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The Scapegoat and Atonement

*How Satan's Power of Death Is Defeated
Through Christ's Descent to Hades*

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Abstract

Hebrews 2:14–15 claims that Christ defeated the devil through death, while Hebrews also presents his atoning work through the Day of Atonement. Building on David M. Moffitt’s account of the priestly and heavenly dimensions of atonement, and engaging Katie Marcar’s Passover–Exodus proposal, this article asks whether Leviticus 16 itself supplies a complementary mechanism for the devil’s defeat. It argues that the second goat—the goat for Azazel—forms a genuine component of the atoning rite and may illuminate Christ’s sin-bearing descent to Hades. On this reading, Satan’s “power of death” is a sin-conditioned juridical claim: he tempts, accuses, and invokes death on the basis of human guilt. Christ bears transferred sin without personal guilt, carries it into the accuser’s realm, and cancels the record on which that claim depends. The article develops this proposal through the identity of Azazel, the biblical roles of tempter and accuser, Colossians 2:13–15, the deception leading to the crucifixion, the harrowing of Hades, Jubilee release, and the New Covenant gift of the Spirit. The result is a constructive synthesis of Day of Atonement and Christus Victor themes in which forgiveness disarms the powers and prepares a cleansed people for divine indwelling.

Keywords: Day of Atonement; scapegoat; Azazel; Hebrews; Christus Victor; descent to Hades; Satan; Second Temple Judaism; Jubilee; New Covenant.

I

Three Questions the Standard Models Cannot Answer

The Epistle to the Hebrews makes a claim about the devil that our dominant theories of atonement do not explain adequately. It asserts both that the devil held “the power of death” and that Christ dismantled that power by dying:

Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. (Hebrews 2:14–15)

Three questions follow from this text, and they organize everything below. First, what is the nature of Satan’s power of death? Second, how did Christ’s death destroy it? Third, how was Satan tricked into a course of action that ruined him? These are not idle puzzles. If you can answer either of the first two, you understand something the church has largely lost hold of; and the third drives the whole second half of the argument, because Satan labored to bring about the crucifixion, and the crucifixion is precisely what undid him according to Hebrews 2:14. That he worked so hard for his own defeat means he did not understand what killing Jesus would do.¹

The dominant model has trouble here for a structural reason. Penal substitution locates the whole of atonement at the cross, in the transaction of divine wrath against a substitute, and treats the devil as at most a bystander. Yet destroying the one who had the power of death is one of the stated purposes of the incarnation and the death. First John says the same in different words:

He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil. (1 John 3:8)

And Revelation reports the outcome as a transfer of custody. Satan once held the power of death; the risen Christ now holds its keys:

I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death. (Revelation 1:18)

Something changed hands. The task is to say exactly how.

II

Two Foundations: Milgrom’s Detergent and Moffitt’s Realism

Two scholars supply the ground on which the argument stands. The first is Jacob Milgrom, whose work on Leviticus established how Israel’s sacrifices were understood to function. The second is David Moffitt, who carried Milgrom’s insight into the reading of Hebrews.

Milgrom’s central point is that blood, in the Levitical system, is a ritual detergent. Leviticus 17:11 is the one place that tells us why atonement works, and its answer is the life carried in the blood:

‘For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you on the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood *by reason of the life* that makes atonement.’ (Leviticus 17:11)

¹ The transcript on which this paper is based frames the three questions in exactly this order and notes that 1 Cor 2:8 (“had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory”) supports the point about Satan’s ignorance but is not strictly required for it: the mere fact that Satan sought Christ’s death, which destroyed him, entails that he did not foresee the outcome. This paper follows the argumentative arc of that presentation throughout.

Sin and impurity pollute sacred space; that pollution is a taint of death; and life, present in the blood, is what cleanses it. From this follows Milgrom's second point, the one Moffitt develops: atonement is accomplished in the application of the blood, not in the killing of the animal. The slaughter is a means to an end. It yields the blood, which the priest then conveys and applies at the altar and, on the Day of Atonement, within the holy of holies. The mercy seat itself bears the name of atonement.²

Moffitt takes this into Hebrews and draws out its realism. If atonement is the whole sequence culminating in the presentation of blood in the sanctuary, then the death of the victim is only one moment in a longer process:³

On this reading Jesus's resurrection and ascension are not epilogues to the atonement but constitutive of it. He had to rise in a body and ascend in order to present the offering of himself in the real sanctuary in heaven, of which the wilderness tabernacle was only a copy. The heavenly tabernacle is the true one; Moses was shown a pattern of it; Jesus, a real high priest of Melchizedek's order, really entered the real place to make a real atonement.⁴

This realism is the lever for everything that follows. If the heavenly sanctuary demanded a real fulfillment, then the parts of the Yom Kippur ritual demand real fulfillment too—including the part Moffitt himself does not fully develop.

III

Marcar's Question and the Gap in the Day of Atonement

Katie Marcar accepts Moffitt's premises and asks the right question. Hebrews presents Christ as accomplishing the ultimate Day of Atonement sacrifice; yet Hebrews 2:14 also says his death disabled the devil. Where, in the Day of Atonement, is the defeat of the devil? Her answer is that it is not there. "No aspect of the Levitical Day of Atonement ritual involves defeating the devil," she writes, and so she looks elsewhere, to a Passover–Exodus typology in which the devil takes the place of Pharaoh, the realm of the dead stands for Egypt, and Christ leads a new exodus of the enslaved dead out of bondage.⁵

Two things should be said about this proposal. Marcar may well be right that Passover imagery is present in Hebrews, and the new-exodus reading is a genuine contribution; this paper does not reject it.⁶

² Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible 3 (New York: Doubleday, 1991), esp. 1079–84 on Lev 17:11 (blood as ransom/detergent) and the treatment of the *kapporet*. On the atoning weight resting on the manipulation of blood rather than the slaughter, see Moffitt's summary of the Levitical evidence in *Rethinking the Atonement* (below), which builds directly on Milgrom and R. E. Gane.

³ David M. Moffitt, *Rethinking the Atonement: New Perspectives on Jesus's Death, Resurrection, and Ascension* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2022). On atonement as a sequence of events whose atoning goal is achieved in the priestly manipulation of blood at the altars rather than in the slaughter, see pp. 35–36 and the extended demonstration from Leviticus 16 on pp. 246–47, where Moffitt notes that "the slaughter was not the central moment in the sacrifice."

⁴ Moffitt, *Rethinking the Atonement*, 37: "In his humanity, the incarnate Son fulfills both the sacrificial and high-priestly Yom Kippur roles when he ascends into the heavenly tabernacle. Jesus's ascension is when and where the elements of his sacrifice—his resurrected body and blood—are presented to the Father." The insistence on the heavenly sanctuary as the real one, the earthly as copy, is a leitmotif of the book; cf. Heb 8:1–5; 9:11–12, 24.

⁵ Katie Marcar, "Passover, Liberation, and the Defeat of Death and the Devil: A Proposal for the Descensus Christi and the Harrowing of Hades in Hebrews 2:14–15," *New Testament Studies* 71 (2025): 264–283. The programmatic claim appears at 264: "No aspect of the Levitical Day of Atonement ritual involves defeating the devil. Instead, the context of Heb 2.14–15 seems to place it primarily within a larger Passover–Exodus typology." The exodus typology (devil as Pharaoh, underworld as Egypt, new exodus of the dead) is developed at 266–67 and throughout.

