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, 1 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 1 Enoch

Although 1 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, 1 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


2The 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.

3Ibid.
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

4It 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.


7Ibid., 54.

8Ibid., 53.

9Apocryphal Old Testament, 190-191.

10Leonhard 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

11Hanson, 221.
12The 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.
13Ibid., 194-195.
14Hanson, 221-222.
15Ibid., 224.
were transferred to the scapegoat through the laying on of hands.\textsuperscript{16} Thus the removal of the goat resulted in cleansing and renewal for the entire camp. Likewise in \textit{1 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. (\textit{1 Enoch} 10:7-8)\textsuperscript{17}

Hanson argues for the existence of a further parallel between \textit{1 Enoch} 10 and the rendition of Lev 16 in \textit{Targum Pseudo-Jonathan} (also known as Jonathan Ben Uzziel or \textit{Targum of Palestine}).\textsuperscript{18} He believes that the formulation, “

\ldots split open the desert which is in Dudael, and throw him there” (\textit{1 Enoch} 10:4), is related to \textit{Pseudo-Jonathan’s} use of רָצִּף (send or cleave) instead of רָשֵׁף (send), in reference to the expulsion of the scapegoat from the camp of Israel (Lev 16:22).\textsuperscript{19} Inasmuch as רָצִּף can denote “to cleave” or “break open,” as well as “to send,” 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.\textsuperscript{20} 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.\textsuperscript{21} Hence this Akkadian literature


\textsuperscript{17}\textit{Apocryphal Old Testament}, 195.

\textsuperscript{18}According to Hanson, this particular Targum “bears close affinities with \textit{1 Enoch}” (223). Although the date of Pseudo-Jonathan has been debated, its foundations apparently go back to pre-Christian times. See Ernst Würtwein, \textit{The Text of the Old Testament}, trans. Erroll F. Rhodes (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 78. Thus it is likely that both \textit{1 Enoch} and the original form of Pseudo-Jonathan were approximately contemporaneous in development.

\textsuperscript{19}Hanson, 223.

\textsuperscript{20}Ibid. Also see “רָצִּף” in \textit{BDB}.

\textsuperscript{21}Hanson, 223.

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 הָמוֹזֶן can denote either a male goat or a demon. Perhaps this fact influenced the author of the Enoch text in his perception of the scapegoat as a demonic figure. Also, the possibility that כִּי לְאֵזָאָזֶל can be understood as “in behalf of Azazel” is worthy of consideration. 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. 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). Also, the fact that Azazel is portrayed in

23See BDB.


1 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 1 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 1 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 1 Enoch, see Hanson, 226-231.

\(^28\)Ibid., 229.

\(^29\)Apocryphal Old Testament, 364.


\(^32\)Apocryphal Old Testament, 366.

\(^33\)Ibid.
A number of references to Azazel appear in the *Apocalypse*.

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). 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). 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)

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

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34Ibid., 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.

35Charlesworth, 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*.


38Ibid., 378.

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 Azazil. (Apocalypse of Abraham 23:3-9)

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; 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. 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 הֵרָדְתָּן הָרִי (house of sharpness), the desert location outside Jerusalem to which the scapegoat was driven. Hanson and Driver both link הֵרָדְתָּן הָרִי (house of sharpness) with “Dudael,” mentioned in 1 Enoch 10:4 as the place of Azazel’s banishment.


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

Mishnaic traditions did not exist in written form when 1 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." The use of the Aramaic phrase, “for the Name of the Lord” (or “Yahweh”) (ךָָּרֶּא אָתֹּה), 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. 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 נָשָׁה (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.

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


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

47See footnote 4 in The Aramaic Bible, 33.

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.\(^4^9\)

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.\(^5^0\) 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 Pseudo-Jonathan*.\(^5^1\)

**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.

\(^4^9\)Compare *Yoma* 6:6, *The Mishnah*, 170, with *The Targums of Onkelos and Jonathan Ben Uziel 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.

\(^5^0\)Hanson, 223-224.

\(^5^1\)Hanson also draws attention to *Pseudo-Jonathan*'s "close affinities with *1 Enoch*" (223).