

## Reading Matthew's Account of the Baptism and Temptation of Jesus (Matt. 3:5–4:1) with the Scapegoat Rite on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:20–22)

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### Introduction

All three synoptic Gospels bear witness to Jesus's baptism by John the Baptist in the Jordan River (Matt. 3:1 - 17; Mark 1:1 - 11; Luke 3:1 - 22), followed by Jesus's temptation by the devil in the wilderness (Matt. 4:1 - 11; cf. Mark 1:12 - 13; Luke 4:1 - 13). Commentators have noted literary parallels between these synoptic accounts to various texts in the Pentateuch, including Genesis (Adam-Jesus, Isaac-Jesus) and Deuteronomy/Exodus/Numbers (Israel-Jesus), which illuminate Jesus's redemptive role as portrayed by each evangelist.<sup>1)</sup> What has been

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1) See, for example, B. D. Crowe, *The Obedient Son: Deuteronomy and Christology in the Gospel of Matthew* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012); W. D. Davies and D. C. Allison, *Matthew*, ICC 3 vols. (Edinburgh: Clark, 1988, 1991, 1997), 1. 352-74; S. R. Garrett, *The Temptation of Jesus in Mark's Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), esp. 21-23; W. R. Stegner, "The Baptism of Jesus: A Story Modeled on the Binding of Isaac," *BR* 1:3 (1985), 36-46; P. Pokorny, "The Temptation Stories and Their Intention," *NTS* 20 (1974), 115-27, on 120-1; B. Gerhardsson, *The Testing of God's Son* (Lund: C.W.K. Gleerup, 1966); G.P. Thompson, "Called—Proved—Obedient: A Study in the Baptism and Temptation Narratives of Matthew and Luke," *JTS* 11 (1960), 1-12.

neglected, regrettably, is understanding Jesus's baptism and wilderness trials in light of Leviticus. While exegetes have detected formal correspondences between Jesus's trial before Pontius Pilate (Matt. 27, Jesus Barabbas/Jesus Christ) and the scapegoat ritual (Lev. 16),<sup>2)</sup> no in-depth exegetical inquiry has been offered to understand the Matthean account of Jesus's baptism and temptation through the ritual narrative of Leviticus 16.<sup>3)</sup> In this paper, I propose that the ritual prescriptions of the Day of Atonement, particularly those found in Leviticus 16:20 - 22, decisively inform our interpretation of the Matthean witness of Jesus's baptism and temptation (Matt. 3:5 - 4:1). Rather than treating the issue diachronically, I offer a synchronic evaluation of the biblical texts in their final form.

## 1. The Day of Atonement (Lev. 16)

The ritual text of Leviticus 16 foregrounds one of the most solemn religious feasts of the Israelites, the Day of Atonement, or Yom Kippur (יום הכִּפּוּרִים, Lev. 23:27, 28), which occurs on the tenth day of the seventh month of the year (Tishri 10). The day marks the climax of the year, when the most egregious sancta trespases of the Israelites are remitted as the high priest

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2) D. Stökl Ben Ezra, *The Impact of Yom Kippur on Early Christianity* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 165-73, on 166; H. Koester, *Ancient Christian Gospels* (London: SCM, 1990), 225-6; A. H. Wratislaw, "The Scapegoat-Barabbas," *ExpTim* 3 (1891/92), 400-3.

3) See some passing remarks in T. Eskola, *A Narrative Theology of the New Testament* (WUNT 350; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015), 137; James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark* (PNTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 39; Ernest Best, *The Temptation and the Passion: The Markan Soteriology* (SNTSMS 2; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), 159.

enters the Most Holy Place with the blood of the sacrifices.<sup>4)</sup> To effect the atonement, the high priest is required to present a bull for himself and his household (Lev. 16:6) and two he-goats and a ram for the congregation of Israel (Lev. 16:5). Of the two goats prepared by the Israelites, the high priest casts lots to determine the “scapegoat” that is to be sent away into the wilderness. One of the ritual highlights on the Day of Atonement is the scapegoat rite specified in Leviticus 16:20 - 22.

The text states explicitly that the scapegoat rite broadly entails three steps: 1) the transference of the sins of Israel on the goat by the officiating high priest (v. 21), 2) the dispatch of the goat into the wilderness by a designated person (v. 21), and 3) the release of the goat in the wilderness (v. 22). A noteworthy point is the locus and scope of the trespasses that move from the Israelites to a place of no return in the wilderness through the change of agents. Notably, the hand-leaning rite for the scapegoat, unlike those rites that usually involve one hand, is unique, in that the high priest is specifically commanded to use two hands (Lev. 16:21).<sup>5)</sup> The ritual procedure facilitates a transference of the corporate trespasses of Israel to the sacrifice and its consequent expiation on the Day of Atonement. On this particular day, all the members of Israel are called to cease from their works and gather for a holy assembly to afflict themselves in penitence (Lev. 16:29, 31; cf. Lev. 23:27, 32). The Israelites would have engaged in various expressions of repentance, including fasting and individual/communal confessions.<sup>6)</sup> Philo, a Jewish historian, states that the Israelites

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4) The most articulate champion of this view is J. Milgrom, who envisioned a tripartite gradation of holiness in the tabernacle/temple. J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16* (AB 3; New York: Doubleday, 1991), 254-8; Milgrom, “Israel’s Sanctuary: The Priestly Picture of Dorian Gray,” *RB* 83 (1976), 390-9.

5) Milgrom, *Leviticus*, 150-2.

