christ whose sacrificial blood achieves our salvation and sanctification (e.g., Rom. 3:25; Heb. 10:10; 13:11-12).

Hebrews 9-10 give a sustained explanation for the typological significance of the Day of Atonement and the parallel ministry of Christ. The author refers to the roles of Christ as eternal high priest, perfect animal sacrifice, and his blood's perpetual purging of sin and corruption of the heavenly Tent of Meeting by the sprinkling of his own blood based on the one-time act of his death and ascension into the heavenly throne room of God (Heb. 9:1-10:18).

The provision made by Christ enables us to enter the heavenly Most Holy Place where we offer our prayers to God (Hebrews 10:19-20). However, the author doesn't refer to the scapegoat. What was the reason for the scapegoat, and what is its meaning for the ministry of Christ?

The meaning of the Hebrew word is uncertain; it occurs only in our chapter (vv. 8, 10, 26). Some versions render it the traditional "scapegoat," based on the proposed meaning "the goat that departs." Others simply transliterate the Hebrew *azazel* or *Azazel*, referring to a location in the desert or to the name of a goat-demon in the wilderness. The suggestion that it names a goat-demon is unlikely since there is a specific prohibition against making an offering to a goat-demon in Lev. 17:7. Scapegoat probably is the best choice since it reflects the role that the goat played in the ceremony.

By the high priest placing his hands on the head of the goat and confessing the sins of Israel, the priest symbolized the transference of the people's sin to the goat (vv. 20-22). Together the goat sacrificed and the living scapegoat showed that the goats were substituted for the people and that they bore the penalty of the sin.

The sacrificed goat perished and the scapegoat took away the impurities and sins to the wilderness (vv. 8-10). The scapegoat pictures Jesus who bore our sins, and by taking them away, frees us from the guilt of our sins.

As in the case of the wedding ceremony, the vows of committed love expressed by groom and bride don't automatically mean they are authentic. Performing the ritual on the Day of Atonement did not robotically ensure this forgiveness without sincere remorse for their sins. The people prepared themselves for the day by humbling themselves in penance before God (vv. 29, 31). – *Internet Search*

The Ultimate Scapegoat

“For on this day [Yom Kippur] shall atonement be made for you to cleanse you. You shall be clean before the Lord from all your sins.” (Leviticus 16:30)

The purpose of the holiday was twofold—first, to “be clean.” The idea of cleansing and purification is a fairly standard one in most every tradition. Most of the world religions have standards for purity and make provision when the adherents of that religion fall short. The holiday of Yom Kippur and its corresponding ritual of sacrifices function as the mechanism to purify and cleanse.

The second purpose of Yom Kippur is just as important, but easily missed: to be “before the Lord.” Here is where we find the Bible making a significant break from other religious traditions. Rather than having a God that simply needs to be appeased, the [God of the Bible requires cleansing for the purpose of relationship](#), because He wants to be with us. Much like a parent welcoming home a child after a summer’s day at the park—a child who is probably hot, sweaty and dirty—God wants us to be clean because He wants to enjoy our company. Our impurity is not something God permits in His presence. And so, He says to us much the same thing a parent would say to that child—go wash up before you come to the table to eat because I want a person who is clean at my table.

So, if being clean and being with the Lord are the dual purposes of the holiday, how was it supposed to work? If you’re only familiar with fasting on Yom Kippur, the fuller answer may surprise you. Leviticus chapter 16 lays out in vivid detail a system of sacrifice. Though it may be unfamiliar and maybe even shocking to modern readers, physical sacrifices were indispensable to the celebration of Yom Kippur.

