Sin, Iniquity, Transgression

In the previous installment of "Glossa," we looked at the impact of sin and the fall on humanity's ability to express God's image and represent God in His dominion on the earth. This article continues exploring the development of sin as a background to present God as Redeemer and Savior, as seen in the types of the Old Testament and their fulfillment in the New Testament. The most general and main words for *sin* in both Hebrew and Greek carry the notion of missing the mark or goal. Other words for *sin* also include a sense of spatial distance; of deviating from a mark or standard or distorting the standard; of a willful, knowledgeable violation of a law or standard by overstepping a line, or an outright rejecting and rebelling against it. The law can be considered a mark that defines and exposes sin. But since sin is an aberration that entered through the fall, ultimately the mark, or goal, is God's eternal economy, or His eternal purpose, which is to make humanity the same as God in life, nature, and expression to be the Body of Christ as His expression and to consummate in the New Jerusalem. This article looks at the mark of the law and of God's economy, the different words for *sin* (subsumed under the three main words *sin, iniquity,* and *transgression*), and a brief history of sin, exposing the human condition before God and in humans themselves. In the next article we look at the consequences of sin and the cure for sin, with the presentation of God as Redeemer and Savior to deal with the problem of sin and to clear the way for Him to fulfill His eternal economy.

The Mark of the Law and of God's Economy

Sin misses the mark, or goal, of God's glory. Romans 3:23 states, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." The background to this verse is the Old Testament picture of the Ark, containing the tablets of the law with its lid overshadowed by the cherubim of glory, in the most holy place of the tabernacle (vv. 24-26). To sin is to miss the mark of the law as indicated by the tablets of the law, and to fall short of God's glory is to fall short of the goal of God's full expression as indicated by the cherubim (Exo. 25:18; 26:1). Sin is frequently associated with the law: "Through the law is the clear knowledge of sin" (Rom. 3:20; cf. 7:7-8); "sin is not charged to one's account when there is no law" (5:13; cf. 1 Cor. 15:56; 1 John 3:4); and "Where there is no law, neither is there transgression" (Rom. 4:15).

The law and God's glory are related to each other, with the law being a portrait, or testimony, of what God is like and what He desires us to be like as His counterpart (Exo. 25:16; 32:15), and glory being the expression of God. Both God and the law are holy, righteous, good, and spiritual (Rom. 7:12, 14, 16; 1 Tim. 1:8). God is also a God of love and light, and the law reflects these attributes (1 John 4:8, 16; 1:5).

Taking the Law as the Word of God according to God's Economy

The law exposes and subdues us. Due to the fall of mankind and the weakness of the flesh, we sin against God's law and are unable to fulfill its requirements. God's original intention was that we would contain Him as life, indicated by the placement of humankind in the garden in front of the tree of life (Gen. 2), and not just imitate Him, knowing what is good and evil and striving independently to do what is good and avoid what is evil. Although the commandment was unto life, the law is unable to give life (Rom. 7:10). As Paul says, "If a law had been given which was able to give life, righteousness would have indeed been of law" (Gal. 3:21).

We need to see the original intention of the law and see that in God's economy the law can have a positive function if it is taken not as the letter that kills but as the Spirit who gives life (2 Cor. 3:6).

> The law is not only a list of divine commandments; it is the living word of God which infuses God's substance into those who lovingly seek Him. If we consider the Ten Commandments only as laws and then try to keep them, we are not proper in our approach to the law. (Lee, *Life-study* 607)

The infusing of God's element into us through the proper appreciation and function of the law as His word leads us to the mark of God's economy.

God's Economy—the Way to Arrive at the Mark

To fulfill the law and arrive at the mark of the law, we need to see that there is another mark, the mark of God's economy (Gk. οἰκονομία), which refers to God's plan, purpose, or administration. Οἰκονομία means "the

management of a house" and is a compound word consisting of two parts, οἶκος, house, and the ending -νομια, which is etymologically related to the word νόμος, law, "lit., anything assigned or apportioned," which is derived from the verb νέμω, meaning "to distribute, to dispense, and to parcel out (e.g., food or pasture)." Οἰκονομία occurs nine times in the New Testament. Three times it is translated "economy" (Recovery Version), "administration" (NASB), "plan" (ESV), or "dispensation" (ASV, KJV), when the focus is on God as the Originator and Dispenser (Eph. 1:10; 3:9; 1 Tim. 1:4), and "stewardship" six times (Luke 16:2-4; 1 Cor. 9:17; Eph. 3:2; Col. 1:25), when it is used to refer to human participation or cooperation in God's economy. God's economy is to dispense Himself in Christ as the Spirit into His chosen people to make them the same as He is in life, nature, expression (glory), and function but not in the Godhead (i.e., what makes God, God, in the sense of His uniqueness). Through God's economy, or His dispensing of Himself into us, He makes us what we should be, both in terms of our relationship with Him and in our proper relationship to one another. To miss, misaim from, or come short of the mark, or goal, of God's economy is sin (Rom. 3:23; cf. 1 Tim. 1:6).

