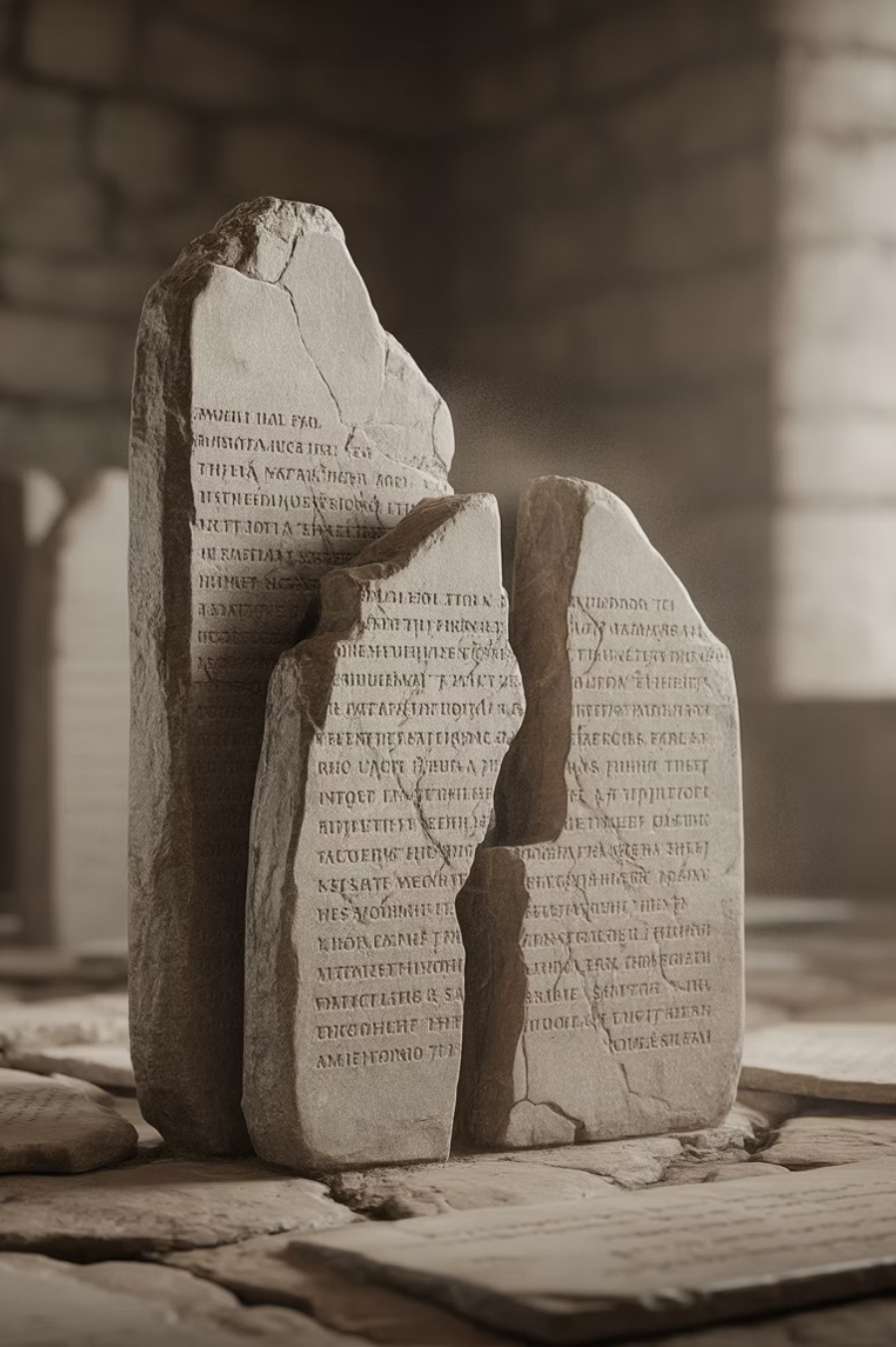




# Old Testament Theology II: Comprehensive Study of Hebrew Theological Concepts

This comprehensive study examines the profound theological concepts that shaped ancient Israel's understanding of God, humanity, and divine purpose. Through careful analysis of Hebrew texts and traditions, we explore how these foundational ideas continue to influence theological thought today.



