Azazel: from the Ritual of the Day of Atonement to the Demonology of Second Temple Literature

Abstract

The article is a synthetic, critical-historical study of the development of the figure Azazel from its sole manifestation in the Book of Leviticus (Kpł 16) to the elaborated portrayals in Second Temple literature, with special attention to the henochic tradition and Qumranic material. The aim is to distinguish levels of inquiry: the biblical text and its immediate ritual context, the history of reception in Second Temple Judaism, and later apocryphal and pseudepigraphal readings. The analysis demonstrates that Kpł 16 does not present Azazel as a deity or as the addressee of a sacrifice; the ritual of the goat “for Azazel” functions as a symbolic exclusion of impurity to the realm of the desert, which God uses in the act of purifying the community. The henochic tradition transforms this symbolism into a cosmological narrative about fallen angels, attributing to Azazel the role of initiator of technologies of violence and “teacher” of forbidden knowledge, which leads to systemic corruption of the world. Qumranic material confirms the existence of such interpretations prior to the Christian era and shows the diversity of reception, which in further apocalyptic texts (e.g., the Apocalypse of Abraham) leads to an almost demonological differentiation of Azazel. The study emphasizes the necessity of distinguishing between the literary theologizing of Azazel and the ritual function in the Torah and preserves a Catholic perspective, placing God as the sole saving and sovereign subject over the order of creation.

Keywords

Azazel, Kpł 16, Day of Atonement, scapegoat, 1 Book of Enoch, Asael, Qumranic literature, desert, demonology, Second Temple tradition, ritual typology

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1. Introduction: problems and methodology

The aim of this study is to present the genesis and transformations of the concept of Azazel in biblical and para-/apocryphal texts related to the Second Temple period. The approach is historical-literary with theological supplementation: we distinguish how a given tradition interpreted the Primal text (Kpł 16), how the henochic and apocalyptic literature developed it, and how demonological categories changed in Jewish milieus before and in early Christian contexts. We assume that the analysis should respect the text as a religious and liturgical

source, avoiding anachronistic projections of modern notions of “demon” or “devil” onto ancient cultic practices.

Methods: textual criticism (taking into account the Hebrew wording), comparative analysis of traditions (henochic, Qumranic, apocryphal), theological interpretation consistent with a Catholic perspective — that is, with the recognition of the uniqueness of God, without mythologizing secondary beings.

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2. Azazel in the Book of Leviticus (Kpł 16): text and ritual context

Azazel appears exclusively in Kpł 16, in the description of the rites of the Day of Atonement (Yom ha-Kippurim). The Hebrew phrase reads: גּוֹרָל אֶחָד לַיהוָה וְגוֹרָל אֶחָד לַעֲזָאזֵל (gôrāl ʾeḥād la-YHWH wəgôrāl ʾeḥād la-ʿĂzāʾzēl). The ritual divides lots into “for YHWH” and “for Azazel”: one goat is killed and its blood used to purify the sanctuary, the other remains alive, the high priest confesses over it the sins of all Israel and sends it out into the desert, “to a land cut off” (אֶרֶץ גְּזֵרָה, ʾereṣ gəzērāh; Kpł 16,22).

Three basic hermeneutical issues:

- the lexical range and possible meanings of the form עזאזל (ʿĂzāʾzēl);
- the ritual function of the second goat;
- the relation of the ritual to monotheistic theology (whether Azazel is the addressee of a sacrifice).

Linguistic analysis: the traditional translation scapegoat / “scapegoat” interprets the name as a compound עֵז (ʿēz, “goat”) + אָזַל (ʾāzal, “to go away”), but such a solution is formally problematic. Another possible reading sees in עזאזל a term referring to a place, a force associated with the desert, or a personification of the sphere of exclusion. The syntax “lot for Azazel” seems to favor a name of an addressee or a space, rather than a description of the animal’s property.

Ritually crucial is that both goats were first “set before YHWH” — it is God who establishes the rite and uses the desert as a space for the removal of impurity. The goat sent “for Azazel” is not killed on the altar nor does it receive cultic sacrifice: its function is transferential — it carries the guilt outside the sacred space.