6) During the Second Temple period, for example, the high priest is said to have

wholeheartedly committed themselves to repentance for the entire day:

...everyone is at this time occupied in prayers and supplications, and since they all devote their entire leisure to nothing else from morning till evening, except to most acceptable prayers by which they endeavor to gain the favor of God, entreating pardon for their sins and hoping for his mercy, ... (Philo *Spec* 2. 196)

The purgation rite reaches its peak on the Day of Atonement in the offering of the “live goat,” or “scapegoat,” to which all of Israel’s confessed sins have been transferred (Lev. 16:21). The dispatched “scapegoat” will have exemplified a climactic elimination of Israel’s confessed sins as it dies off in the “land of separation” (אֶרֶץ חֵדָּה, Lev. 16:22) — a graphic portrayal of how YHWH will eradicate Israel’s transgressions “as far as the east is from the west” (Ps. 103:12).

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recited the following prayer for himself and for his household as he laid his hands upon the sacrifice on the Day of Atonement:

... And the priest places his two hands on the bull and confesses. And this is what he would say in his confession. “Please, God, I have sinned, I have done wrong, and I have rebelled before You, I and my family. Please, God, grant atonement, please, for the sins, and the wrongs, and for the rebellions that I have sinned, and done wrong, and rebelled before You, I and my family, as it is written in the Torah of Moses your servant: ‘For on this day atonement shall be made for you to cleanse you of all your sins; you shall be clean before the Lord’” (Lev 16:30). (Yoma 36a)

See also J. J. Williams, “Cultic, Action and Cultic Function in Second Temple Jewish Martyrologies: The Jewish Martyrs as Israel’s Yom Kippur,” in M. A. Sweeney (ed), *Sacrifice, Cult, and Atonement in Early Judaism and Christianity* (RBS 85; Atlanta: SBL, 2017), 233–64, on 243.

## 2. John's Baptism of Jesus Christ

An abridged form of Matthew's record of Jesus's baptism and temptation is found in the Marcan text (Mark 1:4 - 13) without the temptation narrative. First, it is worth noting some of the additional elements preserved in Matthew's story of John's baptism of Jesus (Matt. 3:1 - 17), which are not found in the parallel pericope of Mark's Gospel (Mark 1:1 - 11).

Unlike Mark's report of the event, Matthew's version contains a short exchange between Jesus and John the Baptist that transpires immediately before Jesus's baptism (Matt. 3:14 - 15). Upon Jesus's arrival at the scene of water baptism, John is shown to have deterred Jesus from being baptized by him. John's prior recognition of Jesus as the one with divine authority is obvious in his exclamation, "I need to be baptized by You!" (Matt. 3:14) In Matthew, John is described as "baptizing with water unto/for repentance" (Ἐγὼ μὲν ὑμᾶς βαπτίζω ἐν ὕδατι εἰς μετάνοιαν, Matt. 3:11). In Mark, John is said to have "preached a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (κηρύσσων βάπτισμα μετανόιας εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν, Mark 1:4). The common component of these expressions is that John's baptism concerned people's repentance of their sins.

In the past, the ablution at Qumran and the baptism in the early church have been compared to John's baptism of repentance. Neither historical water ritual serves as a proper case for comparison, however.<sup>7)</sup> The Qumran ablutions, for example,

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7) Some recent notable studies related to the issue include O. Cullmann, *Baptism in the New Testament*, trans. J. K. S. Reid (SBT 1; London: SCM, 1950), 15-22; G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), 45-67; J. D. G. Dunn, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit: A Re-Examination of the New Testament Teaching on the Gift of the Spirit in Relation to Pentecostalism Today* (SBT 2.15; London: SCM, 1970), 23-37; E. Cothenet, "Le Baptême selon S. Matthieu," *SNTU* 9 (1984), 79-94; R. T. France, "Jesus the Baptist?"

were performed periodically for various ceremonial purposes, both initiation and purification, among the members of an excluded community.<sup>8)</sup> The early church's baptism was administered as an initiation rite of a new believer (Acts 2:38) but its distinction from John's baptism is conspicuous in that the expression "baptism of repentance" is reserved for the case of John the Baptist only.<sup>9)</sup> In particular, Luke affirms the supremacy of "baptism in the name of the Lord Jesus" over John's "baptism of repentance" by relating the rebaptism story of the believers at Ephesus (Acts 19:1 - 5).<sup>10)</sup> If John's baptism does not precisely align with either water ritual, what was Matthew's understanding of such a public performance? Jesus's response to John's refusal to baptize provides a crucial interpretative key: "Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness" (Matt. 3:15).

In Matthew's Gospel, the word "fulfill" (πληρω) is a theologically charged term. Besides the instance found in Matthew 3:15, the term "fulfill" (πληρω) occurs 16 times, of which 14 instances (counting *αναπληρουται* in Matt. 13:14) were used as part of "prophetic fulfillment citations" (Matt. 1:22; 2:15, 17, 23; 4:14; 8:17; 12:17; 13:14, *ανα+*; 13:35; 21:4; 26:56;

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in *Jesus of Nazareth: Lord and Christ: Essays on the Historical Jesus and New Testament Christology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 94-111; E. Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church: History, Theology, and Liturgy in the First Five Centuries* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 99-131; J. Nolland, "In Such a Manner It Is Fitting for Us to Fulfil All Righteousness': Reflections on the Place of Baptism in the Gospel of Matthew," in S. E. Porter and A. R. Cross (eds.), *Baptism, the New Testament and the Church* (JSNTS 171; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 63-80, on 76.

8) J. Klawans, *Impurity and Sin in Ancient Judaism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 138-43.

9) Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, 85.

10) M. Bockmuehl, "The Baptism of Jesus as 'Super-Sacrament' of Redemption," *Theology* 115:2 (2012), 83-97, on 87.