The ritual began with the High Priest (Aaron in the Leviticus passage) preparing himself by bathing and changing into a special set of holiday vestments that included a turban and sash! He then selected three animals as sacrifices—two young goats and one bull. The goats each had a purpose—one as a sacrificial offering and the other as a scapegoat. Aaron cast lots (not unlike a roll of a die) to select one goat as the offering and the other as scapegoat. This random selection ensured that the high priest would not be able to sway the decision; God Himself would make the decision. The goat selected as an offering was killed along with the young bull. Their blood together was brought into the center, most holy place of the Temple. That sacrifice atoned for (cleansed, purified) the High Priest, the people and the sanctuary. [The stage was set for the next goat, the scapegoat.](#)

What followed next was very dramatic . The High Priest placed both hands upon the head of the goat & confessed aloud the sins of the nation, transferring them to the goat. This casting of the sins was more than symbolic; it was ritual. As the previous goat was killed as a representative of the nation before God, this goat would carry away the sins as a representative of the nation. In our world today, this kind of confession is rare. Today, we would think of the scapegoat as in need of some kind of written contract releasing the nation from its guilt and contractually placing that guilt onto the goat. In the biblical world, a person's word, their confession, was as valid as any written contract.

The goat was then brought deep into the wilderness by some trusted man and released in a barren place. Ancient Jewish tradition records that the goat would be led to a rocky place, or a place of jagged rocks to ensure the death of the goat in the wilderness. Evidently the rabbis wanted to make sure the sins wouldn't make their way back into the camp looking for something to eat! This is the tradition of the Azazel, the scapegoat.

Of the myriad of theories about Azazel, two are the most common. The first says that Azazel is a combination of the Hebrew word for goat (az) and the Hebrew word for to carry or to take away (azel). This is the basis for the translation of the word Azazel as scapegoat—literally, the goat who would carry away the sin of Israel, the “tote-goat.” When the text says that the goat would be “for Azazel,” the meaning is better rendered “as Azazel” or “as the scapegoat.”

The second theory is that Azazel is a proper name of an individual, perhaps a demonic being who lives in the wilderness.

One thing is certainly clear: in the biblical tradition of Yom Kippur, God calls for two goats—one a sin offering for Himself and one as a vehicle to remove the sins from the nation. It's clear from the text why God wanted this done—so the people would be clean before Him.

In this Yom Kippur tradition we're told, clearly and dramatically, what God wants. He wants us to be cleansed from our sin and He wants for us to be with Him. We learn that though sin is not welcome in God's presence, sinners are. Though impurity cannot dwell with God, the impure can.

But God wants us to have that assurance so that we can enter into close relationship with Him. So, some 40 years before the Temple was destroyed, He provided a once-and-for-all scapegoat who suffered and died a horrific death on a wooden cross. The prophet Isaiah spoke of him, declaring, “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all” (Isaiah 53:6). - Josh Sofaer

The Atonement

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The doctrine regarding the atonement accomplished by Christ in His suffering and death has been the subject of fierce debate down through the centuries since the "deposit of the faith" came into its final form. During apostolic times the controversy was nonexistent. The various descriptive analogues and illustrative figures gave the first generation of Christians no difficulty whatever. They were at work evangelizing the world. There was little time for pondering the thousandfold implications of the multi-faceted doctrine. With the growth of the church in power and numbers, however, scholars appeared on the scene who thirsted for the knowledge of the infinite. They had time for theorizing and imaginative natures adept at speculative thinking. Thus, history tells us that it has been the same with the atonement as with almost every other theological motif or concept, the less that was said about it in the Bible, the greater the tendency to speculate about what little was revealed. Often there was an unscrupulous "harping" upon a single area that had been obsessively focused upon-it was stressed while other important principles and passages were neglected or even denied. This has been the story of the atonement doctrine throughout the ages. At the outset, . genuine biblical principles have usually been taken and stressed (and quite often mutilated in the process) to the exclusion of others that are just as "genuine" and just as "biblical." What usually has resulted is a completely unbiblical doctrine. The various histories of "Christian Doctrine" attest to this old pattern again and again. And, if histories are forthcoming in years ahead, then the story of the present-day folly will be told in objective terms that will betray both its unbiblical character and its subjective motivation. Our purpose in this study is to look at the doctrine of the atonement as it is presented in the Bible as well as pointing out historical and contemporary perversions of the concept.

At-One-Ment?

Our English word "atonement" is derived from the phrase "at one." The significance is therefore quite clear. It obviously describes a process by which two alienated parties are brought together into an harmonious relationship (in this case God and man), or the resultant unitive state. Another term describing such a state or process is "reconciliation."