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3. Interpretations of the name and the meaning of the desert in the ritual

In the literature interpretations of the name Azazel oscillate between three main proposals:

- “the departing goat” (scapegoat): the traditional, historically rooted translation that emphasizes the action (departing), but encounters phonological–syntactic difficulties;
- a place or sphere of the desert: Azazel as a “cliff place” or “remote zone” — consistent with the designation ʾereṣ gəzērāh and with later rabbinic imagination of casting the goat down a cliff;
- personification of a power of the desert: Azazel as a name representing a power or being associated with the sphere of the desert and chaos — without assigning it the status of a deity equal to YHWH.

Theologically the most fitting interpretation stresses that the ritual is a theocentric act: God decides the mechanics of purification and uses the image of the desert as a symbolic place of exclusion. The goat “for Azazel” transfers impurity beyond the community’s boundaries, to a symbolic realm of chaos from which it should not return.

The desert in biblical tradition has an ambivalent character — it is a space of both encounter with God (e.g., the experiences of Moses, Elijah) and a space of trial and of the presence of unordered forces (motifs of wild beasts, שָׂעִירִים, in Isaiah). In this symbolism Azazel plays a representative role for the side opposed to the order of holiness.

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4. Ritual distinction: this is not a sacrifice to a demon

Crucial from a hermeneutical and doctrinal perspective is to emphasize that Kpł 16 does not describe the offering of a demonic sacrifice nor the giving of cult to Azazel. The ritual consists of contrasting, complementary movements: the goat “for YHWH” (killed, its blood purifies the sanctuary) and the goat “for Azazel” (remains alive, bears the guilt outside the community). This contrast emphasizes a spatial function: movement inward (purification) and movement outward (removal of defilement).

From the perspective of Catholic theology it should also be noted that even when later traditions personify Azazel, this does not change the fact that in the priestly text the only sovereign acting subject is God — it is YHWH who establishes the rite, directs the high priest, and permits the use of the desert as a symbolic place of purification.

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5. Azazel (Asael) in the henochic tradition: narrative development

The most radical transformation of the figure Azazel is found in 1 Book of Enoch (the Book of the Watchers). This text — preserved in Ethiopic, Greek and in Aramaic fragments found, inter alia,

at Qumran — develops the brief motif from Gen 6 and interprets it within an apocalyptic cosmology.

The form of the name appears in various traditions as Asael (Aramaic) and Azazel (Greek, Ethiopic). It is possible that the henochic Asael was in later reception identified with the biblical Azazel of Kpł 16, which facilitated the transformation of the ritual symbol into a moral-cosmic personage.

In the Book of the Watchers two main manifestations of the corruption initiated by the fallen beings are distinguished:

- the leadership of Szemihazy (Shemihazah, Shemyaza) as an act of sexual transgression of order — descending on Mount Hermon, the notion of an oath, and procreation with women, which leads to the birth of giants (nephilim) and the transgression of the bounds of creation;
- the activity of Asael/Azazel as teacher of forbidden knowledge — transmitting technologies (weapon-making, metallurgy), arts of beautification, magical secrets and other practices whose secondary use contributes to violence and social depravity.

The Book of Enoch therefore presents Azazel as the “teacher” of a civilization of violence: it does not automatically deny technology altogether, but stigmatizes the transmission of certain skills contrary to God’s order and at an improper time. Consequently the world is “corrupted by the works of Azazel” (1 Hen 9), and God commands the archangel Raphael to bind him and cast him into a place of darkness (Dudael) in the desert — there, “until the day of the final judgment.”

In this tradition a significant shift occurs: Azazel is held responsible for the spread of corruption — analogous to the goat burdened with guilt in the ritual — but he functions as the perpetrator, not as a figurative “victim.” Enoch thus interprets the priestly ritual cosmologically: the removal of evil from the world entails the imprisonment of its causes in the desert.

One must, however, maintain precision: in the henochic schema Azazel is a fallen angel, distinct from the spirits that originate from the dead giants. Evil spirits arise as a result of the death of the nephilim and torment humans, yet ontologically they differ from figures such as Asael/Azazel.

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6. Qumranic material and the literary context of the Second Temple

The Dead Sea Scrolls (Qumran) play two significant roles for studying the reception of Azazel: first — they contain Aramaic fragments and copies of henochic texts (e.g., 4QEnoch), confirming the earlier composition and dissemination of this interpretation before the Christian era; second — the communal and parabiblical texts from Qumran testify that Jewish milieus of the Second

Temple period differentiated and independently developed various interpretations connected with the motif of the goat and the desert.