27:9) or Jesus's own statement about Scriptural fulfillment (5:17; 26:54). Hence, the verb "fulfill" in Matthew 3:15 is most likely used in reference to completing certain prophetic expectation of the Old Testament.<sup>11)</sup> In the beginning of Chapter 3, which cites Isaiah 40:3, the purpose of John's ministry is stated as a "path maker" for the Lord. The Isaian text serves as a proof-text for the ministry of John the Baptist, who urged the Israelites to repent in preparation for the apocalyptic arrival of the Messiah. But this intertextual connection still does not sufficiently explain Jesus's emphatic expression "all righteousness" (Matt. 3:15). I submit that the text of Leviticus 16:20 - 22 enriches our understanding of the theological messages underlying a series of events in Matthew 3, particularly Jesus's reference to "fulfilling all righteousness."

In Leviticus 16:21 - 22, there is also an emphatic repetition of "all," such as "all the iniquities of the Israelites," "all their transgressions," "all their sins" (Lev. 16:21) and, again, "all their iniquities" (Lev. 16:22). The word "all" in the verses intensifies the gravity of the trespasses that need to be redressed through the ritual of scapegoat. Matthew also retains the word "all" in Matthew 3:5 - 6 seemingly with a rhetorical aim. The parallel verse in Mark also has an emphasis on "all" but Matthew's report of the people from "all the region around the Jordan" in addition to "[people from] all the land of Judah and all those of Jerusalem" more clearly renders the pervasive impact of John's call for repentance at the time. This in turn illustrates that eliciting all the people's confessions of their sins was an integral part of John's baptismal performance, which thereby directed people's attention to their soon-coming Savior (cf. John 1:31).

If we comprehend Jesus's proclamation of "it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness" (Matt. 3:15) in light of Leviticus 16:20 - 22, then we may fully appreciate the significance of

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11) Davies and Allison, *Commentary on Matthew*, 326-7 (e.g., Ps. 2:7 and Isa. 42:1).

the notion of “righteousness” in Matthew’s witness.<sup>12)</sup> First, by responding, “it is fitting for us,” Jesus was acknowledging the momentous role in “God’s saving activity”<sup>13)</sup> both John and he were assuming—in an encounter akin to a legal transaction—Jesus’s offer to receive baptism and John’s acceptance to administer the baptism. After baptism, Jesus emerges as God’s chosen one who bears all the people’s confessed sins at the Jordan River and beyond. Second, the usage of the word “righteousness” in conjunction with the theologically meaningful verb “fulfill” suggests that the concept refers to all the “righteous will” of God proclaimed to Israel through the Law and the Prophets, which awaits its salvific fulfillment (Matt. 5:17).<sup>14)</sup> The paramount essence of God’s will is, as shown in Leviticus 16, the complete removal of Israel’s sins through a substitutionary atonement (cf. Matt. 26:39; Isa. 53:10). Third, the righteousness mentioned in Jesus’s response to John’s question with the specific adjectival modifier “all” presents an antithesis to “all” forms of

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12) Matthew’s understanding of “righteousness” as the “will of God in the sense of God’s saving activity” rather than God’s moral requirement upon people (cf. Matt. 5:20; 6:1; B. Przybylski) against the Paulinized conception of righteousness is much more consistent with Matthew’s usage of “fulfill” (Hagner, 56; cf. Meier, 79). See D. A. Hagner, *Matthew 1–13* (WBC 33A; Dallas: Word Books, 1993), 56; see also, Hagner, “Righteousness in Mathew’s Theology,” in M. Wilkins and T. Paige (eds.), *Worship, Theology and Ministry in the Early Church*, (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992), 101–20; B. Przybylski, *Righteousness in Matthew and His World of Thought* (SNTSMS 41; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980); J. P. Meier, *Law and History in Matthew’s Gospel* (AnBib 71; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute Press, 1976), 76–80.

13) Hagner, *Matthew*, 56.

14) This agrees with the view that endorses intrinsic interconnection between “fulfillment of righteousness” and “fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets” in Matthew’s Gospel. See, for example, C. A. Evans, “Fulfilling the Law and Seeking Righteousness in Matthew and in the Dead Sea Scrolls,” in D. M. Gurtner, J. Willits, and R. A. Burrige (eds.), *Jesus, Matthew’s Gospel, and Early Christianity* (LNTS 435; London: T&T Clark, 2011), 102–14.

unrighteousness (Lev. 16:21) that demand a full redemption. In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus proffers to submit to the will of God (Matt. 26:42).

In this vein, the rite of leaning hands upon the sacrifice in Leviticus 16 provides a relevant point of comparison. The immediate effect of the two hand-leaning ceremony in the ritual context of Leviticus is the legitimate transference of sins to the sacrificial animal. Considering Jesus's encounter with John the Baptist before he was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, we can detect a formal correspondence between the hand-leaning rite on the head of the scapegoat by Aaron and Jesus's baptism by John, who was also of the Aaronic priestly line (Luke 1:5). Just as Aaron's placement of the hands on the live goat officially transferred all of Israel's sins upon its head, John's "baptism of repentance" led to the public disclosure of Jesus as God's sacrificial provision, or the "scapegoat," which carries away humanity's sins (John 1:29; 1 Cor. 5:7). Both cases underline a thorough confession of people's sins before God's presence.

