

Azazel in the Pseudepigrapha

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The name “Azazel” appears in only one biblical passage, Lev 16. There a male goat was selected for Azazel, just as one was selected for Yahweh (vv. 8–10). The goat for Yahweh was sacrificed and its blood taken into the sanctuary for ministration there (vv. 15–19), but the goat for Azazel was not sacrificed. Instead, the symbolic record of sins taken out of the sanctuary was placed upon the head of Azazel’s goat, and it was taken to the wilderness and released “to Azazel” (v. 22, RSV).

By parallelism with the goat selected for Yahweh, the goat selected for Azazel is seen as being selected for another personal being of another type, the antithesis of Yahweh. The fact that this goat was not slain and its blood was not shed indicates that this goat served as part of a removal rite. It did not serve for the forgiveness of sins.

Seventh-day Interpreters¹ have applied the Lord’s goat to Jesus Christ and seen his death on the cross as the antitype of this goat’s death, while Azazel’s goat is taken as symbolizing a demonic figure, i.e., Satan, to whom the responsibility for the sin problem is ultimately attributed. The wandering in the wilderness of the live goat is then applied to the fate of Satan during the millennium (Rev 20:1–3) before he is thrown into the lake of fire at the end of that period (v. 10).

Some evangelical writers see both the Lord’s goat and Azazel’s goat as types of Christ, but others see Azazel’s goat as a demonic figure. Representing this latter view is the statement, “Since verse 8 identifies one goat as ‘for Ya-

¹ F. D. Nichol, ed., *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* (Washington, D.C.: Review & Herald, 1953), 1: 775; S. H. Horn, ed., *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Dictionary* (Washington, D.C.: Review & Herald, 1960), 97; A. M. Rodriguez, “The Sanctuary” in R. Dederen, ed., *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theological Commentary Reference Series* (Hagerstown: Review & Herald, 2000), 12:387

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hewh' and the other goat as 'for Azazel,' it is most consistent to consider Azazel a proper name, probably of a demon."²

I Enoch

Some of the writers noted previously have noted that the pseudepigraphical work of I Enoch uses the name Azazel for one of the evil angels. In support of the demonic interpretation of Azazel, it may be useful to review the occurrences of this name in this pre-Christian work to see just how that source makes use of this name.

There are eight references to Azazel in I Enoch. These references are distributed through two or three of the major sections of this book. Four references occur in The Book of the Watchers, chapters 1–10 (8:1; 9:6; 10:4, 8). The Book of Enoch's Heavenly Journeys, chapters 11–36, is sometimes included with The Book of the Watchers and sometimes divided from it. There is one reference to Azazel in this section: 13:1–3. These chapters, 1–36, are commonly dated to the first half of the second century B.C. on the basis of the finding of fragments from five different manuscripts of this section among the Dead Sea Scrolls.³

Book III (or II depending on how one divides the text) is known as the Parables of Enoch. It includes chapters 37–71. There are three references to Azazel in this section: 54:5; 55:5; and 69:3. This section is commonly dated to the last half of the first century B.C.⁴

These references will be studied in the order in which they occur in I Enoch.

8:1 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 dyes. And the world was changed. And there was great impiety and much fornication, and they went astray, and all their ways became corrupt.⁵

In this passage Azazel belongs to a class of evil angels known as the Watchers, a long list of whom are named in chapter 6. Here Azazel exercises his talent in two directions, towards men and towards women. For the men he has instructed them in the production of weapons of war so that they might fight with each other.

The women he has taught to beautify themselves so that they might seduce men. The result of the latter is given as "much fornication." The result of both taken together is that they produced much impiety and corrupted human ways.

² J. H. Walton, V. H. Matthews and M. W. Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2000), 131.

³ H.F.D. Sparks, ed., *The Apocryphal Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1984), 174.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 175.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 190–191. Translation by M. A. Knibb. This is the translation used for the rest of the quotes from passages from I Enoch.

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This work of Azazel is also the work of Satan from the biblical point of view, though the Bible is less explicit.