# THE THEOLOGICAL CONCEPT OF SIN & REDEMPTION

Sin stands as one of the central themes of the Old Testament, appearing in virtually every chapter and forming the foundation for understanding humanity's relationship with the divine. The Hebrew scriptures present a complex, multifaceted view of sin that goes far beyond simple moral failure.

# The Pervasive Reality of Sin

## Biblical Perspective

The Old Testament contains more terms describing evil than terms describing good. While there is only one way to do right, there are many ways to act wrongly. Scripture takes sin seriously, recognizing its malignancy, culpability, and tragedy.

## Modern Contrast

Unlike many contemporary religious specialists who seek to excuse sin and diminish its seriousness, biblical writers were keenly aware of sin's devastating effects on human relationships with God, the world, society, and one another.



# The Nature of Human Need

## Recognition of Dignity

The Bible acknowledges human dignity and worth as created beings, made in the image of God with inherent value and potential.

## Focus on Deficiency

More importantly, Scripture emphasizes human deficiency and desperate need for divine intervention and salvation from sin's bondage.

## Tragic Condition

Humanity's fallen state, filled with disgrace, guilt, and alienation, constitutes the fundamental human predicament requiring redemption.

# Sin's Devastating Effects

In the Old Testament, sin destroys the unity of human nature and shatters the harmony of the world. Sin is not entertainment—it is tragedy. One of sin's most devastating aspects is humanity's inability to overcome it through personal effort.

Biblical writers understood that without God, humans are lost sinners, incapable of saving themselves or finding true happiness. The restoration of righteousness can only come as God's generous gift, not as human achievement.



# Theological Perspectives on Sin

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## Central Theme View

Some scholars argue that sin constitutes the central theme of the Old Testament, forming the backbone of biblical theology and anthropology.

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## Methodological Neglect

Conversely, many recent Old Testament theologies lack separate chapters on sin, possibly due to modern methodological approaches or cultural attitudes.