### 3. My Son, the Beloved

According to the Gospel accounts of Matthew and Mark, Jesus "saw" the heavens being split open and the Spirit of God alighting on himself after his baptism (Matt. 3:16; Mark 1:10; cf. Luke 3:21). What followed after this visionary revelation was an aural revelation from God the Father: "This is my Son, the beloved, in whom I am well-pleased" (Matt. 3:17; cf. Mark 1:11; Luke 3:22). W. R. Stegner correctly contends that the heavenly voice, "This is my beloved Son," in Mark 1:11 (cf. Matthew 3:17) does not exactly coincide with "You are my son" in Psalm 2:7 or with "Here is my servant... in whom my soul delights" in Isaiah 42:1, as both verses are missing the

key word “beloved.”<sup>15)</sup> Instead, Stegner suggests that the phrase has a more genetic relationship with the Greek formulation found in Genesis 22: “Your son, the beloved, whom you love, Isaac” (τὸν υἱὸν σου τὸν ἀγαπητὸν ὃν ἠγάπησας τὸν Ἰσαακ, Gen. 22:2, LXX). Stegner also mentions the formal correspondences between the Marcan/Matthean account of Jesus’s baptism and the Targumic account of Isaac’s binding:

… As Isaac lay bound upon the altar, he too looked up and saw “the angels of the height.” He too had a vision and saw “the Shekinah [the divine essence or spirit] of the Lord”… A voice from heaven explains the significance of the scene…<sup>16)</sup>

The association between Jesus’s baptism and Isaac’s sacrifice ultimately points to Jesus’s sacrifice on the cross as Jesus foretells his own death to his disciples using the language of baptism (Mark 10:38). Stegner further notes that by means of a Talmudic literary device known as “analogy of expressions” (גיורה שורה)<sup>17)</sup> the Marcan narrative uniquely links Jesus’s baptism to the tearing of the curtain at the Temple (Mark 15:37 - 38; cf. Matt. 27:50-51) with a key word, “split” (σχιζω). He concludes: “Jesus’s baptism is thus connected both to his sacrificial death and to the story of the sacrificial binding of Isaac, ….”<sup>18)</sup>

Stegner’s attention to Jesus’s baptism (Mark 1; Matt. 3) in relation to Abraham’s near-sacrifice of Isaac (Gen. 22) is indeed enlightening. Figuratively speaking, however, I would argue that his portrayal through the binding story (Gen. 22) covers only a side panel of the triptych, the middle section of which features the scapegoat ritual of the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16). The

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15) Stegner, *Baptism of Jesus*, 42.

16) Stegner, *Baptism of Jesus*, 38.

17) Stegner, *Baptism of Jesus*, 46; See M. Mielzinger, *Introduction to the Talmud* (New York: Bloch, 1968), 143.

18) Stegner, *Baptism of Jesus*, 46.

limitation of Stegner's thesis is twofold: 1) his connection of the key word "split" in Jesus's baptism (heaven/s) and the binding story (wood) does not explain the "split" of the Temple's veil in Mark's Gospel; and 2) his framework falls short of accounting for the Marcan/Matthean narrative sequence in which Jesus's baptism is immediately followed by Jesus's temptation. Insofar as the "splitting" of the veil is concerned, the ritual prescriptions in Leviticus 16 become critically relevant, as it is on the Day of Atonement that the high priest can have access beyond the veil, which divides the Most Holy Place and the Holy Place of the Temple precinct.

According to Leviticus 16, Aaron casts lots over two he-goats that are prepared to atone for the sins of the Israelites. The priestly stipulations regarding these two goats help us understand the locus of impurities and the means by which atonement is achieved. The goat chosen "for YHWH" is used to purge the defilement of Israel accrued to the tabernacle, YHWH's earthly abode,<sup>19)</sup> whereas another one chosen "for a scapegoat" is used to carry away the defilement of Israel that is transferred upon itself to the deserted place. If this line of reasoning is valid, then the rite of atonement involving the two goats essentially represents two sides of the same coin, as both animals are appointed by YHWH as a means of expelling ritual contamination. The two goat sacrifices on the Day of Atonement thus dramatically epitomize the periodic sacrifices offered within Israel's tabernacle: after the high priest enters into the most sacred precinct of the tabernacle to redress the wretched defilement of the Israelites (the goat for YHWH), their aggregate pollution is displaced away from YHWH's presence to a place of no return (the goat for Azazel).

To be sure, the Marcan passage on Jesus's baptism and temptation (Mark 1:9 - 13), which the Matthean counterpart

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19) See also J. Milgrom, "Israel's Sanctuary," 390-99.

closely adheres (Matt. 3:13 - 4:1), interfaces with the ripping of the Temple's curtain after Jesus's death on the cross (Mark 15:38). The literary linkage between the events is patently clear as the Greek term "to split" (σχιζω) is used only twice in Mark's Gospel: for the "splitting" (σχίζομένους) of heavens after Jesus's baptism and the "splitting" (ἐσχίσθη) of the Temple curtain after Jesus's crucifixion. What is operative here is, as Stegner maintains, a literary technique called an "analogy expression," in which the second instance of the key word expounds the "ambiguity" of the first instance exegetically.<sup>20)</sup> If we impose the ritual scene of Leviticus 16 in the Marcan narrative, in particular, the duality of Jesus's redemptive role is manifest. After Jesus's baptism, Jesus emerges 1) as the goat marked out "for YHWH" and 2) as the other goat marked out "for Azazel," or "scapegoat," as on the Day of Atonement. The first signifies that Jesus's expiatory death effectuates our eternal access into the Most Holy Place in the heavenly realm as graphically demonstrated by Mark's association of Jesus's baptism with the tearing of the Temple curtain. The latter signifies that God laid upon Jesus "all" forms of conceivable sins—of "all" the people—and banished him so that they might be expunged in a place of no return, a desert inhabited by demons. This point is illustrated by the fact that Mark's account joins the baptism story with the temptation story in which Jesus is portrayed as being led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tried by Satan.