⁶ Marcar herself notes, tellingly for the present argument, that her own reasoning in defending the Passover reading acknowledges the difficulty that "nowhere in Passover is the devil defeated" (Marcar, "Passover," 265). The Passover lamb's blood is apotropaic—it shields Israel from the destroyer—but it does not disable the destroyer. That admission is precisely the seam this paper exploits: a typology that depicts rescue from the destroyer without a ritual act that disables him is depicting, not mechanizing.

Marcar supplies a compelling liberation framework: captives are led out from the dominion of a Pharaoh-like devil. The remaining question is whether that typology also identifies the cultic or juridical mechanism by which the captor's hold is broken. Her own defense of the Passover reading acknowledges that, in the Passover itself, the destroyer is warded off rather than disabled. Passover may therefore depict the liberation truly while leaving room for the Day of Atonement's sent-away goat to explain how the accuser's claim is undone. That mechanism question is the primary concern here.

The further question concerns Marcar's premise that no part of Yom Kippur defeats the devil. The Day of Atonement is a single atoning rite performed with two goats, and the second goat deserves sustained attention. Leviticus is explicit that the live goat is itself part of the atonement:

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. (Leviticus 16:10)

The scapegoat is presented "to make an atonement." Both lots are cast on the same day, over two goats, for one purpose; one goat is killed and one is sent away alive, and only then does the high priest declare atonement complete. If, as Moffitt argues, Hebrews sees Jesus fulfilling one of these goats, there is a good reason to ask where he fulfills the other.⁷

Moffitt's realism creates pressure to ask the question a second time. He is at pains to say that the heavenly tabernacle is the real place, requiring real fulfillment; that same realism, when applied to the second goat, invites us to ask whether the scapegoat's distinctive action—having the people's sins confessed onto its head and then bearing them out of the camp toward Azazel—also receives a concrete fulfillment. The constructive question of this paper is therefore: in what way might Christ fulfill that movement?⁸

IV

The Two Goats and the Transfer of Sin

Consider the two acts in turn. The first goat is "for the LORD." It is slain; its blood is carried into the holy of holies and sprinkled on the mercy seat. This is the cleansing movement, purging the sanctuary. The second goat is "for Azazel." It is not slain. The high priest lays both hands on its head, confesses over it all the iniquities of Israel, and so transfers those sins onto the goat, which is then driven out of the camp into the wilderness.

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: and the goat shall bear upon him all their iniquities unto a land not inhabited. (Leviticus 16:21–22)

⁷ The claim that both goats belong to one atonement is not idiosyncratic. Moffitt reads Leviticus 16 as identifying multiple constitutive elements of a single atoning process, including "sending the live goat away laden with sin (16:20–22)" alongside the application of blood in the holy of holies; see *Rethinking the Atonement*, 246–47. Richard J. Barry IV makes the two-goat unity central: he argues that "the two 'movements,' represented by the two goats, actually require each other," and criticizes modern soteriologies for "conflating" the two goats and so failing to see their distinct but inseparable roles. Richard J. Barry IV, *Jewish Temple Theology and the Mystery of the Cross: Atonement and the Two Goats of Yom Kippur* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2024), esp. the programmatic statements at the opening of the study and in the chapter "The Two Goats and the One Lord, Jesus Christ."

⁸ Moffitt himself draws the directional contrast between the two goats that this paper builds upon. Commenting on Heb 9:28 ("Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many"), he observes that "if one looks to the Levitical cult for the idea of an animal 'bearing sins,' the nearest parallel is the so-called scapegoat," which "was not ultimately offered to God" but, precisely because sins were placed on it, "must move away from God's house and presence. This goat bears sins away from God" (*Rethinking the Atonement*, 63). Moffitt is chiefly concerned to distinguish sin-bearing from the high-priestly self-offering and does not develop the scapegoat movement into a devil-defeating mechanism; that undeveloped movement is the gap this paper fills.

If Christ fulfills this goat, the first thing to establish is that he too had sin transferred onto him and bore it away. This is not a marginal motif but a dense biblical seam. Isaiah 53, which reads throughout like a commentary on the scapegoat, states it repeatedly:

All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. (Isaiah 53:6)

He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities. (Isaiah 53:11)

The New Testament says it plainly and often:

For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. (2 Corinthians 5:21)

Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed. (1 Peter 2:24)

So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation. (Hebrews 9:28)

Just as the scapegoat's sin-bearing was a necessary component of the atonement that secured Israel's forgiveness, the placing of the world's sin on Jesus is a necessary component of the atonement that secures ours. This is why these texts speak of sin-bearing in the same breath as forgiveness. The transfer is not incidental to the cross; it is the second goat being fulfilled. And it is crucial, for reasons that surface later, that the sin laid on Jesus was never his own: "he knew no sin."

Two recent studies establish this scapegoat realism and set the stage for the argument, without completing it. Samuel Renihan, in a study of the descent of Christ, argues that the descent runs through both Testaments far more thoroughly than the modern church assumes, that Christ's human soul really descended to the realm of the dead, and that the goat sent to Azazel pictures Christ sent out of the camp to the pit.⁹

Richard Barry, recovering the two-goat structure of Yom Kippur as the key to atonement, insists that both goats must be held together to express the true shape of biblical atonement and that the New Testament and Fathers, rightly read, do not conflate them.¹⁰

Both treat the scapegoat as a genuine, real component of Christ's atoning work rather than a mere metaphor, and both—Renihan explicitly, Barry through his typological structure—connect Christ's descent to the scapegoat. What neither fully articulates is how that descent, and specifically the delivery of transferred sin to its source, dismantles Satan's juridical claim and defeats the accuser. That mechanism is where this project begins.

⁹ Samuel D. Renihan, *Crux, Mors, Inferi: A Primer on the Descent of Christ* (2021), on the two-goat typology of the Day of Atonement: "The two goats are the one Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. He descended to hell, sent out of the camp to Azazel. Then he ascended to heaven" (ch. 5, "The Descent in the Old Testament"). Renihan takes the Azazel of Lev 16 with 1 Enoch 10:4, 8 as "a fallen angel, if not Satan himself," such that "atonement is achieved through one goat's blood being presented to God, and the other goat being delivered over to the pit, to Azazel, to Sheol and the fallen angels."

¹⁰ Barry, *Jewish Temple Theology and the Mystery of the Cross*, esp. the argument that modern soteriologies err by "conflating" the theological meanings of the two goats and thereby lose the distinct "movements" of the YHWH-goat and the Azazel-goat, which he argues "actually require each other." Barry devotes a distinct treatment to the Azazel-goat movement (drawing critically on von Balthasar) as necessary for a comprehensive soteriology.