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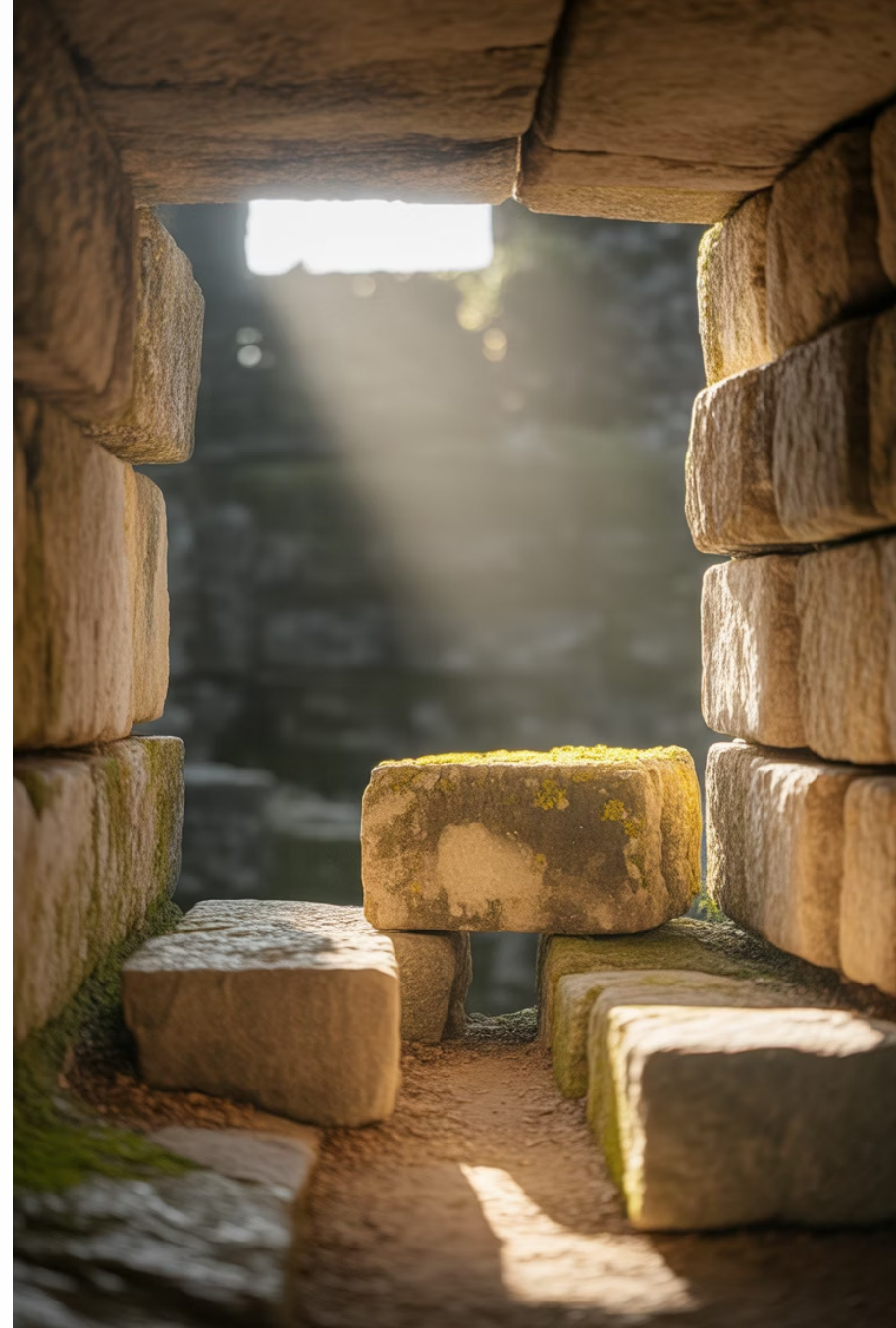
## Terminological Shifts

Contemporary tendency to treat sin under alternative terminology such as crime, threat, guilt, or mental instability reflects changing cultural perspectives.

# Foundation of Christian Religion

The entire nature of the Christian religion rests upon these two great pillars: our great fall and our great redemption.

This fundamental truth shapes our understanding of both human condition and divine grace, establishing the essential framework for comprehending God's salvific work throughout history.



# Complexity of Old Testament Material

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## Prophetic vs. Priestly

How do we reconcile the prophetic perspective on sin with the priestly understanding? These different approaches offer varying emphases and solutions.

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## Comparative Context

Should we consider Israel's understanding of sin in light of concepts held by neighboring cultures? Cultural comparison illuminates distinctive features.

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## Historical Development

Is the perspective on sin consistent from the beginning to the end of the Old Testament? Chronological analysis reveals evolving understanding.

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## Essential Questions

What is sin's nature? What was its origin? Is sin universal? These fundamental questions require comprehensive investigation.



# The Nature of Sin: Beyond Definition

We find no formal definition of sin in the Old Testament, nor should we expect one. The Bible consistently deals with real life, providing rules of conduct and judging behavior rather than offering abstract definitions.

What we have instead are concrete descriptions of evil's reality in various spheres of human experience. The Bible presents sin not as a single, comprehensive definition but as a multifaceted reality identified in all types of actions, conditions, and intentions.

# Action and Condition

## Dual Nature

Most Old Testament scholars agree that sin is both action and condition. Individual sinful actions point to a perverted orientation of the human will, while underlying this is the fundamental condition of human nature's corruption.