9:6 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.

This statement is more comprehensive than the first, though less specific. The preceding case states that Azazel worked in two special ways to corrupt mankind. Here it is stated that he “taught all iniquity on the earth.” This takes in not just the two aspects of evil taught previously, but includes all others. The reference to the “secrets in heaven” is not clear, but what is clear is that Azazel was not supposed to reveal them on earth, but he went ahead and did it 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 the results of the work of Azazel, i.e., the work of Satan, come down upon him. This is his judgment for the works cited earlier in 8:1 and 9:6. This Azazel suffers the same fate as his goat does in Lev 16, but that fate is now elaborated in the antitype. He is cast out into a wilderness or desert, but now that desert splits open to accommodate him to a world of darkness, i.e., the abyss. There he is to be covered up “for ever.” This is an extrabiblical case where “for ever” does not mean “for ever and ever and ever.” It simply refers to the time allotted to it. For after this comes the second phase of judgment. He is cast into the fire on the great day of judgment.

Thus there are two phases to the judgment of Azazel. First he is cast into the abyss of the split desert, and after that he is thrown into the fire. This provides a close parallel to the fate of Satan during and at the end of the millennium, according to Rev 20. There he is imprisoned in the abyss at the beginning of the millennium, and at the end of the millennium he is cast into the lake of fire during the great white throne judgment. I Enoch continues parallel to Revelation in this case, for the next statement, in 10:7, is that the earth, which had been ruined by evil angels, will be restored by God.

10:8 And the whole earth has been ruined by the teaching of the works of Azazel, and against him write down all sin.

This statement is an antitypical extension of Lev 16:21, which says Aaron was to confess, over Azazel’s goat, “all the iniquities of the people of Israel, all their transgression, all their sins.” That case was localized to the people of God, Israel. This case is more comprehensive, as it is not limited to the people of God. Now it is all the sins of the whole earth that are in view, and they are to be written down, recorded against, the account of Azazel. As the one ultimately respon-

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sible for the whole sin problem, Azazel/Satan's fate for this activity is what has been stated earlier: the abyss, followed by the fire.

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.

In his travels Enoch goes to Azazel and tells him what his fate will be and why. In this case only the first phase of Azazel's punishment is revealed, his being bound and his being without mercy and rest. The second phase of his punishment—the lake of fire—is not mentioned here. The reason for his punishment is clear: because of the wrong he has taught the sons of men, not just the Israelites. That wrong is elaborated into all blasphemy and wrong and sin. The use of these multiple words to describe the evil that Azazel has done emphasizes his comprehensive program for the wickedness of mankind.

54:5 These [instruments of chains] 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 their iniquity, in that they became servants of Satan and led astray those who dwell upon the dry ground.

Before the beginning of this quotation, this passage begins with the kings of the earth and the great men who are thrown into a burning valley (vv. 1–2). Then the evil angels are sentenced to join them. As the “hosts of Azazel,” they join Azazel in the judgments that are to fall upon him. First they are thrown into the abyss, the lowest level of Hell, and then subsequently they are thrown into the fire on the great day of judgment. Again, as in 10:4 and Rev 20, there are two phases of judgment for both Azazel and his servants the evil angels. The identification of Azazel with Satan is clear in this passage. The evil angels are first identified as the hosts of Azazel, and then it is said that they do the works of Satan.

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.

This chapter opens with reference to the “Head of Days”—equivalent to the Ancient of Days in Dan 7:9 and 13. The Chosen One, i.e., the Son of Man of Dan 7:13–14, sits down on the throne of glory of the Ancient of Days. He sits there especially to judge Azazel or Satan and his associates and his hosts. The dual reference at the end of this passage may refer to the evil angels as belong-

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ing to one group, and the wicked of mankind in the other. Thus all the wicked will be judged by the Head of Days/Ancient of Days and the Chosen One/Son of Man in this final sitting of the judgment.