> The law was God's temporary economy (dispensation) for man in the Old Testament, since it was added temporarily because of man's transgressions (Gal. 3:19); the faith is God's eternal economy (dispensation) for man in the New Testament, because it is based on God's eternal plan. (Lee, Recovery Version, Rom. 4:13, note 2)

The goal of the divine economy is to dispense the Triune God into our entire being until we are saturated with Him and express Him corporately as the church, the Body of Christ, the organism of the Triune God, which consummates in the New Jerusalem. God's economy is both the goal and the central line (the way to accomplish the goal) of the Christian life, with the improper use of the law actually distracting us from the mark of God's economy (1 Tim. 1:3-11).

Words for *Sin*

In the Bible there are perhaps as many as fifty words used to indicate *sin*, many of which indicate some sense of missing a mark or of spatial distance. The three main Hebrew roots *ht'*, *'wh*, and *psh'*, usually translated "sin," "iniquity," and "transgression or rebellion" respectively, indicate an increasingly serious development of sin from a missing of the mark, to a deviation or twisting related to the mark, to a crossing over of and a rejection of, or rebellion against, the mark. These three roots can be seen as describing direct opposition to God's economy. Sin misses the mark of attaining God's life of righteousness, iniquity twists or distorts what corresponds to God's holy nature, and transgression or rebellion rejects and opposes God's arrangement as an expression of God's enemy in

contradiction to God's glorious expression. Most other words for *sin* can be subsumed either lexically or semantically under these three roots, some also indicating consequences of sin, such as guilt or trouble. Two other roots *r''* ("evil") and *rsh'* ("wickedness") also occur frequently and refer to the source and constitutional consequences of sin.

These words are most frequently translated into English and Greek by words that also convey the notion of missing a mark or goal or lacking a desired condition. There are four main Greek words for sin, the most common being ἁμαρτία ("sin"), which also carries the same meaning of missing the mark, and three others that also convey the sense of missing, lacking, or negating something positive or desirable (indicated by prefixes such as the Greek prefix ἀ- ("not") or the English *un-*): ἀ-δικία ("un-righteousness, in-justice"), ἀ-νομία ("law-lessness"), and ἀ-σέβεια ("un-godliness"). In addition, one English word that is frequently used to translate these Hebrew roots is *in-iquity* (from Latin *in-iquus*, meaning "un-equal, un-fair"). Additional Greek words that indicate to step, pass, or go over some kind of line or boundary (with the prepositional prefix παρα-) are παρα-βαίνω ("trans-gress, tres-pass") and παρά-πτωμα ("falling alongside, offense"), from Latin *ob-fendere* ("strike against"). Other words indicate turning away from or turning back to a previously undesirable state or condition, e.g., ἀπο-στασία ("apo-stasy, stand away from"). These Greek words continue to be used in the New Testament, reinforcing and developing the notion of sin.

The Root ht'

The most frequent and generic word for *sin* in Hebrew is the root *ht'*, which occurs almost six hundred times. It means "to miss a mark or goal, to misaim" (cf. Judg. 20:16, referring to the left-handed slingers of Benjamin who could "sling a stone at a hair and not miss, lit. "cause the stone not to miss," so also Proverbs 19:2; Job 5:24). *Ht'* occurs as a verb, *hata'*, occurring two hundred forty times in the Old Testament and is translated into Greek mostly as ἁμαρατάνω, which occurs forty-three times in the New Testament. There are three distinct noun forms: *hatta't*, occurring almost three hundred times (over one hundred twenty times as "sin offering"); *het'*, occurring about thirty-four times; and *hata'ah*, occurring about ten times. These nouns are mostly translated ἁμαρτία ("sin"), which occurs almost one hundred seventy-five times in the New Testament, or ἁμάρτημα for *hatta't*, occurring four times. An adjective, *hatta'* ("sinful") occurs about twenty times, mostly functioning as a noun, e.g., "the sinners, the Amalekites" (1 Sam. 15:18) and translated ἁμαρτωλός ("sinner"). The root *ht'* has three different senses: sin personified (indicating the ultimate source of sin, Satan), the nature of sin (which constitutes the sinner and is the source of sinful deeds), and the deeds or acts of sin committed (sins).

