

# Day of Atonement — Does Hebrews 9:12-13 Point to?

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## I. The Terms Used in Heb 9:12-13

In Heb 9:12 two types of animal sacrifices are mentioned. The author states that *oude di' haimatos tragôn kai moschôn* ("not through the blood of goats and calves") Christ entered the Holy Place. The next two verses compare the effectiveness of the blood of certain animal sacrifices with the power of the blood of Christ. In this context goats, bulls, and the heifer are mentioned. The first two are grouped together by the term blood, whereas in the case of the heifer the ashes are mentioned. We are especially interested in the phrases

- (1) *di' haimatos tragôn kai moschôn* and
- (2) *to haima tragôn kai taurôn*.

These phrases seem to be parallel. "Blood" and "goats" occur in both of them. Goats are found first in each case. Furthermore, the terms *moschôn* and *taurôn* may be used interchangeably, because the term "for" connects the two verses. A parallel use of the two nouns is also found in Ps 22:12.[1] Thus, Heb 9:12-13 twice stresses the blood of goats and bulls.

## II. The Terms Used in Lev 16

Lev 16 describes the Day of Atonement. In this context, three different types of animals are mentioned, namely the bull, the ram, and the male goat. The Septuagint (LXX) uses the terms *moschos*, *krios*, and *chimaros*. How are they distributed throughout the chapter?

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|-----|----------------------------------|---|
| (1) | Bull ( <i>moschos</i> )          | - Lev 16:3, 6, 11, 11, 14, 15, 18, 27                   |
| (2) | Ram ( <i>krios</i> )             | - Lev 16:3, 5>  |
| (3) | Male goat<br>( <i>chimaros</i> ) | - Lev 16:5, 7-10, 15, 18, 20, 21, 21, 22,<br>22, 26, 27 |

The ram is mentioned only twice. The bull is found eight times. Goats are most important, occurring 14 times. Ram and bull are found together in Lev 16:3, ram and goats in vs. 5, and bull and goats in Lev 16:15,18, 27. In these last three verses blood also is mentioned..

## III. The Problem with the He-Goat

The concept of the blood of bulls and goats is found in both Lev 16 and in Heb 9. Thus, there may be a hint to the Day of Atonement in Heb 9. Yet the precise language of the Day of Atonement is not used. The ram is missing. But the major problem is with the goats. Whereas Heb 9 uses *tragos* to describe a he-goat, Lev 16 uses *chimaros*.

The later term is found quite often in the OT and describes the sin offering. Such a he-goat occurs in the context of the Day of Atonement (14 times in Lev 16; Num 29:11), the Festival of the Weeks (Lev 13:19), the dedication of the sanctuary (13 times in Num 7, e.g. 7:16), monthly offerings (Num 28:15), Passover (Num 28:30), the Festival of the Trumpets

(Num 29:5), the Festival of Booths (8 times in Num 29, starting with vs. 16), etc. In Num the and the tragos stand next to each other. The first describes a sin offering. The tragoi, mentioned also 13 times, represent peace offerings. Yet, different Hebrew terms are used 'atûd for the tragos and sâ'îr for the chimaros so that one wonders whether or not these terms could be used interchangeably. Do the Masoretic Hebrew Text (MT) and the LXX use different words for basically the same animal as soon as goats are used for different types of sacrifices? In any case, in Ps 50:9 and 50:13, within the same context bulls and goats are mentioned, at first the moschoi and the chimaroi,[2] then the tauroi and the tragoi[3]

An almost identical phrase of (to) haima tragôn kai taurôn in Heb 9:13 is found in Isa 1:11 (haima tragôn kai taurôn). This is the closest OT parallel to the text in Heb. In Isa 1 God has enough of the burnt offerings and is not interested in the blood of goats and bulls, because the people's heart is not with Him. This text seems to refer to the entire sacrificial system of Israel,[4] and this may also be the point in Heb 9. In Isa it is not sufficient to follow a mere ritual and to offer sacrifices. Blood sacrifices are meaningless as long as those who offer them are not involved personally by turning toward God, being repentant of sin, and choosing a "lifestyle of justice and righteousness"[5] Similarly, in Heb 9 blood sacrifices of animals are not sufficient. It is only the blood of Jesus through which eternal salvation has been obtained (Heb 9:12) and through which our conscience is purified "from dead works to worship the living God" (Heb 9:14)

## Conclusion

Based on the language of Heb 9:12-13 it is possible that the Day of Atonement is included, but that appears not to be the major focus. To this point it is difficult to demonstrate beyond doubt that the author had in mind the Day of Atonement only.

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[1]. Judg 6:4 according to the LXX reads tauros, whereas LXX (A) read moschos. In Judg 6:25 the LXX has ton moschon to tauron. However, LXX (A) reads only ton moschon.

[2]. Together these two nouns are also found in Lev 9:3, 16:15,18,27; Num 7:87; 15:24; Dt 14:4; 2Chr 29:21; Ezz 6:17; 8:35; and Neh 5:18. chimaros and tauros are not found together.

[3]. Tauros and tragos also occur next to each other in Gen 32:15-16; Dt 32:14; and Isa 1:11; 34:6-7.

[4]. The MT refers to the ram, the fatling, the bull, the lamb, and the goat, whereas the LXX mentions the ram, the lamb, the bull and the goat. As noted by John D. W. Watts, *Isaiah 1-33*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco: Word Books, 1985), 21: "This is a comprehensive list of the types of blood sacrifice."

[5]. *Ibid.*, 20.