In Qumranic and apocryphal literature one repeatedly observes a tendency to “theologize” ritual elements — transferring meanings from the liturgical plane to the cosmological. At the same time Qumran shows that there was a plurality of traditions: not all communities identified Azazel with a single concrete being, and some texts demonstrate selective adoption of henochic mythology.

Further apocrypha, especially the Apocalypse of Abraham, develop the Azazel motif even further and portray him in the role of a kind of arch-demon, combining traits of a fallen angel, tempter and “sacrificial goat” into an almost personal cosmic antagonist. This process of transformation — from a ritual function to a psychological-cosmological personification of evil — is characteristic of the Second Temple period and constitutes an important stage in the history of Jewish demonology and its later reception in rabbinic literature and early Christianity.

Smooth transition to further Second Temple tradition The foregoing chapters show how the symbolism of the priestly ritual could be reworked in apocalyptic literature toward the personification and cosmologization of evil. In the continuation of the study we will subject to critical analysis successive stages of this reception: a detailed discussion of the Apocalypse of Abraham, the introduction of Azazel motifs into the Book of Jubilees, their echo in the targums and other parabiblical material, as well as the shaping of later identifications of Azazel with satanic figures in rabbinic and early Christian tradition — while maintaining a constant distinction between the historical-literary source and later theological interpretations.

7. Other traditions of Azazel

In this chapter I synthetically present and analyze traditions derived outside the biblical text of Leviticus 16 that influenced the development of the figure of Azazel in Second Temple Judaism and in later Jewish literature. I adopt a methodological distinction between: (a) the historico-literary level (reconstruction of the tradition and its stages), (b) modes of development in Second Temple Judaism (Enochic-Qumranic, Jubilees, apocalyptic), and © later reception outside the Mosaic canonical text. I maintain a Catholic theological perspective: I treat Lev 16 as regulating the ritual purification of the community, not as demonic worship, and I deny ascribing to Azazel an equal status with God.

7.1. Aramaic manuscripts of 1 Enoch (Qumran)

The Aramaic fragments of 1 Enoch found in the Qumran caves (notably in cave 4) confirm that the story of the “Watchers” and of the figure Asael/Azazel operated in Jewish circles already in the last centuries before the Common Era, independently of later Christian tradition.[1] The fact that these fragments are preserved in Aramaic is significant: it shows that the Enochic

conception of fallen angels and their responsibility for transmitting forbidden knowledge and violence was part of native Jewish discourse. For the history of demonology this means that the model “angels rebelled → revealed forbidden knowledge → caused the emergence of demons” already existed before the New Testament and could have constituted a shared background for later forms of thinking about supernatural evil.[2]

7.2. 4Q180 (“Interpretation of the periods”) and the combination of motifs

The fragmentary text known as 4Q180 interprets the figure of Azazel in light of the Enochic tradition: it connects the motif of Azazel with the angels who “came to the daughters of men” and begot giants (cf. Gen 6). Consequently, in this fragment Azazel is presented as a participant in or leader of the angelic rebellion, and his desert place from Leviticus 16 begins to be understood as a place of imprisonment or isolation of the fallen angel.[3] The text 4Q180 thus illustrates the process of joining two originally separate patterns: (a) the addressee of the purification ritual in Lev 16 (Azazel as a “place” or “sphere”), and (b) the Enochic story of the Watchers and their destructive influence on human history. Due to the fragmentary nature, only the interpretive direction is reconstructed here: Azazel becomes an element of the story of the origin of evil, not merely a mysterious liturgical term.[4]

7.3. The Book of Giants

Aramaic fragments of the “Book of Giants” (e.g., 4Q203, 4Q530) expand the narrative about the offspring of the Watchers, emphasizing their visions, attempts at interpretation by Enoch, and the announcement of judgment and destruction of the rebels’ progeny. The figure of Azazel appears in these texts fragmentarily — rather as an element in the background of the Enochic genealogy of evil than as a central actor — yet its presence strengthens the connection between the Enochic etiological account of demons and later interpretations of the scapegoat ritual of the Day of Atonement.[5] The Book of Giants also sustains the Enochic theological intuition: wickedness has a cosmic dimension and generates lasting beings (demons) that affect the human world.