Moreover, in the modern usage of the word, "atonement" has taken on the more restricted meaning of the process by which the hindrances to reconciliation are removed, rather than the end achieved by their removal. Thus, when we talk about the biblical doctrine of the atonement, our intention is to make allusion to the process by which the obstacles to reconciliation between man and God were removed.

The Bible as a whole assumes the need for some "atoning action" on the part of man (but in every case devised by and thus acceptable to God), if he is to be right with God. It is accepted as a fact beyond dispute that man is estranged from God, and is himself entirely to blame for this estrangement (Isa. 59:1,2; Rom. 3:23; 5:10; 8:7; Eph. 2:12; 4:18; Col. 2:12). His disobedience to the will of God-i.e. his sin-has alienated him from God, and this alienation must first be remedied if right relationships are to be restored. The barrier raised by man's past sins must be removed (Gal. 6:7; Rom. 1:18; 6:23; Eph. 2:1). One purpose of the elaborate sacrificial system of Old Testament religion was to provide such an "atonement" for human sin. In the ritual for the consecration of priests, it is required: "Every day you shall offer a bull as a sin offering for atonement" (Ex. 29:36). Similarly, the priests must make sacrifice for the sins of all the people that they may be forgiven (Lev. 4:20). In the ritual of the Day of Atonement the first of two goats is slain, but the second "shall be presented alive before the Lord to make atonement" (Lev. 16:9,10). This live goat is driven out into the wilderness, laden with the sins of the people. It is also possible to offer money for the temple "to make atonement for yourselves" (Ex. 30:16), as well as incense (Num. 16:47), or prayer (Ex. 32:30). In the New Testament, though, atonement is related to none of these things (except as they acted as shadows and types of the reality and anti-type). It is related entirely to Jesus Christ and His coming to earth, and especially with His death upon the cross. Much of the language of Old Testament immolationism and sacerdotalism were used to describe his death because He was both priest and sacrifice to end all Old Testament priests and sacrifices (Heb. 8:1,2; 9:11-28). In addition, the New Testament declares that in Christ and His death is all that man needs in order to find his sins forgiven (Eph. 1:7) and his life reconciled to God (Rom. 5:10); in Him is that which can cancel out the ill effects of sin (1 Jn. 2:2), release man from the burden of his guilt (Heb. 10:22), and grant him peace with God (Eph. 2:16-18). Man can rejoice in God because of the reconciliation (Rom. 5:11), having free access to God through Jesus Christ (Eph. 3:11,12). **The "at-one-ment" has been accomplished.**

Jesus-Christ-Our-Scapegoat.

To Christians, both of these rites are regarded as a foreshadowing of (and must therefore find their ultimate meaning in) the future sacrificial Crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Christians believe that, through dying on the cross, Christ not only "propitiated" God's wrath over sin, but also "expiated" us from carrying the burden of sin, by actually doing away with it as Jesus-Christ-Our-Scapegoat.

Propitiation:

By "propitiation" we come to understand the notion of "imputed righteousness". We believe that even though we still remain sinners, from God's perspective, we appear as being covered and shielded by "the righteousness of Christ" and are therefore "counted" as righteous!

Expiation:

By "expiation" on the other hand, we come to understand that we have actually been physically "cleansed" of our sins and thereby "made righteous". Jesus does not just hide our sin but in fact completely removes them, enabling us to "appear righteous" in the eyes of God! Jesus, being both Jesus Christ "The Lords Goat", as well as "Jesus-Christ-Our-Scapegoat" therefore fulfilled both of these rolls. He is our savior & our redeemer fulfilling both of these sacrificial rolls, not because we deserve it, but out of His love for us! **Ephesians 2:4-9:**

"But God, being rich in mercy, for his great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved) and raised us up with him, and made us to sit with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus; for by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, that no one would boast."

Jesus-Christ-Our-Scapegoat is no "fall guy." He is God Incarnate, taking upon Himself the punishment we deserve – not just to balance the books, but wipe our slate clean. What Amazing Love! What blessing of grace to be able to know Him as "Jesus-Christ-Our-Scapegoat!"

Hebrews 9:5 & Romans 3:25 – Christ Jesus: Our Propitiation

By [Wayne Jackson](#)

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In the ninth chapter of the book of Hebrews, the inspired writer discusses the tabernacle arrangement of the Old Testament regime.