Matthew's account of Jesus's baptism and temptation largely aligns with that of Mark, albeit with some differences. For one thing, Matthew does not share Mark's literary association of Jesus's baptism with the splitting of the Temple curtain by means of the theologically pregnant word "split" (σχιζω). Instead, Matthew uses the verb "open" (ανοιγω, attested 11 times in Matthew) in the baptism story (Matt. 3:16),<sup>21)</sup> and retains the

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20) Stegner, *Baptism of Jesus*, 46.

verb “split” for the Temple curtain (Matt. 27:51; cf. Mark 1:10). But this does not mean that Mark’s theological message regarding Jesus’s baptism is effaced in Matthew’s story. In Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus’s baptism has a single focus in light of Leviticus 16: after being baptized by John, Jesus surfaces as the great atoning sacrifice of Israel to carry away “all” their sins as a “scapegoat” (Lev. 16:21 - 22) to satisfy “all righteousness” (Matt. 3:15). Then heavens are “opened,” the Spirit rests on Jesus and God declares, “This is my Son, the beloved” (Matt. 3:17). As in Mark’s Gospel, Matthew’s Gospel witnesses that Jesus is led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil (Matt. 4:1) immediately after the baptism.

Also in Matthew’s Gospel, the progression of the event has, in broad strokes, salient similarity to the Binding of Isaac in Genesis 22. Contrary to Stegner, however, I argue that the literary connection between the expression “my Son, the beloved” in Matthew 3:17 and “your son, the beloved” in Genesis 22:2 (LXX) does not necessarily negate the title’s allusion (Matt. 3:17) to Psalm 2:7 or Isaiah 42:1. In fact, in the larger context of Matthew’s Gospel, it appears that both Abrahamic and Davidic legacies are supposed in the divine voice, “This is my Son, the beloved” (Matt. 3:17). Matthew begins his gospel with the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of Abraham and the Son of David (Matt. 1:1). Moreover, considering that the Spirit-filled servant mentioned in Isaiah 42:1 accomplishes YHWH’s “will” by suffering as “one of the flock” (אֶת־צֹאֵן, either “sheep” or “goat” in Hebrew) before its slaughter (Isa. 53:7) or as even a “guilt offering” (Isa. 53:10), it is apparent that the Spirit’s anointing on Jesus exposed the salvific provision of God’s own sacrifice, already foreshadowed in the near-sacrifice of Isaac (Gen. 22:7).

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21) Matt. 2:11; 3:16; 5:2; 7:7, 8; 9:30; 13:35; 17:27; 20:33; 25:11; 27:52.

#### 4. Jesus in the Wilderness

Whereas Mark comments that it was the Spirit who “drove out” (ἐκβάλλει; Mark 1:12) Jesus into the wilderness, Matthew mentions specifically that Jesus “was led up” by the Spirit into the wilderness (ἀνῆχθη; Matt. 4:1; cf. ἦγετο, Luke 4:1).<sup>22</sup> Both accounts are reminiscent of the priestly instructions in Leviticus 16:22, where a scapegoat is “sent or driven away” (וּשְׁלַחַ) into the wilderness by the hand of a preordained priestly agent (בְּיַד־יֹשֵׁעַ עֵתִי הַמְדַבֵּרָה). Among other interpretive possibilities, it appears that Matthew’s passive usage of the verb softens the Marcan expression by highlighting the agency of the Spirit in Jesus’s entry into the uninhabitable land (Lev. 16:22, אֶל־אֶרֶץ גִּזְרָה).

Matthew’s Gospel further fills in the gap by extrapolating the substance of the devil’s temptation of Jesus (Matt. 4:1-11; cf. Mark 1:12-13; Luke 4:1-13). Exegetes have duly observed that Jesus’s absolute victory over the temptation as the “Son of God” during a 40-day fast was a striking reversal of the failure the “sons of Israel” experienced in the wilderness during the 40 years of wandering.<sup>23</sup> The theological import of this triumph is manifest in that Jesus resists all three instances of temptations by quoting verses from Deuteronomy (Deut. 8:3; 6:13, 16; 10:20), which encapsulates the terms of the Sinai covenant that the first generation of Israelites perpetrates throughout the course of their wilderness journey. Nonetheless, understanding Matthew’s record of Jesus’s temptation primarily in Israel’s

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22) Both “immediately” (εὐθὺς) in Mark 1:12 and “Then” (Τότε) in Matthew 4:1 are followed by the temptation narrative. By contrast, Luke’s version of Jesus’s baptism (Luke 3:21-22) precedes Jesus’s genealogy (Luke 3:23-38) rather than the temptation narrative (Luke 4:1-13). Also, compare “led up by the Spirit” in AV, ESV, and NRSV and “led by the Spirit” in NIV and NLT.

23) See footnote 1.

wilderness experience recounted in Deuteronomy (e.g., Deut. 6-8) addresses only a partial portrait of Matthew's testimony of Jesus at the beginning of his public ministry. For instance, the "Son of God" motif drawn from Deuteronomy does not sufficiently explain Matthew's narrative sequence from the far-reaching impact of John's call for baptism of repentance to Jesus's face-to-face encounter with the devil in the wilderness temptation—both accounts of which have literary links to Jesus's trial and crucifixion. To be sure, a synchronic reading of various inner-biblical references unveils a composite artistry in Matthew's Gospel, without having to sacrifice one interpretation over another. Using the previous analogy, I suggest that the scapegoat ritual in Leviticus 16 occupies the central panel of Matthew's triptychal witness of Jesus's baptism and temptation (Matt. 3-4), which is flanked by Isaac's near-sacrifice in Genesis 22 (baptism) and Israel's wilderness trials in Deuteronomy 6 - 8 (temptation).