7.4. The Temple Scroll (11Q19) and the coexistence of ritual and demonological readings

The Temple Scroll (11Q19), while repeating and reinterpreting the prescriptions of the Day of Atonement, does not explicitly elaborate a complex demonology of Azazel. This fact indicates the coexistence of two types of reading in the Qumran milieu: (a) the traditionally legal-ritual reading, maintaining the legal meaning of the Day of Atonement as an act of communal purification, and (b) the Enochic, demonological reading, which personalizes the addressee of the ritual and incorporates him into the story of the fallen angels.[6] One cannot therefore automatically assume that all Qumran texts identified Azazel with the leader of demons — parallel interpretations functioned side by side.

7.5. Azazel and Belial: two genealogies of evil in Qumran

The texts of the Yahad community usually preferred the figure of Belial as the primary eschatological antagonist; Azazel fulfilled instead a role more connected with the Enochic etiological account of evil. The functional differences may be set out as follows:

- Azazel: associated with the pre-flood period, with the Watchers (Gen 6), teacher of forbidden knowledge, contributing to the emergence of demons; his “place” is the desert or other space outside the community, according to the reading of Lev 16 and the Enochic tradition.
- Belial: operative in the “present age,” chief of evil spirits and of wicked men, actively deceiving Israel, an element of the practical eschatological struggle.

Both figures represent different “genealogies of evil”: Azazel explains the source of violent and technical degeneration of human culture, Belial indicates current structures of resistance to God. In later development these functions sometimes overlap and coalesce into the image of a single antagonist (cf. the development of the concept of Satan), yet one should not simplify their original distinction.[7]

7.6. The Book of Jubilees

The Book of Jubilees accepts the scheme of the Watchers and the spirits of the giants, but assigns the role of central antagonist rather to a figure called Mastema rather than to Azazel. After the Flood some of the evil spirits are bound; Mastema obtains the right to retain a “tenth” part of the spirits, which later deceive the descendants of Noah. Jubilees does not develop Azazel as strongly as 1 Enoch, nevertheless it shows that in the Second Temple world different functions of “the adversary” were distributed and attributed to different figures: teacher of violence (Asael/Azazel), leader of the angelic transgression (Shemihazah), chief of the remaining demons (Mastema), leader of eschatological darkness (Belial), and in later literature also the figure of Satan as accuser appears. This pluralism attests to the complex and multi-layered shaping of the concept of evil in Second Temple Judaism.[8]

7.7. Apocalypse of Abraham: synthesis and development

The Apocalypse of Abraham (a Jewish work, probably late 1st — early 2nd century CE) presents one of the most developed figures of Azazel. In the narrative Azazel is openly identified as the temptation that deters Abraham from ascending the mountain (in the narrative associated with sacrifice) and as a “spirit of falsehood” who acts against God’s revelation. This text:

- connects Azazel with the functions of tempter and opponent of revelation;
- portrays him in an image akin to the serpent of Eden, giving him the character of an ancient opponent of humanity;

- reinterpreting the motif of the scapegoat from Lev 16, depicts Azazel as the recipient of the transferred “polluted” side of history (what is unclean is assigned to Azazel and sent to inaccessible places), while maintaining his responsibility for evil.[9]

In the Apocalypse of Abraham Azazel approaches the function of an archdemon — he has his own “domain” of godless peoples, tempts and opposes Abraham’s calling — yet he retains his own name and particular tradition deriving from an Enochic-ritual background. Azazel’s role in this work illustrates the process of synthesizing Enochic, Jubilees, and eschatological motifs.

7.8. Convergence with Satan: a gradual process

The question whether Azazel was “Satan” has no uniform answer: the response depends on the layer of tradition. In Lev 16 Azazel is not Satan but a term with a ritual-topographical meaning; in 1 Enoch he is an important fallen angel, one of the leaders of the Watchers; in the Qumran milieu he functions more in an Enochic capacity, while Belial plays the role of the principal antagonist in political-religious terms; in the Apocalypse of Abraham Azazel acquires many functions later attributed to Satan — tempter, serpent, chief of the godless — which demonstrates the process of progressive convergence and synthesis of different antagonist figures. A more accurate schema is therefore a description of the “gradual convergence” of various functions of evil into a single, increasingly integrated demonic figure, rather than the claim that Azazel was always merely another name for Satan.[10]

Theological synthesis

In light of the presented materials one can distinguish several enduring theological threads relevant both for historico-literary studies and for Christian reflection.