“And after the second veil, the tabernacle which is called the Holy of holies; having a golden altar of incense, and the ark of the covenant overlaid round about with gold, wherein was a golden pot holding the manna, and Aaron’s rod that budded, and the tables of the covenant; and above it cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy-seat; of which things we cannot now speak severally” (Heb. 9:3-5).

The ark of the covenant was placed in that inner compartment, called the “Holy of holies.” Within the ark were: the golden pot of manna, Aaron’s almond rod, and the tables of stone inscribed with the ten commandments. On top of the ark was a lid called the “mercy-seat.”

In a manner of speaking, the mercy-seat concealed from the Lord’s view the ever-condemning judgment of the law. Each year, on the day of atonement, the high priest entered the Holy of holies and sprinkled blood on the mercy-seat.

The point conveyed by this imagery is this: It is only through the offering of blood that the condemnation of the law can be abated, and violations thereof covered.

In the Greek Testament, the original word for “mercy-seat” in Hebrews 9:5 is hilasterion, denoting “that which makes expiation,” or “propitiation” (cf. ASV fn). It carries the idea of the removal of sin.

In Ezekiel 43:14 (LXX), the brazen altar of sacrifice is also called hilasterion (the propitiatory mercy-seat) because of its association with the shedding of blood for sin.

What is the significance of this? In the New Testament Christ, is designated as our “propitiation.”

“being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in **Christ Jesus**: whom God set forth to be **a propitiation**, through faith, in his blood, to show his righteousness because of the passing over of the sins done aforetime, in the forbearance of God” (Rom. 3:24-25; emphasis added).

Jesus is the covering for sin, as previewed by these Old Testament prophetic images. By means of his death, and our response to the requirements of “the faith” system, all our past sins are covered.

Later in Romans, Paul pinpoints precisely when this occurs.

“Or are ye ignorant that all we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him through baptism unto death: that like as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we also might walk in newness of life” (Rom. 6:3-4).

“But thanks be to God, that, whereas ye were servants of sin, ye became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching whereunto ye were delivered; and being made free from sin, ye became servants of righteousness” (Rom. 6:17-18).

It is when we, upon the basis of penitent faith, are buried with Christ in baptism, to be raised in “newness of life.” By our obedience to the divine commands, we are made “free from sin.”

Too, whenever we sin as children of God, we may turn to Christ, who continues to be “the propitiation” for our sins — which blessing extends, potentially, to the entire world (1 Jn. 2:1; cf. 4:10).

Thus, underline “mercy-seat” in Hebrews 9:5. Marginally note: *See Romans 3:25*. Then, beside Romans 3:25 make this notation: *See 6:3-4, 17-18*.

Briefly, this ties together the Old and New Testament concepts regarding the covering of sin.

Does the Scapegoat Destroy Biblical Ethics?

by [Caleb Colley, Ph.D.](#)

Simon Blackburn is a professor of metaphysics, ethics, and philosophy of mind and language at the University of Cambridge and at the University of North Carolina (“Simon Blackburn,” 2008; “Simon Blackburn,” 2010). His influence has been widened by his production of popular works about philosophical topics. One of these is his book *Being Good*, a text regularly encountered by undergraduates in introductory ethics classes. In *Being Good*, Blackburn levels a number of attacks at Christianity, most of which we have dealt with previously (see [Colley](#), 2010).

In *Being Good*, Blackburn alleges that God was unjust when He punished Jesus for the sins of humanity: “[T]he overall story of ‘atonement’ and ‘redemption’ is morally dubious, suggesting as it does that justice can be satisfied by the sacrifice of an innocent for the sins of the guilty—the doctrine of the scapegoat” (p. 12). This is all Blackburn wrote on the subject (at least in *Being Good*). In context, Blackburn’s point is that, because the use of a scapegoat is morally unacceptable, and biblical morality allowed Christ to be used as a scapegoat, then the Bible is unacceptable as ethical guide. Atheistic writer Christopher Hitchens has echoed this sentiment: “We cannot, like fear-ridden peasants of antiquity, hope to load all our crimes onto a goat.... Our everyday idiom is quite sound in regarding ‘scapegoating’ with contempt. And religion is scapegoating writ large” (2007, p. 211).