The final reference to Azazel in I Enoch is in 69:3. This finds him in the list of evil angels or Watchers. They are named, just as they are named in chapter 6, preceding the first reference to the works of Azazel in 8:1. Here they are also numbered, and Azazel is number twenty-one, the final number in this list. After this the text goes on to identify the various evil angels who direct various sub-groups of evil angels. The fact that Azazel is named and numbered last may lend importance to his position in this scheme of things.

Summary of Azazel in I Enoch

The last reference to Azazel, in 69:3, simply lists him among the Watchers or evil angels. That places him in his appropriate category and probably places emphasis upon his importance there. This parallels the first reference to him, in 8:1, which follows after a similar list of Watchers in chapter six. Thus these two lists place a bracket around Azazel within which his works and fate are described.

From that point on two aspects of his existence are spelled out. The first is his work of introducing the human race to evil. The second is his fate as a consequence of that work. In some passages these two features are joined together, but in others they appear singly.

His works of evil are identified in five passages. In 9:6 he is held responsible for teaching all iniquity. In 10:8 all iniquity is written down or recorded against him. The same thought is echoed in 13:1–2, where all wrongs—identified as all blasphemy and wrong and sin—are attributed to him. I Enoch 8:1 gives two special aspects of this work of evil, telling how he taught men to make the weapons of war and how he taught women how to use the weapons of seduction. Finally, 54:6 indicates that his hosts, the Watchers or fallen angels, have followed Azazel in leading those on earth astray.

The judgment of Azazel is indicated in four passages. In 10:4 the two-fold judgment of Azazel is given for his teaching evil, as indicated in 9:6 and 10:8. The judgment of 10:4 involves first of all his imprisonment in the abyss and then casting him into the fire on the great day of final judgment. His judgment in 13:2 involves only the first of these two phases of judgment, but in 54:5 those same two phases of judgment are visited upon his hosts. In 55:5, all of this is placed in the context of the judgment of Dan 7:9–14.

The equivalence of Azazel with Satan is clear in I Enoch. He is identified as the instigator of all evil, and he has employed his host of fallen angels in that pursuit. He will suffer judgment for what he has brought upon the human race in this way. First he is to suffer in the realms of darkness, and then he is to be thrown into the fire in the great final day of judgment. This two-phased judgment outlined in I Enoch fits well with the fate of Satan as outlined at the begin-

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ning and at the end of Rev 20. There is one passage in which the two names of Azazel and Satan are equated in terms of the host of evil angels that is led by the being who bears both of those names (54:5).

The Apocalypse of Abraham

This pseudepigraphical work appears to be a Jewish apocalypse with Christian interpolations. The Jewish portions are estimated to come from a time after the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, referred to in chapter 27.⁶ Thus it may be a work of the second century A.D. with interpolations coming some time after that.⁷ The first eight chapters of the work tell how Abraham was instructed to give up idolatry. Then the more apocalyptic chapters begin. Azazel is mentioned in six passages in the text, all of them coming from the second half of the book.

13:7–11 He [the angel] said, This is Wickedness, Azazil, for Abraham's lot is in the heavens, but yours on earth. He said to him, Shame upon you Zazal; for you have chosen and have loved to live in your uncleanness here. That 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 Gen 15 where Abraham offered the animal sacrifices by dividing their parts and laying those parts in opposite directions. The bird used here becomes a symbol for Azazel. He is synonymous with Wickedness and is condemned to dwell on the earth in the bird's uncleanness. Under the modified name of Zazal he has brought retribution and misfortune upon the wicked through the evil and deceit he has introduced among them, another evidence that Azazel's work is the work of Satan.

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

In this case the angel gives to 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 Lev 16. Immediately after this the angel tells Abraham not to talk to Azazel. Azazel tries to get Abraham to talk to him (for the purpose of temptation?), but Abraham, following the angel's instructions, will not speak to him.

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

⁶ Ibid., 366. The translation of the Apocalypse of Abraham I am quoting was done by A. Pennington.

⁷ Ibid., 378.

