

Azazel

Historically, the word azazel is an idea and rarely an incarnate demon.

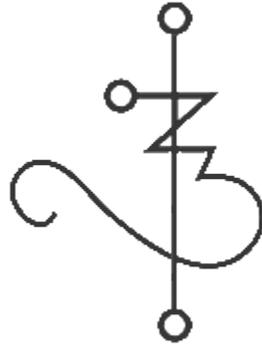


Figure 1 Possible sigil of Azazel. Modern writings use the sigil for the planet Saturn as well.

Vayikra (Leviticus)

The earliest known mention of the word Azazel in Jewish texts appears in the late seventh century B.C. book called the Vayikra (וַיִּקְרָא) which is the third of the five books of the Torah. To modern American Christians, this book is Leviticus because of its discussion of the Levites. In Leviticus 16, two goats are placed before the temple for selection in an offering. A lot is cast. One Goat is then sacrificed to Yahweh and the other goat is said to outwardly bear all the sins of those making the sacrifice. The text specifically says one goat was chosen for Yahweh and the other for Azazel (אֲזָאֵל). The general translation of the words is “absolute removal.” Another set of Hebrew scholars translate Azazel in old Hebrew translates as "az" (strong/rough) and "el" (strong/God).

The azazel goat, often called the scapegoat then is taken away.

A number of scholars have concluded that “azazel” refers to a series of mountains near Jerusalem with steep cliffs. Fragmentary records suggest that a bizarre Yahweh ritual was carried out on the goat. According to research, a red rope was tied to the goat and to an altar next to a jagged cliff. The goat is pushed over the cliff’s edge and torn to pieces by the cliff walls as it falls. The bottom of the cliff was a desert that was considered the realm of the “se’irim” class of demons. The se’irim is a goat variation of the traditional Canaanite Shedim. It was believed that the demons would feed on the sacrifice and therefore have no need to bother the people of Jerusalem.

In all likelihood, the se’irim later became the linkage between the word “azazel” and the idea of a specific demon.

It is worth noting that the interpretation of azazel as an idea instead of a specific demon persisted through the early second century B.C. Koine Greek Septuagint translations of early Hebrew works.

Book of Enoch

The Book of Enoch is a Jewish text written between 100 BC and 300 A.D. In spite of the popularity of the material in the book most factions of Judaism and Christianity view the work as non-canon. From a

modern perspective, only the Beta Israel Ethiopian Jews, the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church and Eritrean Orthodox Tewahedo Church accept Enoch as canonical.

The first section of Enoch discusses the fall of angels and their interaction with humanity. This is one of the first concrete mentions of Azazel as a specific demon rather than the idea of it being a scapegoat. In the book, Enoch is the a chief of the Grigori (Watcher) angels that have been cast out from Heaven. The angels then marry human women and the result is a race of giants.

For his part Azazel is credited in Enoch 8:1-3a with teaching men to make swords, knives, shields, and breastplates. The angel also teaches men how to work metal to produce jewelry.

Because of the greed of men in wanting certain metals and stones, warfare erupts.

The four archangels Michael, Gabriel, Raphael, and Phanuel see the bloodshed and ask God to stop the end the violence.

Instead of correcting the problem, God orders the archangels to “bind Azazel hand and foot and cast him into the darkness: and make an opening in the desert – which is in Dudael – and cast him therein. And place upon him rough and jagged rocks, and cover him with darkness, and let him abide there forever, and cover his face that he may not see light.”

The story of the Grigori told in Enoch is almost the exact same story as from the book of Genesis 6:2-4. In the Genesis version of the story, there is no mention of Azazel.

In Enoch 2:8, it is reported that on the day of God’s judgement, that Azazel will be cast into the fire.

In 3 Enoch which was written in the fifth century, Azazel is one of three fallen angels that oppose the Enoch becoming the angel Metatron. This book claims this opposition is the sin that gets the Azazel cast to earth where he then leads two hundred of the Fallen.

It is important to note that the binding of Azazel and the casting of him into the desert closely echoes the ritual surrounding the Azazel scapegoat from the earlier Jewish tradition.

It’s a bird

In the first Century A.D. text called the Apocalypse of Abraham, Azazel is the unclean bird referenced in Genesis 15:11 that lands on a sacrifice being prepared by Abraham. In the Genesis version, the birds are simply referred to as birds of prey that come after the carcasses. In the apocalypse version of the story, Abraham claims that the bird defiling the sacrifice is a disgrace and calls it Azazel. Abraham chastises the bird as being bound to earth while he is bound to heaven. Later in the texts Abraham mentions Azazel and compares him Satan. At this point, Abraham describes Azazel as being snakelike.

Mishnah

The Third century A.D. Mishnah was the first major attempt to capture Hebrew oral traditions in a Rabbinical text. The Mishnah follows the basic text from Leviticus. Deviating from the version of the story in Leviticus, the Mishnah then details the scarlet rope disposition of the scapegoat as describe

above. The ritual is explained in great detail including men stationed down to cliff with flags to indicate that the goat had passed them.

The use of the red rope is believed to be a reference to Isaiah 1.18 which tells the story of Simon the just that carried a red thread for forty years. After that time the thread turned white indicated that God had forgiven the peoples' sins.

Islam

Generally speaking, the name Azazel is considered to be linked to the name Azazel in Arabic. Claiming the true origin of the word is Iblis, meaning "to despair," in Islam, Azazel was a Jinn that was made into an angel. After the creation of man, Azazel refused to bow down before Adam at God's command. He is then banished from Heaven. Azazel then serves as the serpent in the garden of Eden.

In tenth century Sufi (mystic) writings by Mansur Al-Hallaj, there is a section devoted to protections against Azazel and discussing his personality.

The suggestion that Azazel refused to prostrate before Adam is reinforced in the twelfth century devotional hymns called the Ginans.

Medieval Writings

Throughout the medieval period, Azazel becomes firmly identified as a demon in the various hierarchies of angels. Numerous grimoires include Azazel in their rankings of the most important demons.



Figure 2 Azazel with a demonic goat

Seventh-Day Adventists

In modern times, the Protestant Christian Millerite denomination called the Seventh-day Adventist Church teach that Azazel as the scapegoat is really just a substitute for Satan. As part of the church's

teachings they assert that the death of Satan (as Azazel) at the end of time ends the existence of sin. One possible reason for the appearance in the medieval text may be confusion with similar Hebrew names of Uza and of Azael, two fallen angels.

Television Star

Azazel had the role of lead villain in a number of episodes of the television show *Supernatural*. In the series Azazel is responsible for the deaths of the mother and grandmother of main characters, the Winchesters. The demon continues to be reference throughout the series on a regular basis.

Comic Book star

Azazel made his debut as a supervillain in October 2003 in the Marvel Comic Book *Uncanny X-Men* #428. In the Marvel Universe, the character is a mutant and the father of X-man Nightcrawler. The comic story line explains that rather than angels and demons of religious origin, the genesis of the story was a fight between mutant groups thousands of years ago.

In addition to his comic book appearances, Azazel also appears in the film *X-Men: First Class* as a member of the Hellfire Club.

Modern demon

The question of whether or not there is truly a demon named Azazel is one of personal opinion. The early source material suggests that azazel is nothing more than a shorthand to describe the brutal non-offering sacrifice of a goat to bear the sins of the people.

From a Jewish, Islamic, or Christian perspective, if Azazel is a demon as described by Enoch, there is also the statement over and over again that God had bound the demon like Prometheus or Loki until the end time. If this is the case, then unless they considered God incapable of binding this demon, it would not be possible for him to interact with Azazel.