## Voluntary and Intrinsic

Sin results from human free will—it is humanity's free act. Yet it is also attributed as an objective reality. Wherever there is transgression, there is also material disorder, a state of sinfulness.



# The Essence of Sin: Rebellion Against God

The essence of sin is rebellion against God. It is not simply moral evil, but moral evil with religious connotations. Sin represents an affirmative act or state of hostility against God—a defiant attitude of the soul before the divine.

This understanding distinguishes biblical sin from philosophical concepts like Spinoza's "unreal" or "illusory" evil, Hegel's "essential moment in progressive divine life," or evolutionary "remnants of animal nature." Sin, as understood in both Old and New Testaments, embodies defiant rebellion that becomes an objective power.

# Israel's Distinctive Perspective

## Divine Relationship

Unlike neighboring cultures, Israel analyzed life's problems in relation to God's gracious and just will, understanding sin as violation of divine communion.

## Personal Betrayal

Sin represents betrayal of God's love and revolt against divine lordship, destroying the personal relationship between Creator and creature.

## Covenantal Context

Israel's understanding emerged from their covenant relationship with God, who chose them as instruments of universal redemption according to Genesis 12:3.

# The Vocabulary of Sin

Israel possessed numerous terms related to sin, but statistical research of these terms falls short of revealing theology's core. While vocabulary study provides important insights, the etymological approach has limitations.

Significantly, the vocabulary related to sin is largely identical to that used in Egypt, Babylon, and Greece. Therefore, sin's nature must be explained from vocabulary only when terms are studied within faith's integral context, which differs radically from paganism due to fundamental differences in faith content.



# Key Hebrew Terms for Sin



## Hata' - "Missing the Mark"

The basic term translated as "sin," meaning "to miss the target," like someone throwing stones with a sling or a traveler who loses the way. This suggests falling short of God's standard.



## 'Awon - "Perversion"

Meaning "to pervert" or "make crooked," this term describes sin as what is twisted, not straight, correct, or direct—the opposite of righteousness and moral uprightness.



## Pesa' - "Rebellion"

Referring to deliberate rebellion against authority, this term emphasizes the willful nature of sin as conscious defiance against God's righteous rule and covenant relationship.

# Scholarly Classifications

## C.R. Smith's Approach

Divided Hebrew words into generic terms, metaphors, and antonyms, providing a systematic categorization of sin vocabulary based on linguistic relationships and semantic fields.

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## De Vries' Organization

Arranged terms in six groups: formal deviations, theological challenges to God, interior states, ethical aspects, harmful results, and guilt-related terms.

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## Robinson's Method

Classified terms by concepts: deviation from right path, altered condition of the agent, rebellion against authority, and characterization of the act's quality.



# Rich Terminology Reflects Deep Reality

The Bible's rich vocabulary regarding sin is no accident, especially in the Old Testament. Its authors didn't concern themselves with theoretical definitions of sin but reflected, in their rich and visual terminology, the depth and broad effects of the sin they experienced.

This extensive vocabulary demonstrates that sin encompasses error, failure, rebellion against God, disobedience, foolishness, infidelity, greed, oppression, violence, pride, and immorality. Sin involves doing wrong things, acting badly, and being evil in itself.

# Personal Nature of Sin

## 1 Conscious Decision

In the Old Testament, sin is almost always personal, resulting from conscious decision. Animals or objects cannot sin because they lack freedom to choose between good and evil.

## 2 Individual and Collective

Sin can be both individual and collective in the Old Testament. Sinners bear responsibility for their choices, attitudes, and actions, whether acting alone or as part of a community.

## 3 Comprehensive Lists

Understanding Old Testament sin perspective requires examining lists of Israel's sins and individual transgressions found throughout Scripture (Deuteronomy 9:6-24, Psalm 106:6-39, and others).