THE SCAPEGOAT IN THE BIBLE

The scapegoat concept will be familiar to students of the Old Testament. The only mention of the scapegoat is in the passage about the institution of the Day of Atonement in the Mosaic Law:

Aaron shall offer the bull as a sin offering, which is for himself and for his house. He shall take the two goats and present them before the Lord at the door of the tabernacle of meeting. Then Aaron shall cast lots for the two goats: one lot for the Lord and the other lot for the scapegoat. And Aaron shall bring the goat on which the Lord’s lot fell, and offer it as a sin offering. But the goat on which the lot fell to be the scapegoat shall be presented alive before the Lord, to make atonement upon it, and to let it go as the scapegoat into the wilderness.... And when he has made an end of atoning for the Holy Place, the tabernacle of meeting, and the altar, he shall bring the live goat. Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goat, confess over it all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions, concerning all their sins, putting them on the head of the goat, and shall send it away into the wilderness by the hand of a suitable man. The goat shall bear on itself all their iniquities to an uninhabited land; and he shall release the goat in the wilderness (Leviticus 16:7-10, 20-22).

The word translated “scapegoat” in the Leviticus text literally means “for Azazel.” The meaning of Azazel is obscure; it seems to refer to the sending away of the goat (see Möller, 1929, 1:342-343).

Observe several points about the scapegoat in Leviticus (adapted from Ryken, et al., 1998, pp. 763-764): (1) The goat was not a sacrifice to God. Only a perfect animal could be sacrificed to Him on the Day of Atonement (Lev 1:10). (2) The discharge of sin by means of the scapegoat was possible only because God arranged it. (3) There were further special circumstances surrounding the use of the scapegoat. It was not as if the people could indiscriminately kill goats to get rid of sin. (4) God Himself chose the scapegoat. In sum, God was in charge of the whole process.

The Bible writers never designated Christ as God’s scapegoat *per se*. Yet, the vivid imagery of the scapegoat, in combination with the New Testament record of the death of Christ and resulting atonement, does suggest a metaphorical connection between the Levitical offering of the scapegoat and the crucifixion as an example of foreshadowing, or a type/antitype relationship.

The motif of a creature chosen by God carrying the sins of the people out of an inhabited place in order to face God’s judgment reappears several times in the [New Testament].... Jesus is the sacrifice for our sins (Heb 10:1-18), an offering to God and not “for Azazel.” Yet John the Baptist calls Jesus the “Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world” (Jn 1:29), and in Hebrews 13:12-13 the point is stressed that Jesus was crucified outside the city. [T]he disposal of sin is considered as an almost physical process: sin is loaded onto Jesus; he is driven out of town & given over to God’s curse (Gal 3:13). His death is a rightful consequence of our sinning (Rom 6:23). Thus, some aspects of the ultimate justification by Christ are foreshadowed in the scapegoat ritual (Ryken, et al., p. 764, parenthetical items in orig.).

It is fair to suggest that the Bible portrays Jesus as a scapegoat in some ways.
Does this damage the credibility of biblical ethics?

GOD WAS NOT UNJUST

The shocking thing about Blackburn’s proposal is that it is the extreme secular response to God’s grace. Only someone who wholeheartedly rejects the supernatural and feels no spiritual poverty could react to his sole means of salvation from eternal damnation by complaining coldly that the system fails to satisfy his own idea of justice. Yet, to the degree that Blackburn’s view is influential, it must be answered.

First, there are some points implicit in Blackburn's statement with which we would agree. We have no argument with the idea that the Father ultimately was responsible for the death of the Son. The Father "did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all" (Romans 8:32). Nor do we contest that Jesus' death was substitutionary punishment. He clearly suffered in our place (Isaiah 53:1-12; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Galatians 3:10,13; 1 Peter 2:24). We also agree with Blackburn that for one human person to use another human person as a scapegoat is morally wrong (cf. Matthew 7:12; Romans 12:17; Ephesians 4:32).