To understand the priestly instructions in Leviticus 16, it is necessary to assess the term *'aza'zel* (עֲזָזִיל, Lev. 16:8, 10, 26), a Hebrew equivalent to the "scapegoat" in some English Bible translations.<sup>24</sup> Some commentators translate the Hebrew word as "scapegoat" by upholding the Vulgate rendition as "emissary goat" (*et alteram capro emissario*, Lev. 16:8), which accords with the Septuagint reading as "the one that carries away [sins]" (καὶ κλήρον ἓνα τῷ ἀποπομπαίῳ, Lev. 16:8) or "the goat set apart for sending away" (τὸν χίμαρον τὸν διεσταλμένον εἰς ἄφεσιν, Lev. 16:26). Both ancient versions appear to assume a combination of the two Hebrew words, "goat" (עֵז) and "to remove" (זָל), in their translation of the term *'aza'zel* (עֲזָזִיל).<sup>25</sup>

24) Compare "a/the scapegoat" in KJV (1611 "the Scape goat"/1769 "the scapegoat")/NKJ (1982), NIV (2011), NAS (1977)/NAU (1995).

25) The verb זָל ("go, go away") is attested in the OT (Deut. 32:36; 1 Sam. 9:7; Prov. 20:14; Job 14:11, etc; BDB 288). By contrast, W. Gesenius convincingly suggests the possibility of a substitution of *lamed* with *aleph* in the reduplicative

But the prefix lamed (i.e. “for, to”) in both YHWH (לַיהוָה) and ‘aza’zel (לְעִזְאֵל) resists a facile solution. Still, others opt for translating the Hebrew term ‘aza’zel as a proper name “Azazel,” which may refer to a desert-dwelling demon.<sup>26)</sup> Such

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intensive form of אָזַל (‘remove’; i.e. עִזְאֵל > עִזְאֵל\* ; BDB 736; GCK §30n), indicating “a complete removal” (e.g., LXX).

- 26) Compare “Azazel” in ESV, NRSV, NLT, and JPS. Milgrom offers a fourfold explanation of Azazel as the designation for a demon which has been deprived of “demonic powers”: 1) the “syntactical parallelism” between YHWH and Azazel (Lev. 16:8); 2) the biblical and extra-biblical references that suggest wilderness as an abode of demons; 3) ‘Azēl in *1 Enoch* 10:4-5 which is an “obvious reference” to Azazel (עִזְאֵל) in Leviticus 16; 4) Azazel (עִזְאֵל) as a derived epithet of the Canaanite deity of the underworld (עִזְאֵל < עִזְאֵל; cf. אֲנִשֵּׁי בֵית־עִזְמוֹת , Neh. 7:28; 12:29; Tawil). Some of Milgrom’s points, however, are not without difficulties. Most importantly, a careful survey of the term Azazel in *1 Enoch* suggests that the mention of Azazel (Eth. ‘zz’; Aram. עִזְאֵל) in *1 Enoch* 10:4-5 reflects a later scribal harmonization of Asa’el (Eth. ‘s’; Aram. עִזְאֵל/עִזְאֵל) in *1 Enoch* 6:7) to Leviticus 16 (Wright, 108-10; Knibb, 159). Although Azazel during the Second Temple period signified a demon, associating Asa’el in *1 Enoch* to Azazel in Leviticus 16 finds sparse textual support (Wright, 110, 115-16; Blair, 23; Grabbe, 154). Tawil’s conclusion based on philological considerations also poses problems. For one thing, Tawil conveniently assumes that *1 Enoch* preserves the reading of Azazel as ‘azaz’el (עִזְאֵל), the form which is not precisely matched in *1 Enoch* (*1 En.* 9:6; 10:4-5, 8; 54:4-6). Given the late manuscript attestation of ‘azaz’el (עִזְאֵל), there is no firm ground to suppose that MT’s ‘aza’zel (עִזְאֵל) “seems to be a scribal metathesis deliberately altered to conceal the true demonic nature” of ‘azaz’el (עִזְאֵל), or “a fierce god,” which is “the epithet of the Canaanite god Môt” (Tawil, 58-9; cf. Wright, 115n80). Blair correctly points out that Tawil’s demonstration of the marked affinity between the Mesopotamian literature and the Enoch material in their portrayal of “Azazel” does not so much elucidate the identity and the function of Azazel in Leviticus 16 (Blair, 23). J. M. Blair, *De-Demonising the Old Testament: An Investigation of Azazel, Lilith, Deber, Qeteb and Reshef in the Hebrew Bible* (FAT 2.37; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 16-24; A. T. Wright, *The Origins of Evil Spirit: The Reception of Genesis 6:1-4 in Early Jewish Literature* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005); L. L. Grabbe, “The Scapegoat Tradition: A Study in Early Jewish Interpretation,” *JSJ* 18:2 (1987), 152-67; H. Tawil, “Azazel The Prince of the Steepe: A Comparative Study,”

an interpretation apparently supposes that the two goats fulfill two different ritual purposes in the Israelite atonement sacrifices: one for YHWH and the other for Azazel. An important objection to this interpretation is that Leviticus 17:7 plainly prohibits offering an appeasement sacrifice to other pagan deities.

Nevertheless, the juxtaposition of YHWH and Azazel does not necessarily mean that the sacrifices on the Day of Atonement were meant to be offered to appease two separate deities. The ritual laws of Leviticus 16 in the present canonical form make this point rather clear: both goats are brought “before YHWH” during the Day of Atonement ritual (לְפָנֵי יְהוָה, Lev. 16:7; לְפָנֵי יְהוָה לְכַפֵּר עָלָיו, 16:10). One of the goats, which was set apart “for YHWH” (לְיְהוָה, Lev. 16:8), is again described as a sin offering “for the people” (לְעָם, Lev. 16:15). The other goat marked “for Azazel” (לְעִזָּאֵל, Lev. 16:8) likewise functions as a substitutionary ransom for the same Israelites as Aaron the high priest transfers to it “all their iniquities” (כָּל-עֲוֹנוֹתָם, Lev. 16:22) before it is sent out into the wilderness. This means that the preposition *lamed*, which has various contextual usages employed for both YHWH and Azazel (Lev. 16), cannot be taken to suggest that they are the direct beneficiaries of purification sacrifices, especially given that YHWH does not allow Israel’s cultic engagement with other deities. The distinction between YHWH and Azazel, then, does not relate to the final recipient of the sacrifice but to the proximity in which the