# Prophetic Language and Imagery

Beyond formal Hebrew terms, the Hebrew prophets used their entire vocabulary and experience to show Israel the extent of their unrighteousness through vivid metaphors:

- **Washerwoman's language:** They were filthy and needed cleansing (Jeremiah 2:22)
- **Physician's language:** They were desperately sick, needing Yahweh's healing (Isaiah 1:5-6)
- **Shepherd's expression:** Israel was a lost sheep, strayed from the fold (Jeremiah 23:3)
- **Farmer's language:** They were like wheat full of chaff, needing winnowing (Amos 9:9)

# Categories of Sin

|                                                                                                                                                                    |                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                       |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p><b>Personal</b></p> <p>Rebellion against God - the primary Old Testament concept where sin represents direct defiance of divine authority and relationship.</p> | <p><b>Moral</b></p> <p>Deviation from external conduct standards - falling short of established ethical norms and behavioral expectations.</p> | <p><b>Dynamic</b></p> <p>Transgression of taboo - violation of sacred boundaries that maintain community purity and divine order.</p> |
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# Biblical Heroes and Human Frailty

The Bible courageously exposes evil even in its most important characters, demonstrating the universal nature of human sinfulness:

Adam is a coward; Cain is irresponsible; Noah is weak; Abraham is fearful to the point of allowing his wife to be violated; Jacob participates in fraud against his brother Esau; Joseph is an ambitious manipulator; and the greatest of Hebrew heroes, King David, commits unforgivable crimes.



# Evolution of Jewish Understanding

## Old Testament Period

Personal sense of sin emphasized interiority and corrupting influence on the human heart (Jeremiah 17:9). Focus remained on the heart's transformation and divine relationship.

## Post-Biblical Judaism

Emphasis shifted to observance of external law rules. Sin became defined as infraction of Mosaic law, with rabbis teaching the existence of both good and evil impulses in humans.

Post-biblical Judaism adopted a very optimistic view of human nature and possibility of personal restoration, believing humans could overcome sin through their own efforts without external mediation.

# Contrast: New Testament Perspective

In stark contrast to rabbinic Judaism's optimistic view of human ability to overcome sin independently, the New Testament and Christianity assumed a pessimistic view of sin's power.

The New Testament uses essentially the same terms and concepts as the Old Testament regarding sin but expands and deepens them. Jesus' statements about sin went beyond anything scribes and Pharisees could imagine (Matthew 5:21-48; Mark 7:21-23).

Paul transcended law as the measure of sin and righteousness, declaring that no one can fulfill the law and that it reveals human failures and the vastness of individual sinfulness (Romans 3:20; 5:20; 7:7-24).



# The Essence of Sin: Comprehensive Nature





# Sin's Comprehensive Impact

Sin in the Old Testament encompasses the entire person—flesh, spirit, heart, and soul. From the integral perspective of human nature, sin cannot be explained unilaterally as concupiscence or psychological disturbance.

Sin has spiritual, physical, and mental dimensions. Humans don't sin with just one part of their nature (mind or body); rather, the entire being is involved in each sin (Matthew 5:27-28).

In its grossest forms, sin places humans below animals, because animals sin only with flesh, lacking the higher qualities of self-understanding, self-consciousness, memory, imagination, and sense of meaning and purpose for earthly activity.



# The Question of Sin's Origin

Anyone reflecting on sin's doctrine in light of God's Word soon confronts the question of sin's origin. When identifying a problem, the natural course is discovering its cause, source, or main origin.

The Old Testament recognizes a problem exists in nature and the human race—a profound and abnormal disorder. Humans today are not the "good" creatures God created. "Opposition existence" to God manifests openly in specific acts of rebellion and human disobedience.

"Every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Genesis 6:5)

# The Genesis Account: Sin's Entry

## Perfect Creation

God created everything perfect. The human race was created in divine image, with capacity for fellowship and moral choice.

## Audacious Attempt

In Genesis 3, rebellion represents an audacious attempt to make God's commandment a means of repression, seeking divine equality.