V

Azazel: A Being, a Destination, and an Identity

The second goat is sent “to Azazel,” and the Hebrew forces a question most English translations soften. Leviticus 16:8 casts the two lots as a pair of opposites:

And Aaron shall cast lots upon the two goats; one lot for the LORD, and the other lot for the scapegoat.
(Leviticus 16:8)

Where the KJV reads “for the scapegoat,” the Hebrew reads “for Azazel,” set directly opposite “for the LORD.” The parallelism pairs a personal name with a personal name and strongly implies that Azazel is a being, not a place. The common expedient of reading Azazel as a cliff or a rugged place of removal has little purchase in the text itself; it is largely a way of avoiding the discomfort that one goat appears to be designated for a demon.¹¹

The name is not obscure in Second Temple literature. In 1 Enoch, Azazel is one of the principal fallen angels and the figure especially associated with humanity’s corruption. Two passages bear directly on the ritual. The first assigns responsibility for the earth’s corruption to him and directs that all sin be ascribed to him:

And the whole earth has been corrupted through the works that were taught by Azazel: to him ascribe all sin. (1 Enoch 10:8)

The second explains what a wilderness far from the camp has to do with him. He is bound there:

And again the Lord said to Raphael: 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. (1 Enoch 10:4)

Read against these texts, the ritual becomes more intelligible. Why drive a sin-laden goat into the wilderness? In this reception history, the wilderness is where Azazel is bound. Why send the people’s sin toward him in particular? Because the tradition ascribes responsibility for humanity’s corruption to him. The gesture can therefore be read, in effect, as a juridical reassignment: this burden no longer rests on the accused but is carried toward the adversarial source associated with its origin.¹²

Michael Heiser adds a further link that matters later. Drawing on the wider Second Temple background, including the Baal cycle’s death-god Mot, he argues that the wilderness to which Azazel is consigned is not merely arid land but the realm of the dead.¹³

Milgrom, Heiser, Renihan, and several other interpreters discussed here understand Azazel as a personal supernatural referent, although they differ sharply over what follows from that identification. The further step—identifying Azazel with the biblical Satan—is a constructive synthesis rather than a settled lexical fact. Several converging lines nevertheless support it. If the earth was corrupted through Azazel’s deception and sin is ascribed to him, the closest biblical analogue is the serpent who deceived humanity. The

¹¹ The grammatical parallelism argument is Milgrom’s. Because he is not given to supernatural readings, his conclusion carries added weight: Azazel is “the name of a demon” and the syntactic opposition of “for YHWH” and “for Azazel” demands a personal referent, not a place. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, 1020–21. Michael Heiser follows this, arguing that both the Hebrew text and the surrounding Second Temple literature require a real supernatural entity: *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the Supernatural Worldview of the Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2015), esp. ch. 27 on Azazel and the Day of Atonement.

¹² The pairing of 1 Enoch 10:8 (“to him ascribe all sin”) and 10:4 (Azazel bound in the desert) to interpret the scapegoat’s destination is made by both Renihan (*Crux, Mors, Inferi*, ch. 5) and Heiser (*Unseen Realm*, ch. 27). Jude 14–15 quotes 1 Enoch as genuine prophecy of “Enoch, the seventh from Adam,” which establishes its antiquity and evidential value for Second Temple belief without implying canonical status.

¹³ Heiser, *Unseen Realm*, ch. 27; and *Reversing Hermon: Enoch, the Watchers, and the Forgotten Mission of Jesus Christ* (Crane, MO: Defender, 2017), on the association of the Azazel-wilderness with the realm of the dead. The association of the outer wilderness with death and the netherworld is a recurring feature of the Second Temple material.

binding of Azazel also resembles the cursing and confinement of the serpent. *The Apocalypse of Abraham* makes the broader identification with the Edenic adversary especially clear: the serpent functions as Azazel's instrument, while Azazel appears as the ruling source of corruption and the antagonist of God's elect.¹⁴

The curse of Genesis 3 fits this picture. Two of its terms are strange if taken as literal zoology and pointed if taken as consignment:

And the LORD God said unto the serpent, Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life.
(Genesis 3:14)

Serpents do not, in fact, eat dust; and the "dust" is the earth, the ground itself. Heiser reads the curse as encoding the serpent's consignment to the earth and, by extension, to the realm of the dead beneath it.¹⁵

None of this requires that Satan be confined; he can still tempt, possess, and range "to and fro in the earth" as Job says. The claim is narrower: in some sense Satan is bound to the realm of the dead, and that is why the sin-bearing goat is sent to him there.

This yields two competing readings of how the scapegoat works, and the choice between them shapes the whole argument. On the first, which may be called the trashcan view, the wilderness matters only as somewhere outside the camp; sin must be removed from the place where God dwells, and Azazel's presence there is incidental. Milgrom holds something like this, and Barry's emphasis on removal is compatible with it.¹⁶

On the second, the return-to-sender view, Azazel's bound presence is the whole point. Because all sin is ascribed to him, the confessed sin of Israel is being sent back to the account to which it ultimately belongs: this is yours; it should be on your ledger, not theirs. This is the reading argued for here.¹⁷

The return-to-sender reading has a further advantage: it dissolves the old objection that the goat "for Azazel" looks like a sacrifice offered to a demon. It is no such thing. The goat is not killed; Leviticus presents it alive, and the later rabbinic practice of pushing it from a cliff to ensure its death is a development the biblical text does not require or emphasize.¹⁸

It is not a sacrifice, and not even a gift. On the reading proposed here, it is a return in a juridical and cultic sense—a removal of sin from the accused and its reassignment toward the adversarial source to whom the tradition attributes humanity's corruption. Receiving that burden does Azazel no good; it becomes the means of his undoing, as the argument will propose.

¹⁴ *The Apocalypse of Abraham* (late first century AD or later) identifies the Eden serpent as "merely the instrument of Azazel" in the account of the Fall (ch. 23), and portrays Azazel as "the arch-fiend," source of wickedness and uncleanness, "lord of hell," whose heritage is over the wicked (chs. 13–14, 22, 31). See G. H. Box and J. I. Landsman, eds., *The Apocalypse of Abraham*, Translations of Early Documents (London: SPCK, 1918), with the editors' notes on the serpent as the instrument of Azazel and the parallel to John 8:44. Daniel Stökl Ben Ezra likewise treats the *Apocalypse of Abraham* and 1 Enoch 10 as texts in which "the 'Azazel goat serves as imagery for the leaders of the evil powers"; see *The Impact of Yom Kippur* on Early Christianity** (WUNT 163; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 79. Marcar cites Stökl Ben Ezra to the same effect at "Passover," 275.

¹⁵ Heiser, *Unseen Realm*, ch. 11 (the Genesis 3 curse read against ancient Near Eastern netherworld imagery). The point that serpents do not literally eat dust, so that the curse must carry another sense, and that "eat dust / crawl on the belly" encodes consignment to the ground and the realm of the dead, is developed there. The present paper takes this as consistent with, and mutually reinforcing of, the Azazel-bound-in-the-wilderness material.

¹⁶ For the elimination/removal emphasis, see Milgrom, Leviticus 1–16, 1020–21, 1044, where the rite's function is the disposal of impurity into the wilderness; and the general "elimination ritual" framing Moffitt cites from C. A. Eberhart, *The Sacrifice of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2011), 91, quoted in *Rethinking the Atonement*, 52 n. 24: elimination rituals move "away from the human habitat and toward uncultivated territory."

¹⁷ The "return to sender" reading is developed from Heiser's treatment of Azazel and is, so far as I can tell, held by few. It has an exegetical advantage over the trashcan view (below) and is essential to the juridical mechanism argued in section VII.

¹⁸ Lev 16:10 presents the live goat alive "before the LORD"; the biblical text makes no point of its death. The cliff-and-thread procedure belongs to later tradition (m. Yoma 6:6), not to Leviticus. The observation that the Bible, unlike later midrash, does not stress the goat's killing is significant for the non-sacrificial reading advanced here.

VI

The Nature of Satan's Power of Death

To see how the scapegoat defeats the death-power, one must first say what that power is. Hebrews states its existence but not its nature: the devil “had the power of death.” To understand it we must accept something the modern imagination resists: God has an arrangement with Satan, a permitted and bounded operation, allowed for God's own purposes. The evidence for such an arrangement runs through Scripture.