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The setting here is Abraham going out to count the stars in the night sky to number his descendants. The Lord tells him that some of the people of Azazel will belong to his [Abraham's] descendants; they will be subservient to them. (This sounds like the ingathering of the formerly wicked gentiles.) Abraham cannot understand this because Azazel reviled Abraham, so how can Azazel's people come to be related to Abraham's people? Here again Azazel's work is seen in relation to Abraham and his people, but Azazel is foiled because some of Azazel's former servants will come to belong to the people of Abraham.

22:5-7 Those on the left side are the many peoples which 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.

The picture here is that of the final judgment. Instead of the righteous on the right hand and the wicked on the left, the people on the left are divided between the righteous and the wicked. Then the people on the right are some of the people who once belonged to Azazel but have now come to belong to the descendants of Abraham. Azazel is going to lose some of his servants to the tribe of Abraham. This sounds like the conversion of the gentiles or the reconversion of some Jews. In either case Azazel loses and Abraham gains. This sounds very much like the picture found in the preceding passage that deals with Azazel, 20:5-7.

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.

In this case the work of Azazel is taken back to the time of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. It was Azazel who came between them when first Eve and then Adam fell to his temptations. This set them on the road to perdition from which, graciously, God rescued them. Once again there is a clear connection between Azazel and the work of the serpent-devil-Satan in causing the fall of mankind, as recorded in Gen 3.

29:5-8 . . . and some of them mocked that man, and some assaulted him, but some of them worshipped him. I saw them worshipping him; and Azazel ran up and worshipped, 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 worshipped by the heathen and Azazel.

The person referred to here has a messianic character, that of God's suffering servant. From a Christian point of view one might think of Azazel acting through Judas, and that raises the question whether this might be one of the interpolations. The setting here, however, is eschatological. Abraham's question is

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answered by stating that he is “the respite granted by the heathen to the people who will come from you in the last days, in the twelfth year of the ungodly age” (v. 8). Following this come the ten last plagues (ch. 30) and the establishment of God’s kingdom with a Second Coming type of scene (ch. 31). In that setting this scene with Azazel may represent his final subservience to the Messiah and the kingdom of God.

Summary of Azazel in the Apocalypse of Abraham

The picture of Azazel in the Apocalypse of Abraham is similar to that in I Enoch, but it is more complicated. Like I Enoch, the Apocalypse of Abraham sees Azazel as the instigator of evil in the world. It goes beyond I Enoch in tracing that problem back to the time of Adam and Eve (22:9–10). This idea is also stated in more general terms in 13:7–11. Azazel’s personal attacks upon Abraham are described in terms of tempting (ch. 14) and reviling him (20:5–7). Azazel does not win, however, as he loses subjects to Abraham’s descendants (20:5–7; 22:5–7). Finally, Azazel will be subject to the Messiah at the end of time (29:5–8). The only other fate of Azazel described here appears in the curse that Abraham pronounced upon him. There he was told to depart into the fire and to the uttermost parts of the earth (ch. 14).

Conclusion

Azazel is known as a Satan-like figure in Jewish apocryphal literature of the second century B.C. (I Enoch’s Book of Watchers), from the first century B.C. (I Enoch’s Parables) and from the second century A.D. (the Apocalypse of Abraham). This gives a spread of about four centuries during which Azazel was identified with Satan in this type of literature.

I Enoch was known to early Christian sources such as the Epistle of Barnabas, Origen, Tertullian, Jerome, and Augustine.⁸ So this interpretation of Azazel would also have been known to them. Christian hands even went so far as to write interpolations into the Jewish work known as the Apocalypse of Abraham, so this source was also known to them, along with its interpretation of Azazel as a Satanic figure. Thus Azazel was firmly identified with Satan in Jewish apocryphal sources, and these same sources were known to early Christians. This provides a useful background for the modern interpretation of the figure of Azazel in Lev 16. The very earliest extrabiblical interpretation of this figure known saw him as a figure for Satan.

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⁸ Ibid., 169–170.

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