## Early Rebellion

Humanity revolted against their creator early on. Genesis 3-11 interweaves confessions of sin with accounts of human achievements.

## Universal Corruption

By the flood narrative, the entire human race was corrupted (Genesis 6:5), demonstrating sin's comprehensive spread.



# The Mystery of Rebellion

Human rebellion against the Creator remains perplexing. Biblical accounts don't attempt to explain it. Rebellion against the Creator will always be unexpected, unfounded, illogical, inexcusable, and unjustified.

If God created all things perfectly, there can be no acceptable explanation or reason for sin. To someone asking whether the Creator could have prevented human failure in revolting against God, we must answer that He chose to create free partners, not robots automatically obeying His will and command.

# The Classical Answer: Original Sin

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## Church Teaching

The church's classical answer to sin's origin is "the fall" or "original sin," though the Old Testament never uses these terms directly.

2

## Concrete Focus

The Old Testament rarely speaks of sin in theoretical or theological terms, instead referring to specific sins committed in particular places and times by specific people.

3

## Momentary Emphasis

When the Old Testament discusses sin, primary emphasis falls on its concrete momentary expression in individual actions, relegating questions of origin to secondary importance.



# Genesis 3-11: The Great Hamartiology

The Old Testament contains a narrative (Genesis 3) about a decisive moment in the first human couple's life, from which humanity's history became a history of sin. In the great hamartiology of Genesis 3-11, sin erupted and spread like an avalanche.

The Old Testament recounts how sin began and continued increasing within the human race, generation after generation. However, it points to no other entry door for sin into the world except Eve and Adam's free choice to disobey God through a serpent's suggestion.



# The Effects of Adam's Sin

Every study of Old Testament sin must include the effects of Adam's sin and the effects of individual and societal sins. The Old Testament says nothing about how Adam's sin affected his descendants, though Genesis 3 shows consequences for those involved.

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## Immediate Consequences

Shame, guilt, and fear overtook Adam and Eve after their sin. They became aware of their nakedness and hid from God's presence.

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## Specific Punishments

Consequences included pain in childbirth for women, lifelong labor to extract sustenance from cursed ground for men, and expulsion from Eden.

03

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## Universal Effects

All nature was cursed because of human sin. Death became inevitable since access to the tree of life was permanently denied (Genesis 3:22-24).

# Generational Consequences

The Old Testament doesn't explain dogmatically or philosophically how the first couple's sin affected their descendants. It simply tells subsequent generations' story as a history of sin.

The first son of Adam and Eve murdered his brother (Genesis 4:8). Cain's sin wasn't merely external violence—the seed of sin was in his anger against his brother (Genesis 4:5-7). The word "sin" occurs here for the first time in the Old Testament.