Our disagreement arises because Blackburn and Hitchens fail to appreciate the unity with which the Father and the Son operate. Jesus claimed that He and His Father are one (John 10:30). The skeptics seem to want us to view the vicarious death of Christ in a similar way as a judge finding a defendant guilty of a high crime, and giving the death penalty to an innocent bystander instead of the defendant. None of us would condone such a sentence. Yet, Christ does not fit the role of the bystander in this hypothetical case. Christ is in fact the **Judge** & has all authority in spiritual matters: Jesus, as the Father's agent, will judge the living and the dead (see Acts 10:42; Acts 17:31; 2 Corinthians 5:10; 2 Timothy 4:1; 1 Peter 4:5; etc.). Jesus, as both Judge and willing participant in the scheme of redemption, essentially sentenced **Himself** to death (Romans 5:8; cf. Matthew 26:42). He voluntarily gave Himself (Galatians 2:20; Ephesians 5:1), and He will judge us as innocent only if we accept his terms of salvation, based on His grace (Ephesians 2:8-9).

To extend the courtroom illustration, consider that in the case of Christ, the trial took place before there ever was a defendant. The plan whereby Christ would die to offer salvation to the world was established infinitely prior to the first human sin. The plan was "according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Ephesians 3:11). It was not as though man sinned & then God was forced to develop an *ad hoc* plan for justice, and He somehow settled on substitutionary atonement.

Furthermore, there is a sense in which every sinner who is saved must die. Paul explained this:

[D]o you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore, we were buried with Him through baptism into death.... [O]ur old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him.... [R]eckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 6:3-4,6-8,11).

We participate in Christ's death symbolically when we are immersed into water, at which point we contact the blood of Christ (e.g., Galatians 3:27; Titus 3:5; 1 John 1:7; Revelation 1:5).

Finally, as with all illustrations, the idea that Christ is a scapegoat can only be taken so far. Insofar as God used the scapegoat as a foreshadowing of Christ, the imagery seems to have been used primarily to impress upon us that the crucifixion facilitated the removal of sins far away from those who are saved. Other images might be used to convey this notion (e.g., Psalms 103:12; Micah 7:19), but perhaps none of them are as powerfully illustrative of Christ's redemptive role. If anyone imagines that the scapegoat illustration does much more than this, then he is on shaky interpretive ground, because the scapegoat concept does not cover everything that happened at the cross. For example, Blackburn ignored the fact that Christ's death & resurrection initiated the establishment of a new covenant, a new system of religion. "For where there is a testament, there must of necessity be the death of the testator" (Hebrews 9:16). The will of Christ concerning the gospel plan for redeeming man in His body (the church; Ephesians 1:22-23) was brought into effect because Christ was willing to undergo physical death. "He takes away the first (the system of animal sacrifice) that He may establish the second (sanctification through Christ)" (Hebrews 10:9, parenthetical items added; cf. 8:7-13).

We are grateful for Christ's sacrifice on many levels, and our appreciation is only enhanced by Old Testament imagery that provides insight into various aspects of God's mercy. "[T]he love of Christ compels us..." (2 Corinthians 5:17).

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Two Men of Opportunity

The people of Israel—the people who under God gave us the Hebrew Scriptures that we call the Old Testament— took sin seriously. Since that was the case, the biggest day of the year in Israel was the Day of Atonement. This was the day when the nation dealt, at a national level, with sin. One might appear before God as an individual sinner at any time, but the Day of Atonement was a national act of repentance. The day was full of ceremony and ritual, all of it dramatic in symbolism. I want us to concentrate on one peculiar activity of the Day of Atonement. Early in the ritual the high priest would take a bull and two goats. The bull and one goat were slain, and their blood was sprinkled ceremoniously, seven times, on the mercy seat of the altar in their place of worship. This brought atonement for the holy place, the tent of meeting, and the altar. Then the high priest, in his epic moment of the year, was to

lay both his hands on the head of the live goat, and confess over it all the iniquities of the people of Israel, and all their transgressions, all their sins, putting them on the head of the goat, and sending it away into the wilderness by means of someone designated for the task. The goat shall bear on itself all their iniquities to a barren region; and the goat shall be set free in the wilderness. (Leviticus 16:21-22)

But the Israelites didn't seek simply to have their troubles or their sickness or some natural disaster carried away but their *sins*. They wanted to know that their relationship to God was without impediment, and they understood that sin was ultimately the basis for all of earth's pain—most particularly because sin separates the human soul from God. The primary issue, therefore, was to be rid of sin. And because they had a sense of community, of human solidarity, which is difficult for people of our individualistic culture to understand, they sought forgiveness not for their personal sins but for the sins of the nation.