An arrangement, before and after the cross

Any adequate account must explain Satan's dominion both before and after the crucifixion, because he is shown exercising it in both periods. Whatever the cross did to his power, it did not simply remove all worldly dominion from him, since the New Testament continues to describe him as active. The following texts establish a granted, bounded authority. In Job, God sets the limits of what Satan may do, permitting affliction but forbidding, then permitting under limit, the taking of life:

And the LORD said unto Satan, Behold, all that he hath is in thy power; only upon himself put not forth thine hand. So Satan went forth from the presence of the LORD. (Job 1:12)

Jesus tells Peter that Satan has requested him, language of petition and permission:

And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not. (Luke 22:31–32)

After the cross, Paul still calls Satan the god of this age, actively blinding minds:

In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them. (2 Corinthians 4:4)

And believers still contend against a structured spiritual dominion:

For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. (Ephesians 6:12)

John says the world lies in his power; the temptation narrative reports his claim to the kingdoms and, tellingly, Jesus does not dispute the claim itself:¹⁹

And the devil said unto him, All this power will I give thee, and the glory of them: for that is delivered unto me; and to whomsoever I will I give it. (Luke 4:6)

Taken together, these show a dominion that is real and bounded in both periods, which can only mean it is granted. The task is to name the terms of the grant, and they turn on the power of death.

The office of the tempter and the purpose of testing

The first link in the chain is that Satan is a tempter, and the role is described as an office with a definite article:

And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread. (Matthew 4:3)

¹⁹ Additional dominion texts: John 12:31 (“the prince of this world”); 1 John 5:19 (“the whole world lieth in wickedness”/“in the wicked one”); Luke 4:6 (“All this power will I give thee ... for that is delivered unto me”), where the absence of a rebuttal to the claim of delegated authority is itself evidence. That Satan retains real, if bounded, authority in the present age is common ground with Marcar and with the Second Temple material on Mastema/Belial cited below.

Paul uses the same title, and the New Testament everywhere warns that Satan tempts to sin.²⁰

Why would God permit such an office? The scriptural answer is testing. Trial is framed, again and again, as a test to reveal who will obey and who will not. The pattern is remarkably consistent and largely foreign to modern theology. Abraham is tested, and the outcome is spoken of as something God comes to know:

And he said, Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me. (Genesis 22:12)

The wilderness years are interpreted as a test of the heart:

And thou shalt remember all the way which the LORD thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no. (Deuteronomy 8:2)

The New Testament continues the theme, and ties the proving of faith to final reward:

That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 1:7)

Revelation goes further, presenting the devil himself as the administrator of a permitted test whose stakes are the crown of life:

Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life. (Revelation 2:10)

James makes the same connection between testing, endurance, and reward.²¹

This raises the tension James felt obliged to answer, that God tempts no one:

Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man. (James 1:13)

James insists both that trials will come and that God is not their tempter. The tension is real and appears elsewhere in Scripture in a striking way. The census of David is narrated twice, once with the LORD as the agent who incites and once with Satan:

And again the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he moved David against them to say, Go, number Israel and Judah. (2 Samuel 24:1)

And Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel. (1 Chronicles 21:1)

The same event has two agents, and this doubling appears, notably, on the subject of tempting. The pattern recurs at the temptation of Jesus, where the Spirit is the one who leads him to be tempted by the devil:

Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. (Matthew 4:1)

God, through the Spirit, wills that the testing occur; the devil is the one who tempts. The office of the tempter is permitted, and it serves the purpose of proving.

A caution is needed against overreading this as Satan being an employee from the beginning. He was not created as a tempter. The Eden temptation was not the discharge of an office; it was an aberration, the

²⁰ "The tempter" also at 1 Thess 3:5; cf. 1 Cor 7:5 ("that Satan tempt you not for your incontinency"). The consistent titular use supports treating tempting as a recognized role rather than a series of unrelated acts.

²¹ Jas 1:2–3 ("the trying of your faith worketh patience"); 1:12 ("Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life"). The testing framework is a load-bearing, and widely under-recognized, feature of the biblical material: trials are permitted, they are pass/fail, and they matter to final salvation.

opening move of a rebellion, and the severity of the curse that follows it proves the point, for he is not cursed afresh every time he tempts thereafter.²²

Why did Satan choose the tree of the knowledge of good and evil as his opening? Because of what its fruit does. The consequence passed to humanity was not, as one tradition holds, a nature so corrupt that we can do nothing but sin. It was opened eyes and accountability. The knowledge of good and evil functions like the law: it does not compel sin, but it makes us aware of good and evil and answerable for our choices, and so it kills.²³

Add to opened eyes and accountability a highly motivated adversary—older, subtler, and expert at temptation—and the combination is fatal. Human beings, now aware and answerable, are led into the sin for which they are accountable, and sin carries the sentence of death:

For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. (Romans 6:23)

The soul that sinneth, it shall die. (Ezekiel 18:4)

The chain that defines the power

Now the nature of the death-power can be stated precisely. It is not a bare sovereignty over dying; it is a juridical claim conditioned on sin. Satan tempts so that he may accuse, and he accuses so that he may kill. Having led a person into real sin, he holds a real charge; the accusation is a death claim, a guilt-warrant. His power over death rests on a valid claim of human guilt, and where there is no valid claim there is no power. The power is sin-conditioned.²⁴

A Second Temple text sharpens the picture of a sanctioned, staffed office. In Jubilees, the chief of the evil spirits, Mastema—identified with Satan—petitions God, when the rebellious spirits are about to be imprisoned, to retain a portion of them so that he can carry out his work of leading humanity astray:

And the chief of the spirits, Mastema, came and said: “Lord, Creator, let some of them remain before me, and let them hearken to my voice, and do all that I shall say unto them; for if some of them are not left to me, I shall not be able to execute the power of my will on the sons of men.” ... And he said: “Let the tenth part of them remain before him, and let nine parts descend into the place of condemnation.” (Jubilees 10:8–9)

This is not canonical, but it witnesses to a pre-Christian Jewish understanding in which Satan’s corrupting, tempting work, staffed by permitted demons, is a sanctioned office petitioned for before God.²⁵

One further, admittedly speculative, observation about the arrangement. Death, once introduced, requires an apparatus, and above all an abode of the dead. Hades, as distinct from the lake of fire prepared

²² This is marked, in the underlying presentation, as the firmly held point within an otherwise speculative discussion of when Satan acquired the tempter’s office. The claim is that Eden was rebellion, not sanctioned office; the permitted office emerges afterward, by default, out of the new situation the rebellion created. The precise moment of that transition is left open.

²³ This reading takes the effect of the tree to be epistemic and juridical (awareness and accountability) rather than a transmitted “sin nature.” Paul’s argument across Romans 1–7, that the law brings knowledge of sin and thereby death (e.g., Rom 7:7–11), is read here as unfolding this same dynamic. The point is developed further in section XII below. It is offered as the author’s constructive exegesis, distinguished from the sources cited elsewhere.

²⁴ The formula—tempts so he can accuse, accuses so he can kill—is the hinge of the whole thesis. It reframes Satan’s role: not “Satan as judge,” which is not a biblical picture, but “Satan as accuser-prosecutor whose case rests on real sin.” The accuser role is canonical: Zech 3:1–2; Job 1–2; Rev 12:10 (“the accuser of our brethren ... which accused them before our God day and night”).