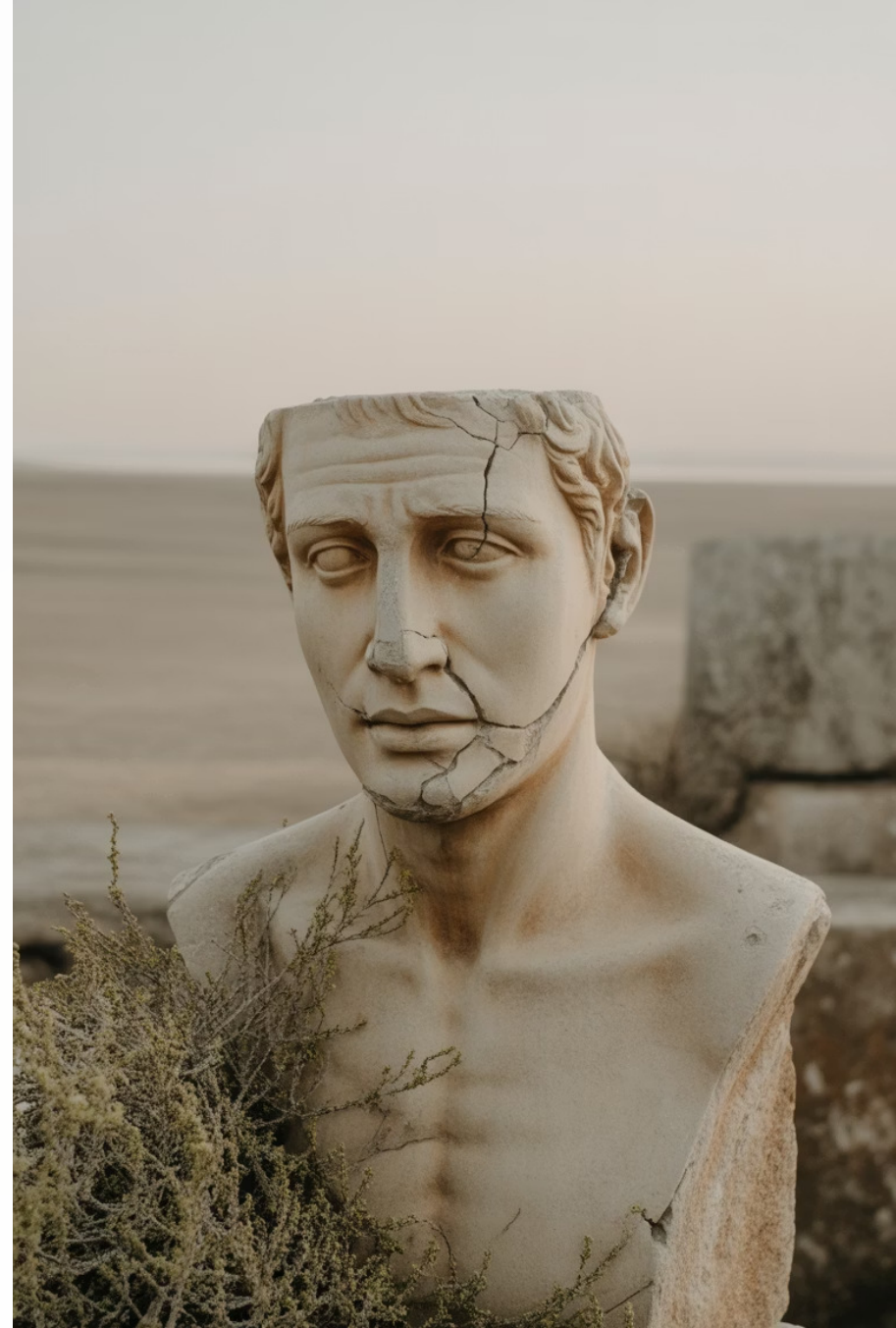
Lamech added bigamy to the growing list of sins (Genesis 4:19). By Noah's time, God saw that "every imagination of human heart thoughts was continually evil" (Genesis 6:5).



# Universal Nature of Sin

Several Old Testament texts have been used as proof texts for sin's universality and even for the doctrine that sin is hereditary. Psalm 51:5 speaks of original tendency toward sin: "I was born in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me."

Statements like this recognize evil's power to corrupt humans from the beginning. Even while saying nothing about original sin doctrine in terms of guilt transmitted from Adam, the Old Testament is keenly aware of humanity's natural tendency toward evil.



# Corporate Responsibility

## Collective Punishment

Some passages indicate that during certain Old Testament periods, children were punished for their fathers' sins (Exodus 20:5; 34:7; Joshua 7:24).

## Social Solidarity

The best explanation for collective punishment passages lies in Israel's view of "corporate personality" or social solidarity within community structures.

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## Individual Accountability

Other passages emphasize individual independence from the group (Deuteronomy 24:16; 2 Kings 14:6; Jeremiah 31:29; Ezekiel 18).

## Personal Responsibility

While individuals were subordinated to their group, they were never so absorbed as to lack responsibility for personal acts and moral choices.