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ZAW 92 (1980), 43–59; M. A. Knibb, *The Ethiopic Book of Enoch: Introduction, Translation and Commentary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 73n10; Milgrom, *Leviticus*, 1020–21. Another view, though less convincing than the previous, is that ‘*aza’zel* signifies the destination of the dispatched goat. This means “a rough and difficult place” (cf. Arab. *z’z*, “rough ground”), which is derived from the midrashic interpretation of “a land of separation” (אֶרֶץ נִזְרָה) in Leviticus 16:22 (e.g. *Tg. Ps.-J.*, באחר תקיף וקשי רבמברא דצוק, Lev. 16:10). G. R. Driver, “Three Technical Terms in the Pentateuch,” *JSS* 1:2 (1956), 97–98; Milgrom, *Leviticus*, 1020.

atonement is effectuated. The goat “for YHWH” is slaughtered “before YHWH” on behalf of the people (cf. *περὶ τοῦ λαοῦ ἔναντι κυρίου*, LXX; Lev. 16:15) and its blood is applied to purge the impurities on the [Most] Holy Place, the tent of meeting, and the altar (Lev. 16:15 - 20). The other goat “for Azazel,” or “the live goat” (*הַפִּיז הַשְּׂעִיר הַחַי*, Lev. 16:20, 21), is brought before the high priest for an off-loading ceremony to actualize the transfer of Israel’s impurities to the goat’s head and sent out into the remote wilderness that Azazel is assumed to inhabit (Lev. 16:10). When the goat “for Azazel” dies in the wilderness (cf. Lev. 17:11)—ideally, as far away as possible from Israel’s holy encampment where YHWH dwells—the Israelites will be released from their guilt.

The above examination of the Hebrew term *‘aza’zel* (*אֲזַזֵּל*) reveals that the differences in the translation do not significantly alter the focal message of the priestly instructions in Leviticus 16. Whether or not the Hebrew term *‘aza’zel* signifies a scapegoat, Leviticus 16 envisions a pivotal ritual scene in which Israel’s sins would be carried far away by a substitutionary sacrifice and expunged in a deserted place. In this regard, we can observe correspondences between the Matthean narrative of Jesus in Chapters 3–4 and the scapegoat ritual of Leviticus 16 in that Matthew’s Gospel allots particular attention to Jesus, who is led by the Spirit into the wilderness where the devil awaits to tempt him. If we accept Matthew’s testimony of Jesus as the one who came to offer his own life “as a ransom for many” (Matt. 10:45; 20:28), it is apparent that Matthew begins his Gospel by presenting Jesus Christ as the sacrifice *par excellence* who carries the sins of the world toward the cross of Calvary, as God’s appointed “scapegoat.”<sup>27)</sup> At the height of Jesus’s

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27) Compare Matthew’s description of Jesus’s trial before Pontius Pilate (Matt. 27), which has inverse parallels to the lottery and riddance ritual of the scapegoat on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16). For example, Barabbas, not Jesus, is “released”

suffering on the cross, an epic showdown with Satan take place as he challenges Jesus through the mouths of the cynical onlookers: “If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross!” (Matt. 27:40b). It is remarkable that Matthew’s Gospel alone mentions the mocking crowd addressing Jesus as the “Son of God” as they provoke Jesus to save himself from the cross (cf. Mark 15:31, “the Christ, the King of Israel”; Luke 23:35, “the Christ of God, his Chosen One”). The mockers further deride in the words of Psalm 22:8 in Matthew’s account: “He trusts in God. Let God deliver him now, if He desires him. For he said, “I am the Son of God” (Matt. 27:43). Here Matthew links the ridicule hurled at Jesus on the cross by the religious leaders with the temptation scene earlier in his Gospel through the concept of the “beloved Son of God” — as “desire” or “want” in Greek (θέλει, Matt. 27:43) underlies “delight” in Hebrew (יִצְחַק, Ps. 22:8). The three-fold temptation marked with the question “If you are the Son of God” climaxes in the final moment of Jesus on the cross of Calvary as the devil challenges God’s favor upon him. This literary arrangement takes the reader back to the scene of Jesus’s baptism where God first declared, “This is my Son, the beloved, in whom I am well-pleased.” In this way, the idea of the “beloved Son of God” as a “scapegoat” (Lev. 16) weaves Jesus’s baptism, temptation, and crucifixion together as a seamless thematic whole in Mathew’s Gospel.

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after Pilate’s query, “Which of the *two* do you want me to *release* for you?” (Matt. 27:21). See Stökl Ben Ezra, *Impact of Yom Kippur*, 168. The paradoxical juxtaposition highlights Jesus’s redemptive role as the ultimate scapegoat whose sacrifice brings unmerited deliverance and freedom to sinners.

## Conclusion

This article attempts to provide another vantage point for interpreting Matthew's account of Jesus's baptism and temptation in light of Leviticus, particularly through the lens of the scapegoat ritual of Leviticus 16:20 - 21. In this exegetical framework, Jesus offered to be baptized by John the Baptist to fulfill one of the major prophetic expectations of the Old Testament embodied in the sacrificial ritual of the Day of Atonement. As an atoning sacrifice of the scapegoat rite, Jesus became God's perfect sacrificial provision, who carried away all of the sins of Israel and beyond for their remission. John the Baptist's call for "baptism of repentance" by which the people from "all Judea" and "all areas along the Jordan" gathered to confess their sins (Matt. 3:5) parallels Israel's nationwide convocation for self-negation on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:29, 31). The profound notion of "fulfilling all righteousness" can be likewise appreciated in the context of Leviticus. Notably, "all" the righteousness (Matt. 3:15) is diametrically opposed to "all" the unrighteousness (Lev. 16:21) from which Jesus Christ will redeem his own people.