²⁵ On Mastema as Satan and as a divinely permitted adversary, see the treatment in Moffitt’s own study of Jubilees: David M. Moffitt, “Jubilees and Hebrews 2:10–18: Passover and the Defeat of the Devil,” in *Reading Hebrews in Context*, ed. B. C. Blackwell et al. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2023). Moffitt notes that in Jubilees the exodus is “as much about the liberation of God’s people from the power of Mastema, the satanic ‘destroyer,’ as it was about being freed from Pharaoh,” and that Mastema is not “a fully independent agent” but operates within the Lord’s plan (see Jub. 48:17). This paper cites Moffitt’s Jubilees material for the Mastema-as-permitted-adversary point; it does not adopt his routing of the devil’s defeat through Passover, which is the rival account this paper displaces.

for the devil and his angels, may be a new category that came into being at the fall, with Satan deemed its lord—cursed to the ground and made lord of the realm of the dead by the same curse.²⁶

VII

Return to Sender: How the Scapegoat Defeats the Death-Power

The pieces now assemble into a single mechanism. It proceeds in steps.

First, Christ takes on sin as the scapegoat did, but the sin of the whole world rather than Israel's alone, and the sin is not his own—"he knew no sin." The transfer texts of section IV establish this: the LORD laid on him the iniquity of us all; he was made sin for us; he bore our sins in his body.

Second, that sin is delivered to Satan in Hades in the same way the scapegoat's burden is delivered to Azazel in the wilderness—not as a picture only but as a real event. Satan, treating Jesus as one who has fallen under his jurisdiction, takes him down to the place of the dead, reckoning it another instance of his ordinary victory over sinners. The descent is attested across the New Testament:

Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. (Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.) (Ephesians 4:8–10)

For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. (Matthew 12:40)

The descent was a historically received doctrine, confessed in the Apostles' Creed, and—crucially, Christ appears as victor: taking keys, freeing captives, never as one being punished. This alone tells against the penal handling of the descent, in which Christ goes to hell to suffer wrath. Calvin made the descent a metaphor for hell coming to Christ on the cross; the penal tradition, where it retains a literal descent, makes it a place of punishment. The multiplicity and awkwardness of these expedients is itself a sign that something has gone wrong.²⁷

Third, the delivery is a Trojan horse. What Satan hauls into his own domain is the very payload that destroys his claim, because it strikes at the basis of his ownership.

Fourth, here is the ownership analysis. Satan owns people through their sin and the justified accusation it grounds; the death claim is their guilt-warrant. But if those very sins have been transferred onto Jesus, and Jesus carries them back to their owner in Hades—not merely discarding them but moving them off our account and onto his, the return-to-sender movement—then the account on which Satan's claim depended is altered at its root. As the wilderness ritual sends the scapegoat to Azazel, so the descent sends the sin-bearing Christ to Satan.

Fifth, forgiveness is the decisive result. As Israel was forgiven on the Day of Atonement, so this atonement effects our forgiveness; and once forgiven, we are beyond the reach of a power that depended on our

²⁶ Marked in the underlying presentation as "incredibly speculative." Matt 25:41 has the lake of fire "prepared for the devil and his angels," but the angelic rebellion of Gen 6 postdates Adam; the suggestion here is that Hades (the intermediate abode of the dead) is a distinct, newly opened category tied to the first human deaths, over which Satan is made lord via the Genesis 3 curse. Offered as speculation, not as a load-bearing premise.

²⁷ On the descent as victorious rather than punitive, and on the strained penal handling of it (Calvin's metaphorical reading; the compressed-eternity reading of the three days), the underlying presentation surveys the options and finds them unstable. Renihan's *Crux, Mors, Inferi* is a modern defense of a real, victorious descent read through the two-goat typology. The earliest name for the victorious reading, *Christus Victor*, rightly preserves the victory but, as the next paragraph argues, does not name the mechanism.

guilt. Satan's claim was based on justified, sin-conditioned accusation. Remove the guilt by forgiveness, and the claim collapses.

Sixth, this is exactly the logic of Colossians 2, the key text. Paul welds forgiveness and disarming into a single act:

And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses; blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross; and having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it. (Colossians 2:13–15)

What is nailed to the cross is often read as the Mosaic law, but the term Paul uses is the *cheirographon*, the handwritten certificate of debt, the record of decrees “against us” and “contrary to us.” That is not the law as such but the ledger of genuine charges that grounded the accuser's power of death. The passage opens with “having forgiven you all trespasses” and proceeds without a break to the blotting out of the certificate and the disarming of the powers. Grammatically and theologically these are one movement: forgiveness tears up the guilt-record, and tearing up the guilt-record is the disarming of the powers. He does not retain the power of death once the record is cancelled—the more so when that same record of sin has been returned to him as its owner.²⁸

Seventh, a word on who benefits. The disarming applies to those who become beneficiaries of the atoning act, through faith and allegiance to Jesus. This is why Satan retains his sin-conditioned dominion over the unforgiven after the cross even as he is disarmed with respect to those who are in Christ. The deeper security is union with Christ: we are safe in him, and it is through that union, sustained by forgiveness and by abiding, that the benefits are inherited. The point matters for the paper's conclusion.²⁹

VIII

The Deception: Why Satan Sprang His Own Trap

A problem remains. Killing Jesus and taking him to Hades was entirely within Satan's power; he did it; and it ruined him. Where, then, was he confused? Naming the confusion illuminates not only this episode but a great deal else.

Begin from the sin-conditioned character of the power. Satan tempts, then accuses, then kills; he cannot rightly kill whom he has not first brought under a valid charge of sin. He very likely knows that the promised head-crusher of Genesis 3:15 has come, and has watched for him. His method with Jesus is therefore his standard method: get him to sin, and thereby acquire a death claim.

His first campaign is direct temptation, in the wilderness, and it fails. But he does not abandon the project:

And when the devil had ended all the temptation, he departed from him for a season. (Luke 4:13)

²⁸ On the *cheirographon* as a bond or certificate of indebtedness rather than the Mosaic law per se, and on the participial chain that binds forgiveness (v. 13) to the cancellation of the bond (v. 14) and the disarming of the powers (v. 15) as a single act, see Peter T. O'Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, Word Biblical Commentary 44 (Waco: Word, 1982), on 2:13–15. The reading that the “bond” is the record of debt/decrees standing against the sinner, cancelled in the act of forgiveness and thereby stripping the hostile powers of their ground, is well represented in the exegetical literature and coheres exactly with the juridical mechanism argued here. The verb ἀπεκδυσάμενος / the imagery of “disarming” and public triumph is military-legal, fitting an accuser stripped of his case.

²⁹ The union-with-Christ qualification guards against a misreading of the mechanism as requiring sinless perfection. The claim is not that the forgiven are henceforth sinless and so unaccusable, but that they are in Christ, and that their standing rests on his desert, maintained through forgiveness and abiding (John 15). This is why the disarming is real yet the present age still contains a Satan with real, sin-conditioned power over those outside that union.

He withdraws “for a season”—until a more opportune time—and looks for another angle.³⁰

Now the trap is sprung, and the key move is a misreading. When the world’s sin is imputed to Jesus, Satan reads that imputed sin as Jesus’s own guilt, as proof that he has at last brought him under his power. Believing he has won, he engineers the killing and conducts Jesus to Hades—thereby personally completing the scapegoat ritual and the atonement that effects forgiveness. And because the sin was imputed, not personal, Satan has in fact killed an innocent, exceeding his authority.³¹

This differs from Renihan’s account of the deception, and the difference is worth stating precisely. Renihan holds that Satan knew he had failed to make Jesus sin and killed him anyway, not knowing that a sinless man cannot be held in Hades; the harrowing follows because death had no claim on the innocent one.³²

Two claims of Renihan’s are correct and retained: a sinless soul cannot be held in Hades, and the harrowing does follow. Where this account diverges is on Satan’s state of mind. Satan would not, and arguably could not, simply give up tempting and kill a man he knew to be sinless, because he knew he needed a valid claim of sin to have any death-authority at all, and because an illegal killing would jeopardize that very authority. The deception must therefore run through a misread claim of sin, not through a reckless killing of the confessedly sinless.