- The ritual function of removing sin (Lev 16) remains central. In the priestly tradition sin is not only a moral concept but also a sacred “contamination” which is symbolically removed outside the holy space of the community. This distinction between what is “within the community” and what is “outside the community” is important for understanding the semantics of the scapegoat.
- The Enochic personalization of the ritual addressee: 1 Enoch and related texts personalize the “place” of removal as an agent and source of contamination. Consequently, sin acquires a cosmic dimension — it is connected with angelic defection, forbidden knowledge, and the emergence of demons. For pastoral and moral theology this means that evil has structural and supra-individual dimensions, yet this does not remove individual human responsibility.
- Evil as “false revelation”: the Enochic critique of forbidden knowledge shows that demonology also serves as a critique of a culture based on violence and techniques of

domination. Azazel (Asael) — as teacher of weapons, metallurgy, or other arts — becomes a symbol of civilizational means of expanding violence.

- Ritual geography as mapping eschatological judgment: interpretations that transform the Day of Atonement ritual into an “eschatological scenario” (e.g., the Apocalypse of Abraham) show how cultic practice could be read as a typology of final judgment — that “second elevation” when what is unclean will be permanently assigned to the adversary and removed from the cosmos.
- Theological caution: personalizing Azazel does not absolve humans from moral responsibility. The ritual does not transfer guilt in a strict, literal way; rather it signifies that evil is also a reality with causes and consequences that transcend singular actions.

From a Catholic perspective it is important to emphasize that the described Jewish traditions do not undermine the monotheistic order of things: figures such as Azazel, Belial, or Mastema are created beings subjected to God’s judgment. They cannot be portrayed as partners of God or co-divine beings.

11. Synthesis of traditions and partial conclusions

The materials of 1 Enoch, the Qumran scrolls, the Book of Jubilees, the Book of Giants and the Apocalypse of Abraham form a coherent history of the development of the image of Azazel: from an almost anonymous ritual element in Lev 16, through personalization and accusation in the Enochic tradition, to the function of an archdemon in later apocalyptic works. At the same time, alongside this trajectory another explanatory line concerning the presence of evil ran: the traditions of Belial and Mastema indicated other aspects of the eschatological struggle. As a result, later Jewish demonology (and indirectly Christian demonology) is the product of a pluralistic and staged synthesis.

From a theological point of view it is crucial to maintain distinction: to understand Azazel in his historico-literary contexts while also recognizing that personal representations of evil do not eliminate or fully explain human moral responsibility nor God’s sovereignty over history and final judgment.

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12. Azazel, Satan and the limits of identification in a Christological perspective

In the biblical-theological tradition the name Azazel has long aroused interpretive interest: its appearance in Leviticus 16, developments in intertestamental literature and receptions in Judaism and Christianity make this interest multilayered and require precise methodology. The

aim of this part is to show the limits that should constrain identifying Azazel with Satan, to demonstrate the role of the historico-literary method and canonical reading, to point out the risk of dualistic interpretations, and to formulate a Christological interpretive framework for understanding evil and practical, responsible conclusions for the contemporary reader.

1. Diversity of traditions and ambiguity of the original context The text of the atonement liturgy in Leviticus presents two goats: one sacrificed to the Lord, the other “for Azazel” (Heb. עֲזָאזֵל, `aza’zel) — a ritual of transferring sin and sending the goat into the desert intended to cleanse the community. The term as preserved in the text is semantically uncertain: philological studies allow several possibilities — from a toponym (a remote place), through a demonic name, to a ritual construction. In any case the original text does not precisely define the nature of Azazel; the liturgical context emphasizes a compensatory and symbolic-ritual function rather than an elaborate demonology.

In intertestamental literature (e.g., the Book of Enoch and certain apocalyptic traditions) a clearer identification of Azazel with one of the fallen angels appears, to whom is ascribed the transmission to humans of forbidden skills and the bringing about of violence. There Azazel appears as a figure bearing moral responsibility for the spread of anthropogenic evil. This is an important reception layer, but it is specific to a particular northern circle of intertestamental writing and does not necessarily represent the original meaning of the Levitical ritual.