Matthew's version mainly coheres with Mark's account of the revelation of Jesus as the "beloved Son of God" after the baptism. In particular, a literary comparison between the Marcan narrative of Jesus's baptism and the Talmudic account of Isaac's binding (Gen. 22) reveals that Stegner's thesis regarding the significance of Genesis 22 in understanding the Marcan/Matthean narrative of Jesus's baptism spotlights only the side panel of a triptych. Mark's Gospel envisions the two-goat sacrifice (i.e., the live goat and the scapegoat) of the Day of Atonement (16:15 - 19; 21 - 22) to articulate the theological significance of Jesus's baptism in relation to his crucifixion. On the other hand, Matthew's Gospel envisages the scapegoat ritual of the

Day of Atonement (16:21 - 22) and deploys the key concept of the “beloved Son of God” to integrate the accounts of Jesus’s baptism, temptation, and crucifixion.

Some literary linkages between Jesus’s temptation and Israel’s wilderness trials have been proposed under the motif of the “Son of God” but the Deuteronomic connection presents, again, only another side panel of a triptych—of which the ritual prescriptions of Leviticus 16 figure as the central panel, allowing us to comprehend Matthew’s grand narrative beginning from Jesus’s baptism to his crucifixion. More specifically, Jesus’s 40-day journey into the wilderness to face the devil’s temptation, which is only a prelude to Jesus’s trial at the cross of Calvary, runs parallel to the scapegoat’s banishment into the wilderness inhabited by Azazel. Unlike the scapegoat of Leviticus 16, Jesus’s victory culminates in his resurrection after his death on the cross.

**<Keywords>**

Matthew 3, Leviticus 16, Jesus’s baptism, Jesus’s temptation, Scapegoat, John the Baptist, Day of Atonement

**<주제어>**

마태복음 3장, 레위기 16장, 예수 그리스도의 세례와 시험, 희생양, 세례 요한, 대속죄일

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<초록>

## 마태복음에 나타난 예수 그리스도의 세례와 시험(마 3:5-4:1)과 대속죄일의 희생양에 대한 규례(레 16:20-22)

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마태복음에 기록되어 있는 예수 그리스도의 세례와 광야시험(마 3:13-4:11)의 본문에는 구약의 직접 및 간접 인용이 다양하게 나타난다. 이제까지 마태의 본문(마 3:13-4:11)과 관련해 창세기, 출애굽기, 민수기 그리고 신명기에 대한 문학적 및 신학적 연관성은 충분히 논의됐지만 레위기와의 연계성은 그다지 주목받지 못하고 있다. 이 논문은 레위기의 규례 가운데 특히 대속죄일에 대한 지침이 기록된 16장 20-22절을 중심으로 마태가 서술한 예수 그리스도의 공생애 초기의 두 사건, 즉 주님의 세례와 시험사건을 비교 연구해 두 본문의 상호 연계성으로 도출되는 신학적 의미를 조명하려 한다. 두 본문의 주석적 비교 분석을 통해 필자는 대속죄일의 희생양 제의식이 예수 그리스도의 세례, 시험과 십자가의 죽음에 대한 마태의 증언을 이해 하는데 중요한 개념적 토대를 마련한다고 주장한다. 레위기 16장(20-22절)과 마태복음 3장(15-17절)의 유형적 일치점은 공동체적 회개, 집합적인 죄의 전가와 속죄, 그리고 광야로 추방되는 희생양에서 찾아 볼 수 있다. 아울러 필자는 세 폭 제단화(triptych)의 비유를 빌어 이 해석이 마태복음의 본문과 관련된 창세기(22장) 및 신명기(6-8장)와 대비되어 상호본문적인 측면에서 마태복음의 복합적 문예성(composite artistry)의 이해를 돕는다고 결론짓는다.

<Abstract>

**Reading Matthew's Account of the Baptism and  
Temptation of Jesus (Matt. 3:5-4:1) with the  
Scapegoat Rite on the Day of Atonement (Lev.  
16:20-22)**

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Commentators have observed numerous Old Testament quotations and allusions in Matthew's account of Jesus's baptism and his wilderness temptation (Matt. 3:13 - 4:11). However, no serious exegetical inquiry has yet been made to survey the Matthean texts (Matt. 3 - 4) in light of Leviticus 16. This article sets out to examine Matthew's version of the two inaugural events of Jesus's public ministry, Jesus's baptism and his temptation (Matt. 3:13 - 4:11), with particular attention to Leviticus 16:20 - 22. The exegetical evaluation yields the conclusion that the scapegoat ritual of the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16) serves to elucidate Matthew's witness of Jesus's baptism, temptation and crucifixion coherently. After his baptism, Jesus emerges as God's "beloved" Son and perfect atoning sacrifice, who takes "all" sins of Israel to "fulfill all righteousness," and his beloved sonship challenged by the devil until the crucifixion (Matt. 3:15 - 17; 27:40, 43). The formal correspondences traceable in Matthew's Gospel vis-à-vis Leviticus 16 include communal repentance, transference and atonement of aggregate sins, and banishment of the scapegoat into a demon-inhabited wilderness. This inner-biblical interpretation further sheds light on the literary artistry of Matthew's Gospel (Matt. 3 - 4), in

which allusions to Genesis 22 and Deuteronomy 6 - 8 are artistically juxtaposed with Leviticus 16 in a triptych layout.