The Judas gambit (offered as severable)

How might Satan have come to believe he possessed such a claim? What follows is offered as a distinct and severable proposal. The core thesis—that the scapegoat and its delivery of sin are necessary components of Christ’s defeat of Satan—stands whether or not this reconstruction of the deception is accepted. A reader may find the mechanism below unproven and still hold everything above.³³

The proposal: having failed at direct temptation, Satan attempts to turn one of the Twelve, wagering that a disciple’s betrayal could be charged back to Jesus’s own account. The logic he would be exploiting is that Jesus chose the Twelve after a whole night of prayer, in obedience to the Father:

And it came to pass in those days, that he went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God. And when it was day, he called unto him his disciples: and of them he chose twelve, whom also he named apostles. (Luke 6:12–13)

If one of the chosen should prove a traitor, then—so the wager runs—either Jesus chose wrongly, having failed to hear the Father, or his communion with the Father was somehow broken. Either way, a charge of sin might be laid.

Several lines of evidence, none decisive alone, converge on this reading. The first is structural: the Gethsemane scene is bracketed by Judas. Satan enters Judas at the supper; Judas departs; the agony in the garden

³⁰ A secondary and more speculative campaign may be read in the repeated failed attempts on Jesus’s life (“no man laid hands on him, for his hour was not yet come,” John 7:30; 8:20; cf. Luke 4:29–30). The charges that provoked these attempts—blasphemy, Sabbath violation—would have been valid capital charges were Jesus not who he is; their failure may have functioned as information to Satan (“I could not kill him; perhaps that was not, after all, a punishable sin”). The underlying presentation files this in the speculative bucket; only the first campaign is needed for the argument.

³¹ On exceeding delegated authority and forfeiting it, Ps 82 provides a precedent: the divine-council figures “judge unjustly” and are stripped of their standing (“ye shall die like men,” Ps 82:6–7). The underlying presentation allows the illegal killing as a contributing factor in Satan’s loss of power but locates the decisive cause in forgiveness (Col 2:13–15), not in the illegality of the killing as such.

³² Renihan, *Crux, Mors, Inferi*: “The goat sent to Azazel came back, for the first time. In fact, the goat had overpowered Azazel, broken his stronghold, and left him chained in the ruins of his own citadel.” Renihan’s mechanism turns on the impossibility of holding a sinless soul in Sheol (cf. Acts 2:24, “having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it”). The present paper agrees that a sinless one cannot be held, and that the harrowing follows, but locates the deception differently—see the main text.

³³ This severability is stated explicitly in the underlying presentation and is preserved here as a matter of intellectual honesty: the deception-mechanism is the most speculative element of the argument and is deliberately quarantined from the core juridical thesis.

unfolds; and Judas reappears with the soldiers. Satan is in Judas across the whole Gethsemane window—and so, on this reading, absent from Jesus during it, which will matter shortly.

The second is the proposed placement of imputation. On the reading advanced here, the transfer of the world's sin begins in Gethsemane rather than first at the cross—though it certainly rests on him there too. The agony, the bloody sweat, and the words “my soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death” may mark that moment, as developed in section IX.

How would Satan read his supposed success? Two versions are possible. On the first, he can in some measure see guilt spiritually. There is a plausible basis for this in Zechariah's vision, where iniquity is visible as filthy garments in the heavenly court with the accuser present:

Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments, and stood before the angel. And he answered and spake unto those that stood before him, saying, Take away the filthy garments from him. And unto him he said, Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment. (Zechariah 3:3–4)

On the first version of the proposal, Satan, returning in Judas after the Gethsemane window, sees on Jesus a burden of sin that was not there before and misreads transferred sin as personal guilt. On the second version, no spiritual sight is required: Satan simply infers success from the fact that the execution now proceeds. Every previously impossible step—arrest, trial before Pilate, scourging—now succeeds, where before “his hour was not yet come” had blocked them. The machinery moving forward could therefore look, to Satan, like proof that the charge had stuck.

Another line of evidence is the Fourth Gospel's insistence that Jesus knew about Judas from the outset. This answers the very charge the gambit tries to lay: choosing Judas was not a failure to hear the Father but obedience to him, that Scripture might be fulfilled.

But there are some of you that believe not. For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that believed not, and who should betray him. (John 6:64)

While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name: those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the scripture might be fulfilled. (John 17:12)

John presses the point repeatedly, as though answering an accusation: Jesus chose the Twelve knowing one was a devil; he knew who would betray him; he knew whom he had chosen.³⁴

A fifth line concerns why Satan enters Judas personally at all. Judas had already resolved on betrayal and had already bargained with the priests; the possession was not needed to produce the betrayal.

Then entered Satan into Judas... And he went his way, and communed with the chief priests and captains, how he might betray him unto them. (Luke 22:3–4)

Judas's greed and settled treachery had opened the door—the foothold Paul warns of—and through that door Satan himself entered.³⁵

And a sixth: the Johannine word over Gethsemane itself, which ties the casting-out of the ruler of this world to what is happening in the garden, not to a generic “the cross did it”:

³⁴ John 6:70 (“Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil?”); 13:11 (“he knew who should betray him”); 13:18 (“I know whom I have chosen ... that the scripture may be fulfilled”). Read against the gambit, John's repeated insistence functions as a rebuttal of the charge Satan tried to lay: the choice of Judas was foreknown obedience, not a lapse. Satan's premise—that a traitor among the chosen would convict the chooser—would have held had the Father not directed the choice; his error was in the premise, not the reasoning.

³⁵ Eph 4:26–27 (“neither give place to the devil”) supplies the door/foothold logic. The point is that possession here is not the cause of the betrayal (already resolved: Matt 26:14–16) but Satan's personal investment in a plan he expected to pay off, which is itself a small piece of circumstantial evidence for the gambit reading.

Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour... Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out. (John 12:27, 31)

IX

The Psalm-Trail: Gethsemane, Imputation, and Descent

The proposal that imputation begins in Gethsemane can be tested against a pattern in the Old Testament. Jesus's words in the garden function as a springboard, in the way "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" sends the reader to Psalm 22 for a picture of the cross. Follow the phrase "my soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death," and a suggestive pattern emerges: passages of an innocent bearing the sins of others are bound up with passages of descent into the realm of the dead. Where a single text combines a Gethsemane verbal link, sin-bearing language, and descent language, the Gethsemane-imputation proposal gains textual support, though not demonstration.

Then saith he unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here, and watch with me. (Matthew 26:38)

The Johannine counterpart pairs with it: "Now is my soul troubled" (John 12:27).³⁶

The first stop is Isaiah 53, which may be read as a passage about sin-imputation first of all. Its language of soul, death, and the numbering of the innocent among the guilty is precisely scapegoat language:

He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors. (Isaiah 53:11–12)

"Numbered with the transgressors" is especially suggestive when read as the reckoning of an innocent among the guilty; and it comes from a chapter that repeatedly speaks of bearing the sin of many for their justification and forgiveness. "Poured out his soul unto death" and "travail of his soul" also answer to the Gethsemane cry.