# Later Theological Development

Later Jewish and Christian writers developed many theories about how Adam's sin affected the human race. 2 Esdras (written around 100 AD) makes several references to Adam's sin and its effects on descendants:

"The first Adam, burdened with an evil heart, transgressed and was overcome, as were all who descended from him. Thus diseases became permanent; the law was in people's hearts along with the evil root; but what was good departed, and what was evil remained" (2 Esdras 3:21-22).

# New Testament Continuity

## Essential Consistency

The New Testament concept of sin is essentially the same as the Old Testament. All previous terms appear there, though "fall" and "original sin" terms don't occur.

## Pauline Teaching

Paul taught that sin and death entered the world through Adam (Romans 5:12-14; 1 Corinthians 15:21-22) and that sin is universal (Romans 3:23; 5:12).

## Personal Responsibility

James 1:13-15 emphasizes individual responsibility: "Each person is tempted by his own desire, when it attracts and seduces. Then desire conceives and gives birth to sin."

## Church Development

Doctrines of "fall" and "original sin" were fully developed by patristic scholars in Western and Eastern branches of the ancient church.



# Consequences of Sin for Individuals

## The First Consequence: Guilt

The first consequence or result of sin is the feeling of guilt. Guilt can be an interior feeling of disturbance, alienation, and estrangement. This was Adam and Eve's experience (Genesis 3:10)—they felt ashamed and hid.

David's heart accused him after he took a census of the people (2 Samuel 24:10). The psalmist declared: "While I kept silent about my sins, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my vitality was drained as with summer heat" (Psalm 32:3-4).

# Punishment and Divine Justice

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## Divine Justice

The second result of sin is punishment or condemnation. Every transgression brings punishment because offenses against God must be repaired.

2

## Inevitable Consequences

Yahweh is presented as a God who "does not acquit the guilty" (Exodus 34:7) and who "does not forget all their works forever" (Amos 8:7).

3

## Correspondence Principle

Many Old Testament scholars recognize correspondence between sin and its punishment—offense and punishment must correspond to each other.

4

## Restorative Purpose

God's judgment aims beyond punishment to purify like refining fire, correct like a plumb line, and renew like cleaning a dish.



# THE REMOVAL OF SIN

The Old Testament's terminology regarding sin's removal is as rich and varied as its vocabulary related to sin itself. Much of the language focuses on what God does with sin through His gracious intervention.

# What God Does With Sin



## Removes and Discards

God removes sin, sets it aside, throws it away like dirty and torn clothes (Isaiah 6:7; Zechariah 3:4)



## Washes and Cleanses

God thoroughly washes iniquity and purifies from sin (Psalm 51:2, 7; Jeremiah 33:8)



## Casts Into the Sea

God hurls all sins into the depths of the sea, trampling iniquities underfoot (Micah 7:19)



## Erases and Blots Out

God erases transgressions for His own sake (Isaiah 43:25; Psalm 51:1, 9; Isaiah 44:22)



## Covers and Conceals

Blessed is the one whose iniquity is forgiven, whose sin is covered (Psalm 32:1; 85:3)



## Forgives Completely

God forgives all iniquities, not remembering sins anymore (Psalm 103:2-3; Isaiah 43:25; Jeremiah 31:34)



# The Ultimate Solution: Divine Forgiveness

In the Old Testament, the most profound word about sacrifices relates to the future sacrifice of the Suffering Servant—a sinless man offering voluntary, vicarious sacrifice for Israel and the nations through suffering, death, and "resurrection."

While the term "resurrection" doesn't appear in Isaiah 53, some form of life after death is envisioned: "He will see his offspring and prolong his days... After his soul's anguish he will see light and be satisfied" (Isaiah 53:10-11).

In the Old Testament, sin is a serious problem not satisfactorily resolved. The definitive means of forgiveness came in the New Testament, in Christ, through his atoning death and the power of his resurrection.