1. Jewish and Christian lines of reception: continuation or transformation? In rabbinic Judaism the topic of Azazel was commented on from various perspectives — from etymological interpretations to allegorical readings of the ritual function. In later Jewish tradition the monotheistic emphasis strongly resists radical dualism. In some Jewish texts the figure of Azazel acquires demonic traits, but a uniform, dogmatic image corresponding to the Christian concept of Satan never becomes established.

In Christianity the reception of Azazel proceeded in varied ways. Some commentators — particularly those who read apocalyptic and apocryphal traditions as important for understanding demonic sources of evil — saw in Azazel a concrete author (or symbolic representative) of cosmic evil. Others, especially within careful canonical reading and dogmatic reflection, distinguished categories: the Levitical scapegoat, the figuration of guilt and transfer of sin, and the theological figure of Satan as tempter and adversary of God’s purposes. It must therefore be emphasized that identifying Azazel with Satan never became a hermeneutical necessity or normative for the whole Christian tradition; it is rather one possible reception, dependent on the broader interpretive context.

1. The importance of the historico-literary method The historico-literary method reminds us that the meaning of a text is shaped by its original context: genre, redactional situation, cultic practice and historical reception. In the case of Azazel it is necessary to separate analysis

into layers: (a) the atonement rite in Leviticus 16; (b) developments in apocalyptic literature; © later rabbinic and Christian commentaries; (d) artistic and cultural reception.

Only by recognizing these layers can one avoid anachronistic transfers of meaning — e.g., imposing on the Levitical text the image of a demon known from apocalyptic literature. This method requires philological patience and hermeneutical caution: not every later development reflects the intention of the original rite. At the same time, historico-literary analysis should not be an end in itself but a stage leading to integration within canonical and ecclesial theology.

1. Canonical reading as a brake on overinterpretation Canonical reading consists in interpreting a single text in the light of the whole Tradition of Scripture and the faith of the community. From a canonical perspective one must weigh that Leviticus formulates rituals of purification and communal renewal within the monotheistic order of the God of Israel. The symbol of the goat as bearer of sin and its removal serves a theological purpose — the restoration of the community's holiness before God — and not the construction of a second, coequal deity or principle of cosmic evil.

Canonical reading also allows one to see that the New Testament, while it does not mention the name Azazel, develops the themes of atonement and victory over sin in the person and work of Jesus Christ. In the light of Christology the Levitical ritual may be read typologically, pointing to the practical mechanisms of purification that find their fulfillment in Christ. This, however, does not justify a simple transfer of the goat's function onto the figure of Satan.

1. Critique of dualism One serious interpretive danger is adopting a syncretistic dualism according to which evil is an independent, coequal power acting against God. Both the Old and New Testaments, however, present a monotheistic configuration in which evil exists and acts, but is not an ontological being equal to God. Jewish tradition and early Christianity repeatedly reacted against dualistic tendencies (e.g., Gnostic, Manichaean) by defending God's sovereignty and eschatological liberation of the world.

Identifying Azazel with Satan often leads to a simplified model: a single demonic leader is held responsible for all the world's evil. Such a construction can reduce the complexity of human responsibility, social structures and institutional sources of evil. The critique of dualism should therefore lead to emphasizing human co-responsibility, the necessity of moral transformation, and appreciation for God's saving action, which does not fight an equal being but transforms and heals created reality.

1. Christological interpretation of evil Christology provides the decisive key to understanding evil in a biblical-theological perspective. In the light of the Paschal mystery evil does not remain unanswered: the Cross and Resurrection reveal both the reality of sin and its destructive power, and God's ultimate victory. The typology of the goat transferring guilt to

the desert can be read as an image of humanity's need for forgiveness and purification, but it is a symbol that in Christ attains fuller fulfillment — not as a simple transfer of guilt to a demonic person, but as the Son's taking of guilt in order to transform and redeem it.

From this perspective Satan is recognized as the adversary of God's plan, tempter and accuser, but his ultimate dominion is overcome by Christ. This leads to a theology of evil that combines the reality of threat with the hope of salvation, and not to mythologizing the demonic element.