The decisive text is Psalm 88, which unites all three threads. Its opening supplies the Gethsemane link:

For my soul is full of troubles: and my life draweth nigh unto the grave. (Psalm 88:3)

Its next line supplies language of being reckoned among those descending to the pit, language that becomes especially suggestive when read christologically of an innocent bearer:

I am counted with them that go down into the pit: I am as a man that hath no strength. (Psalm 88:4)

And it supplies the descent link:

Free among the dead, like the slain that lie in the grave, whom thou rememberest no more: and they are cut off from thy hand. Thou hast laid me in the lowest pit, in darkness, in the deeps. (Psalm 88:5–6)

The psalm even embeds the harrowing in a series of questions whose answer, on this reading, is yes:

Wilt thou shew wonders to the dead? shall the dead arise and praise thee? Selah. Shall thy lovingkindness be declared in the grave? or thy faithfulness in destruction? Shall thy wonders be known in the dark? and thy righteousness in the land of forgetfulness? (Psalm 88:10–12)

³⁶ The underlying presentation attributes "my soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death" to "both Matthew and John"; strictly, that wording is Matt 26:38 (|| Mark 14:34), and the Johannine text paired with it is John 12:27 ("Now is my soul troubled"). The pairing is preserved; the attribution is corrected.

Will God show wonders to the dead? Shall the dead rise and praise him? On the christological reading proposed here, these questions anticipate the wonders associated with Christ's victory among the dead. Psalm 88 does not itself narrate the harrowing, but it can be read as giving voice to the innocent sufferer who enters the realm in which those wonders will be displayed.³⁷

A final thread ties Psalm 88 to Jonah, whom Jesus already made a type of his descent. The wave-language is shared:

Thy wrath lieth hard upon me, and thou hast afflicted me with all thy waves. Selah. (Psalm 88:7)

For thou hadst cast me into the deep, in the midst of the seas; and the floods compassed me about: all thy billows and thy waves passed over me... I went down to the bottoms of the mountains; the earth with her bars was about me for ever: yet hast thou brought up my life from corruption, O LORD my God. (Jonah 2:3, 6)

Jonah cries "out of the belly of hell" in the language of Sheol's bars and corruption; the shared billows and waves stitch Psalm 88 to Jonah 2 to the descent, and Jesus himself made the Jonah connection in the sign of Jonah (Matthew 12:40).³⁸

X

The Harrowing of Hades and the Geography of the Dead

Among the things Christ does in the place of the dead is to bring out the righteous dead who waited there. This is the harrowing of Hades—"when he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive"—and it is signaled at the moment of his death:

And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent; and the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose, and came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many. (Matthew 27:51–53)

Ephesians reads Psalm 68 the same way, of a descent followed by a leading-out of captives, and Peter speaks of preaching to the spirits in prison.³⁹

The received cosmology, drawn largely from the account of the rich man and Lazarus, places Hades in the heart of the earth with two compartments, a place of torment and a place of comfort ("Abraham's bosom," called paradise), divided by a great chasm.⁴⁰

On this reading, the paradisaal compartment of Hades was emptied in the harrowing: the righteous were taken out, and those who die in Christ are now "absent from the body, and present with the Lord," who is not in Hades. This conclusion remains a theological inference from the two-compartment picture of Luke 16, the harrowing texts, and Paul's language of presence with Christ; it is not stated directly in any single

³⁷ Charles Spurgeon noted the Gethsemane parallel to Psalm 88 (*Treasury of David*, on Ps 88), though the link is not widely developed. Commentators often struggle with Psalm 88 because a psalmist "of my salvation" (v. 1) speaks as one going down to the pit; the common expedient is to read it as the language of depression wrongly fearing damnation. Read prophetically, of the innocent bearing imputed sin into Hades and the wonders wrought there, the psalm coheres without that expedient.

³⁸ Whether Jonah literally died is not required for the argument; either way Jonah 2 is Sheol language ("out of the belly of hell [Sheol] cried I," Jonah 2:2). The verbal link ("billows and waves") between Ps 88:7 and Jonah 2:3, combined with Jesus's own use of the sign of Jonah for his descent, binds the psalm-trail to a descent Jesus explicitly claimed.

³⁹ On 1 Pet 3:19 ("by which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison"), the reference is disputed: it may denote the imprisoned angelic spirits of Gen 6 in Tartarus (cf. 2 Pet 2:4; Jude 6) or the Old Testament righteous in paradise. The present argument does not turn on which; either way the descent is presupposed. The harrowing proper (the leading-out of the righteous) is grounded in Matt 27:52–53 and Eph 4:8–10 (quoting Ps 68:18).

⁴⁰ Luke 16:19–31 supplies the two-compartment picture and the "great gulf fixed" (16:26). The harrowing is then read as the emptying of the paradisaal compartment, its occupants taken to be with the Lord.

passage. The compartment of torment persists until the final judgment, when Hades itself is cast into the lake of fire.⁴¹

Why the paradisaal side needed emptying at all is an open question; the suggestion here, held loosely, is that even that comfort was not the fullness of communion with God and stood in some relation to a claim upon the dead—a claim the atonement resolves. The point reinforces the paper's conclusion: the goal is union with Christ, not merely relocation of souls.

XI

The Jubilee: Freedom Without Ransom

The Jubilee, in Leviticus 25, is a fiftieth-year reset. After seven cycles of seven years a trumpet sounds and liberty is proclaimed:

Then shalt thou cause the trumpet of the jubile to sound... And ye shall hallow the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof: it shall be a jubile unto you; and ye shall return every man unto his possession, and ye shall return every man unto his family. (Leviticus 25:9–10)

Debts are cancelled, slaves freed, and ancestral land lost to debt reverts to its original owner. Christ opens his ministry by claiming to fulfill this year:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord... This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears. (Luke 4:18–21)

There is a calendar link worth noting: the Jubilee is proclaimed on the Day of Atonement itself, after the two-goat ritual, when the trumpet sounds (Leviticus 25:9). If Jesus intentionally fulfills the two goats, it is coherent that he fulfills the Jubilee that the same day proclaims.

The Jubilee's mechanism is instructive for how Satan loses his hold. Jubilee terminates temporary claims by divine decree. Land returns to its ancestral holding and Israelite servants return to their proper covenantal status; the release is not a ransom paid to a hostile captor. A higher authority declares the captive free, and the adversarial power receives nothing.⁴²

This is precisely why the ransom objection to a Christus Victor account misfires. Critics reject Christus Victor because they take it to mean a payment handed to Satan. But nothing in this account is handed to Satan. Even the scapegoat rite gives Azazel nothing he profits from: the goat is laden with sin already ascribed to him, returned to his own account; it is not a sacrifice, and receiving it is his undoing, not his gain. Whether by scapegoat or by Jubilee, Satan is not paid; he is defeated.⁴³

A Dead Sea Scroll bears on this suggestively. 11QMelchizedek, a first-century BC commentary on the Jubilee laws of Leviticus 25, reads Jubilee release as forgiveness of sin-debt, identifies the captor from whom the faithful are freed as Belial, and sets the release on the Day of Atonement. The document does not

⁴¹ 2 Cor 5:8 ("absent from the body ... present with the Lord"); Rev 20:11–15 (Hades cast into the lake of fire after the great white throne judgment). The distinction between the intermediate Hades and the final lake of fire is essential to the picture: the present torment of Hades is not yet the final state.

⁴² This is the crucial feature for the present argument, and it distinguishes the account here from ransom theory. There is no transaction with the captor; the captor's claim is voided, not satisfied. On the anti-transactional reading, the release is an act of a higher court, not a purchase from the one who held the captive.