Dr. Alter notes further that early rabbis added to the momentum of the ritual by imagining the goat being pushed off a high cliff. But the descriptive word in Leviticus is simply that the animal was set free in the howling wilderness, far from human habitation—a place, I suspect, that most humans avoided even in the daylight hours—a place of lostness and desolation.

That goat has gotten a place not only in our religious consciousness but even in our language. The dictionary calls him the *scapegoat*, with the definition, "one who is made to bear the blame for others or to suffer in their place." The dictionary then directs its readers to the biblical incident we've described. Our common speech has abbreviated the term. Thus, we say it of a person who is easily victimized. When next you hear the term, picture a beast being led into the wilderness in the ancient Middle East.

But if the scapegoat was the lead character in the long-ago celebration of the Day of Atonement, I want us to observe now the supporting character, the man who led the goat into the wilderness, perhaps even to a cliff—perhaps, in such a scenario, even pushing the animal off the cliff. His assignment doesn't seem to call for any unique skill. He needed to be familiar enough with animal life to cope with the peculiar personality of the goat, but in a pastoral economy almost any teenage boy or girl had such experience. The person needed enough courage to go at

least to the edge of the wilderness, and more likely into the wilderness itself, to set the goat on its course of lostness. Yes, and courageous enough to deal if necessary with wild beasts along the way. But on the whole, it doesn't seem to have been a skilled job. Perhaps. But one gets the feeling that this person was nevertheless quite special. We're not told how he was chosen, which only adds to his mystery, but it's clear that he was seen as being out of the ordinary. The New Revised Standard Version of the Bible calls him "someone designated for the task," then adds in a footnote, "Meaning of Hebrew uncertain" (Leviticus 16:21). If you're a detective, it's hard to let that one go. The ace detective to whom I referred earlier, Robert Alter, calls him "a man for the hour" and explains in his footnote that the "expression appears only here" and that its literal sense is "a timely man," and that "it probably indicates a man chosen to serve for this time and task."

But I like best of all the language of the King James Version, the translation in which I first read the Bible as a boy. Here he is called "a fit man," with the footnote, "Hebrew, a man of opportunity." Whenever you think of this anonymous character—background unidentified, training unknown, yet trusted with a uniquely sacred assignment—call him "a man of opportunity." He is only a supporting actor in the drama of a nation's redemption—some would even identify him, I suppose, as a bit player—but as he walks along, sometimes prodding his reluctant companion, doing what is surely unskilled labor, know that for this year a nation's sense of divine acceptance rests upon his doing his peculiarly ordinary task successfully.

The detective work in the book of Hebrews goes beyond all the rest. He found pictures of Christ not only in the messages of the prophets but also in numbers of places, events, rituals, and ceremonies of the Hebrew Scriptures. So, when the writer refers to the sacrifice that Jesus made at Calvary he sees significance in the place of our Lord's death. "For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest as a sacrifice for sin are burned outside the camp. Therefore, Jesus also suffered outside the city gate in order to sanctify the people by his own blood" (Hebrews 13:11-12). The writer of Hebrews was dealing with an idea that many of the early scholars of the church, such as Leo the Great in the fifth century, pondered. Jesus was the ultimate sacrifice, yet it was not on an altar in the place of worship; rather, he died in a public place on a public highway outside the city, so to speak. Thus, his death had its symbolism in the disposal of the animal sacrifices in a place of burning outside the city. But there is a picture, too, in the scapegoat, because it died not at the altar of the temple but outside the city—indeed, outside civilization, much as one would treat a shameful criminal, a creature so reprehensible that it was better it should be banished from public view.