1. Responsible hermeneutical and pastoral conclusions On the basis of the above reflections the following limits and practical conclusions can be formulated for the contemporary reader and pastor:

- One should not automatically identify Azazel with Satan without taking into account textual and historical layers. The Levitical ritual has its proper liturgical meaning, which does not necessarily imply elaborate demonology.
- Interpretation should integrate historico-literary precision with canonical reading: distinguish the original context from later interpretations and place both within a Christological perspective that reveals the meaning of rites and images in the light of God's final action in Christ.
- One must counteract simplistic dualism, which too often leads to shifting responsibility onto demonized "others" — both individually and socially. The evangelical response requires acknowledging personal and structural responsibility and engaging in the process of transformation.
- In pastoral ministry and religious education avoid sensational demonizing of real social, psychological or political problems. Biblical concepts should be applied with theological discipline so that they do not justify violence, stigmatization or exclusion.
- In a theological context the typology of the goat and motifs associated with Azazel can be used as material for catechesis on sin, reconciliation and redemption, yet always emphasizing that the ultimate purification is accomplished in Christ and in the sacramental life of the community.
- Academic research should remain open to interdisciplinary approaches (philology, history of religion, reception studies) while avoiding speculation unsupported by evidence. At the same time pastoral theology must take into account the real experiences of the faithful concerning evil and suffering.

Finally, the limits of identifying Azazel with Satan should be a sign of intellectual humility: historical and theological determinations require care, while Christological interpretation

indicates the direction of hope and practical transformation, which is the essence of the Church’s life in the world.

Supplementary conclusion

The foregoing reflections have two aims: first — to recall that biblical documents and their receptions form a mosaic whose elements require discrimination; second — to indicate that the ultimate meaning of symbols connected with Azazel should be read in the salvific perspective given by Christ. Historico-literary precision and canonical reading complement one another, guarding against overinterpretation and theological reductionism. The critique of dualism and the Christological interpretation of evil lead to an ethical and pastoral program: recognizing threats, accepting responsibility and bearing witness to hope. For the contemporary reader this is a call to prudent discernment — both in scholarly work and in the life of the community — so that religious symbols are not used to build fear or exclusion, but for healing and renewal consistent with the Gospel.

Notes

1. Cf. the Aramaic fragments of 1 Enoch found in the Qumran caves; see also discussions on the chronology of the Enochic tradition in the secondary literature on the subject.[A]
2. See on the influence of the Enochic model on demonology: discussions in the scholarly literature concerning the origins of late Jewish demonology and its reception in Christian literature.[B]
3. Fragment 4Q180 and its interpretation: see studies on the fragments of 4Q180 and commentaries on the joining of motifs from Lev 16 and Gen 6.[C]
4. Because of the state of the manuscripts reconstructions should be treated with caution; see critical remarks on reconstructions of Qumran texts.[D]
5. On the “Book of Giants” and its relation to the Watchers tradition see critical editions and discussions of the Aramaic fragments.[E]
6. Cf. analysis of the Temple Scroll (11Q19) and discussion on parallel interpretations of the Day of Atonement in the Qumran milieu.[F]
7. Comparative juxtaposition of the functions of Azazel and Belial within Qumran literature; see works describing the role of Belial in Yahad theology.[G]
8. On the presentation of Mastema and the hierarchy of evil spirits in Jubilees see commentaries on that text.[H]

9. Detailed analysis of the role of Azazel in the Apocalypse of Abraham, his links with the serpent motif and the reinterpretation of the Day of Atonement ritual; see discussions in the literature on this apocalypse.[I]
10. On the gradual convergence of demonic figures and its theological implications see syntheses of comparative literature on late Jewish and early Christian demonology.[J]

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Note: the bibliography below contains basic editions and monographs useful for further study of the problem; it is a selective list.

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- VanderKam, James C., works on the Book of Jubilees and the reception of pre-flood traditions in Second Temple Judaism.
- Stone, Michael E., studies on apocryphal and pseudepigraphal Jewish texts.

The above list is indicative and points to key textual sources and selected synthetic studies. For detailed inquiries it is recommended to consult critical editions of the Qumran fragments and monographic literary studies dedicated to each of the texts discussed.