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Animals  
Goats and Punishment of Sin

Animals are frequently used in the scriptures to represent biblical principles. For instance, sheep are used to represent God's elect covenant people. In this essay we will explore how goats are used to represent God's eternal punishment of sin.

In the Old Testament there are eight sacrifices associated with the tabernacle or temple worship. There is the sin offering, the trespass offering, the burnt offering, the peace offering, the wave offering, the heave offering, the meat offering, and the drink offering. The only offering that goats were used in is the sin offering. In forty verses in the scriptures either a goat or a kid of the goats was used as the sin offering. This is more than all the other types of animals or birds combined. Cattle were used in 23 verses; sheep were used in six verses; a pigeon and a turtledove were used in 1 verse. Thus, in the seventy verses that the sin offering is mentioned, the goat is mentioned in forty verses.

Each of the Old Testament sacrifices under the tabernacle or temple worship point us to various aspects of what Christ did for us in atoning for our sins. The sin offering pointed us to the fact that Christ suffered the judgment of God on account of our sins. The trespass offering pointed us to the fact that we had trespassed against the laws of God and that Christ paid for our trespass. The burnt offering pointed us to the fact that Christ suffered for us in judgment because of our sins. The peace offering pointed us to the result of Christ atonement caused God to be at peace with us. The meat offering pointed us to the pure sinless body of Christ that was broken for us. The drink offering pointed us to the blood of Christ that was offered to God to remit our sins. The wave offering pointed us to the victory we have in Jesus Christ. The heave offering pointed us to both the resurrection of Christ and our awaiting resurrection.

The ordinance of the scapegoat gives us an understanding of God's purpose in using the goat to represent God's eternal punishment of sin. The ordinance is set forth for us in Lev. 16:8-10: 8 "And Aaron shall cast lots upon the two goats; one lot for the LORD, and the other lot for the scapegoat. And Aaron shall bring the goat upon which the LORD'S lot fell, and offer him for a sin offering. But the goat, on which the lot fell to be the scapegoat, shall be presented alive before the LORD, to make an atonement with him, and to let him go for a scapegoat into the wilderness."

Two goats were used to represent the one work of Christ on our behalf in God's judgment of sin. The one goat was offered for a sin offering. Christ offered himself

without spot to God as a sin offering having suffered the wrathful eternal judgment of sin on our behalf. The second goat was sent unto a land not inhabited: Lev. 16:21 And Aaron shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat, and confess over him all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions in all their sins, putting them upon the head of the goat, and shall send him away by the hand of a fit man into the wilderness: 22 And the goat shall bear upon him all their iniquities unto a land not inhabited: and he shall let go the goat in the wilderness. As a result of Christ's offering and God's acceptance of Christ's offering, Christ put away our sins (symbolized by the scapegoat which was sent into a land not inhabited after our sins were atoned for by the first goat). Christ put away our sins by his sacrifice on our behalf. The judgment of God had been satisfied and our sins shall never again be brought before God as set forth in Rom. 8:33: "Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth."

The next thing we read about goats is that goat hair was a covering of the tabernacle: Ex. 26:7 "And thou shalt make curtains of goats' hair to be a covering upon the tabernacle: eleven curtains shalt thou make. 8 The length of one curtain shall be thirty cubits, and the breadth of one curtain four cubits: and the eleven curtains shall be all of one measure. 9 And thou shalt couple five curtains by themselves, and six curtains by themselves, and shalt double the sixth curtain in the forefront of the tabernacle." Goats' hair is the product of the goat. These eleven curtains of goats' hair covered the tabernacle. Since goats represent God's eternal judgment of sin and the product of God's judgment of sin in the person of Christ on behalf of the elect family of God is to cover these elect children with Christ's work of justification. The tabernacle ordinances all point us to Christ's work of justifying his elect family: Rom. 4:7 "Saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered."

The final use of goats in representation in the scriptures is found in Matthew chapter 25. Matt. 25:31-46 sets forth God's eternal judgment of sin at the last day. In this passage there are two classes of people who are represented by sheep and goats. The sheep are on the Lord's right hand and are called righteous and go away into eternal life. The goats are on the left hand and are called cursed and go away into everlasting punishment. The sheep represent God's elect children and are declared righteous because Christ was their sin offering delivering them from the everlasting punishment of their sins. The goats are cursed by sin and were not covered by the atoning blood of Christ and thus have the eternal judgment of God to face because of sin.