⁴³ It is important to keep two engines distinct. The Jubilee/kinsman-redeemer logic voids the captor's claim without payment; the harrowing then enacts the repossession of what Christ already owns by right. Collapsing these—treating the harrowing as a purchase—would reintroduce the very ransom-transaction the argument rejects. The Jubilee enters here strictly as liberation-of-captives and as the anti-transactional key, not as a payment to Satan.

itself connect Belial with Azazel or the scapegoat, but it supplies a striking Second Temple parallel to the larger constellation proposed here: remission, Yom Kippur, and liberation from a satanic captor belong together.⁴⁴

The document therefore already joins Jubilee-liberty, the Day of Atonement, and captivity to Satan through a sin-debt—the very cluster this paper argues from—and implicitly connects the captor of the Jubilee with the Azazel of the scapegoat. The convergence is striking, whatever weight one gives a non-canonical text.

XII

The Goal: The Spirit, the New Will, and the Answer to Eden

All of this is finally about the Holy Spirit. The atonement effects forgiveness, and forgiveness disarms Satan—Colossians 2:13–15 says as much, and the death-power of the whole satanic apparatus was undone in that act. But forgiveness is not the terminus. Its purpose is the New Covenant, and the New Covenant's center is the indwelling Spirit. Under the old order the tabernacle required ceaseless upkeep, morning and evening sacrifices and the annual Day of Atonement, all to keep God's presence amid the sin-pollution of the camp. The point of atonement, then and now, is that God may dwell with his people. The cosmic atonement cleanses not the tent of the wilderness but the temple of the body, so that it may house the Spirit.⁴⁵

Why a New Covenant at all, rather than Yom Kippur repeated forever? Because the old covenant was broken and its remedies were provisional, and because the prophets promised something the old order could not deliver: God's own Spirit placed within his people, producing obedience from the inside.

A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them. (Ezekiel 36:26–27)

Hebrews' whole argument is that the blood of bulls and goats, a mortal priesthood, and a copied sanctuary were never sufficient; a real atonement with a better priest and better blood in the true sanctuary was required precisely in order to cleanse us as temples for the Spirit. The ascension, which completes the first goat in heaven, is not incidental to this; it is how the offering reaches the real sanctuary.⁴⁶

Why does the Spirit answer the problem that began in Eden? Because that problem was, at root, opened eyes and accountability. The tree did not transmit a nature that can only sin; it made us aware of good and evil and answerable for choosing. That accountability is the ground of the accuser's claim: we knew, and

⁴⁴ 11QMelchizedek (11Q13) interprets the Jubilee release of Lev 25 and Deut 15 as an eschatological “release”/forgiveness effected by the heavenly Melchizedek, sets it on the Day of Atonement of the tenth jubilee, and frames it as liberation of the captives “from the hand of Belial” and the spirits of his lot. See the text and discussion in F. García Martínez and E. J. C. Tigchelaar, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Study Edition* (Leiden: Brill, 1997–98), 2:1206–09; and, on its relevance to Yom Kippur and supernatural warfare, Stökl Ben Ezra, *Impact of Yom Kippur*, and Marcar, “Passover,” 275 (citing Stökl Ben Ezra). Offered here as illuminating Second Temple corroboration, not as canonical warrant; the text does not itself identify Belial with Azazel or discuss the scapegoat.

⁴⁵ The temple-of-the-body language is Paul's: 1 Cor 3:16–17; 6:19 (“your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost”). The reading of atonement's purpose as God dwelling with his people, rather than as the mere acquittal of sinners, is exactly Moffitt's (via N. T. Wright's foreword to *Rethinking the Atonement*): “Hebrews is not asking how sinners can find their way to a holy God but how the holy God can dwell in the midst of his people” (*Rethinking the Atonement*, foreword). The blood removes the taint of death so that the presence may remain.

⁴⁶ Heb 9:11–14; 10:1–4 (the blood of bulls and goats “cannot take away sins”); 7:23–25 (the permanent priesthood); 9:23–24 (the heavenly things themselves purified, the true sanctuary entered). The point that the ascension is constitutive of the atonement, not an epilogue, is Moffitt's central thesis; see *Rethinking the Atonement*, and *Atonement and the Logic of Resurrection in the Epistle to the Hebrews*, NovTSup 141 (Leiden: Brill, 2011).

so we are chargeable. Paul unfolds this across Romans, that the very knowledge of the law kills, because it makes sin culpable.⁴⁷

Add the highly motivated adversary who profits from our sin—who is “the god of this world” precisely because our sin grounds his death claim—and the human predicament is set. The remedy therefore cannot stop at washing and carrying away sin, indispensable as that is. What is needed is a new will. And that is what the Spirit supplies:

For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure. (Philippians 2:13)

This is exactly what the new-covenant prophecies promised: “I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes.” The Spirit gives a new will and new power, and that is the answer to what Satan exploited in Eden—not a mere pardon, but a re-created capacity to resist.

The effect is a real, experienced freedom, though not sinless perfection. Paul names it:

For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. (Romans 8:2)

Those who have known genuine deliverance recognize it: a sin that once enslaved loses its grip, and the desire itself changes, so that the yoke is easy and the burden light. The counsel that quitting sin is mere “white-knuckling” under an inescapable depravity is answered by that experience of real power to resist.⁴⁸

Freedom is conditioned on abiding. Justification and inheritance remain in Christ, but the branch must remain in the vine, and can wither and be cut off. The Christian life from this point forward is explicitly one of resisting the devil in the Spirit’s power:

Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. (James 4:7)

For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live. (Romans 8:13)

Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. (Ephesians 6:10–11)

We are told to be strong in the Lord so that we may stand against the wiles of the devil—and none of this would be possible without the new power the Spirit brings. The ongoing power that Satan still exercises, tempting toward the sin that grounds his accusation, is met and broken by a new will that no longer wants the old bondage and a new strength to refuse it.

Conclusion

The argument returns to where it began. Moffitt’s realism showed that atonement is a whole sequence culminating in the real presentation of blood in the real sanctuary; Marcar rightly asked where, in that sequence, the devil is defeated and supplied a compelling Passover–Exodus liberation frame. This paper has proposed that the Day of Atonement’s second goat may supply the complementary cultic and juridical mechanism. On this account, Satan’s power of death is a sin-conditioned claim—he tempts to accuse and

⁴⁷ Rom 7:7–11 (“I had not known sin, but by the law ... sin, taking occasion by the commandment ... slew me”). The reading here takes the effect of the tree, and of the law, to be the awakening of accountability rather than the infusion of a compulsion to sin. This is the author’s constructive position; it is compatible with, though distinguishable from, more traditional accounts of the fall.

⁴⁸ This is the pastoral register of the underlying presentation, retained here because it is part of the argument’s claim, not decoration: the reality of Spirit-given power to resist is offered as evidence against a total depravity that would make such resistance impossible. Matt 11:30 (“my yoke is easy, and my burden is light”); the vine imagery of John 15 supplies the abiding condition.

accuses to kill—and the scapegoat bears confessed sin away from the accused toward the adversarial terminus signified by Azazel. Christ fulfills that movement: bearing the world's transferred sin, he enters the realm of the dead, where the warrant of accusation is cancelled and the powers are disarmed. Colossians 2 offers a supporting analogue by joining forgiveness and cancellation of the hostile record with the stripping of the powers. The further proposal is that Satan, mistaking transferred sin for personal guilt or inferring guilt from the progress of the execution, helped spring the trap that undid him. And the whole of it serves a further end: forgiveness cleanses the body to receive the Spirit, whose gift of a new will is the promised new-covenant answer to the accountability that Eden opened and the adversary exploited. The two goats are one atonement, and their one purpose is that the holy God should dwell within a cleansed people, no longer in bondage to the one who had the power of death.

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