But I am more interested still in how Jesus got to the place of death. I reason that there must be a supporting actor, someone like that "man for the hour," or even more particularly, "the man of opportunity." I offer two possibilities—two quite different possibilities, in fact. The first is the man named Judas. He was one of the twelve disciples, the chosen group privileged to live with Jesus day after day, observe his miracles, bathe in his teachings and in the wonder of his person. I suspect that he was in many ways one of the most talented of the disciples. I judge this from his being chosen to serve as the group's treasurer. After all, several of the disciples were small business owners, part of family fishing businesses that had additional employees; and Matthew was a tax collector, accustomed to handling money. Yet Judas was the treasurer of the twelve. There had to have been a good argument for his being chosen above his fellows.

But something went wrong in Judas's soul, so wrong that eventually he betrayed his Lord for thirty pieces of silver. The Gospel of John indicates that he did so out of his love of money. Some scholars, wanting to redeem Judas's name, try to prove that Judas was very committed to Jesus as a political redeemer and that he hoped that by the betrayal he would force Jesus to declare himself as Israel's king. However, it was, Judas betrayed Jesus.

Having made his betrayal contract with the enemies of Jesus, Judas had to find the circumstance that was just right: an occasion when there was the least danger of people rising up to defend Jesus. The Gospels of Matthew and Luke use the same phrase to describe what was going on in Judas's mind: he "began to look for an opportunity to betray him" (Matthew 26:16, Luke 22:6).

The phrase intrigues me because it reminds me of that phrase that the King James Version says best expresses the Hebrew description for the man who took the scapegoat into the wilderness: he was "a man of opportunity."

I'm not trying to establish a doctrine. I'm just a detective, that's all, and I find it fascinating that the man who led the scapegoat on the Day of Atonement was a man of opportunity—and that when Judas agreed to betray Jesus, he set out immediately to find the opportunity to do so.

The other possibility is a man who was somewhere in the crowd on the day Jesus was being led to crucifixion. His name was Simon, and he was from Cyrene on the North African coast. Here is Mark's report: "They compelled a passer-by, who was coming in from the country, to carry his cross; it was Simon of Cyrene, the father of Alexander and Rufus" (Mark 15:21). Careful students have long suggested that when Mark bothers to tell us that Simon is the father of Alexander and Rufus it indicates that these men were well-known as early followers of Jesus. Some note that the Apostle Paul includes a Rufus in his list of greetings when he writes to the church at Rome (Romans 16:13).

So perhaps Simon the Cyrenian is the man of opportunity. After all, he was just in town, probably doing routine business, when Roman soldiers rudely pulled him—by chance?—from his place as an innocent bystander and made him Jesus' companion, carrying our Lord's cross outside the town to the place of crucifixion. Was it divine providence that Simon was standing just where he was at just the opportune time?

Very, very long ago the people of Israel chose a man of opportunity to guide the scapegoat into the wilderness as he carried, by their faith, the nation's sins of the year. And now I see a day almost two millennia ago when another Scapegoat carried the sins, not simply of a nation but of all humankind, and not simply for a year but for the ages, to a place outside the city. And here again, I see an opportune figure. Is it Judas the betrayer, or is it Simon the bearer of the cross? Or is it both, like all the mixed figures of our human race? ¹

¹ Kalas, J. E. (2010). [*Detective stories from the bible*](#). Nashville: Abingdon Press.

Which “Man of Opportunity” Are You?

JUDGEMENT PREPARED FIVE STATES FIVE STEPS

Five States of the Soul:

- EXEMPTION:
- Ezekiel 18: 20; Matthew 18: 1 – 3
- CONDEMNATION:
- Galatians 3: 22
- JUSTIFICATION:
- Romans 5: 1, 2; 8: 1, 2
- DAMNATION:
- Matthew 23: 3; Mark 16: 16
- GLORIFICATION:
- Romans 8: 17, 30; II Thess. 1: 7 – 12

JUDGEMENT PREPARED

FIVE STATES FIVE STEPS

Five Steps For Saving:

- **HEARING:**
- Romans 10: 17; Matthew 7: 24 - 27
- **BELIEVING:**
- Hebrews 11: 6; Mark 16: 15, 16
- **REPENTING:**
- Acts 2: 38; 17: 30; Luke 13: 3
- **CONFESSING:**
- Matthew 10: 32, 33; Acts 8: 36, 37
- **BAPTISM:**
- Romans 6: 3 – 5; Acts 8: 36 - 38