The noun *hatta't* in its first occurrence (Gen. 4:7) is used to refer to sin in a personified sense. After Jehovah did not regard Cain's offering, and Cain became angry, Jehovah told Cain, "If you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door; and his [or its] desire is for you, but you must rule over him [or it]." This personification of sin points to Satan as the source of sin, wickedness, and evil. As Keil and Delitzsch indicate,

> The fem. חַטָּאת is construed as a masculine, because, with evident allusion to the serpent, sin is personified as a wild beast, lurking at the door of the human heart, and eagerly desiring to devour his soul (1 Pet. V. 8)…Cain is to rule over the sin which is greedily desiring him, by giving up his wrath, not indeed that sin may cease to lurk for him, but that the lurking evil foe may obtain no entrance into his heart…The words do not command the suppression of an inward temptation, but resistance to the power of evil as pressing from without, by hearkening to the word which God addressed to Cain in person, and addresses to us through the Scriptures…But Cain paid no heed to the divine warning. (112)

The New Testament continues this view of personified sin, which overlaps with the notion of our sinful nature, and it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between the two senses. Sin can reign in us and lord it over us (Rom. 6:12, 14), take us captive (7:23), make us its slaves (6:17, 20; John 8:34), work out in us coveting of every kind (Rom. 7:8), and deceive and kill us (v. 11). All who practice sin are of the devil (1 John 3:8), "denoting living in sin, committing sin habitually. Such a life is of the devil, whose life is one of sin and who has sinned continually from the beginning. Sin is his nature, and sinning is his character" (Lee, Recovery Version, v. 8, note 1). "The devil has sinned continually from ancient times and begets sinners that they might practice sin with him" (Note 4). We are constituted sinners not only by our continual sinning but also because of the sinful nature that we received from our forefather Adam (Rom. 5:19).

Two other Hebrew roots that indicate the presence of our sinful nature, semantically related to and frequently associated with *ht'*, are the roots *shgg* ("go astray, sin without intent," Psa. 119:67), and *shg'* ("err, wander," Ezek. 34:6). The noun *shagagah*, occurring frequently with *ht'*, means "without intent" (Lev. 4:2). It is glossed as "unwittingly" or "without knowing" (Josh. 20:3; Lev. 5:18). *Shagagah* occurs nineteen times and is mostly translated ἀκουσίως ("involuntarily") and a few times as ἀγνοέω ("be ignorant, not know"). The fact that we can commit these sins without intent *beshegagah* ("errs, makes a mistake," 4:2) indicates we have a sinful nature with its tendency to err:

> The sinning without intent…signifies the sin in our fallen

nature, the indwelling sin that came through Adam into mankind from Satan (Rom. 5:12), which causes us to sin unintentionally (Rom. 7:19-20). This sin, personified in Rom. 7…,is the evil nature of Satan, even Satan himself, who dwells in our fallen flesh (Rom. 7:17-18a, 20, 23…). Since our flesh is one with sin (Rom. 8:3), whatever we do out of our flesh, whether good or evil, is sin. Moreover, since the flesh denotes a fallen person (Gen. 6:3; Rom. 3:20), every fallen person is sin (2 Cor. 5:21 and note 2). (Lee, Recovery Version, Lev. 4:2, note 1)

Another root that means to err is *t'h* ("wander, go astray, err," Psa. 107:4). For example, Jehovah characterized the generation that wandered in the wilderness for forty years as "a people who go astray in heart; / And they do not know My ways" (95:10), and Isaiah characterizes all of us "like sheep [who] have gone astray; / Each of us has turned to his own way" (53:6). Israel went astray from Jehovah after idols (Ezek. 44:10). The going astray of *t'h* seems more active or conscious than *shgg* ("go astray ignorantly"). Its use may indicate some realization concerning going astray but little conscious effort to reverse it. Perhaps this is borne out by the fact that the most common form of *t'h* is the causative hiphil form "to lead astray" (Hosea 4:12; Jer. 50:6; Micah 3:5), which is translated mostly as πλανάω ("lead astray, deceive"). *Ht'* also has a causative sense of leading astray, causing to sin, which is reiterated at least twenty-four times in 1 Kings and 2 Kings, when referring to Jeroboam, who "caused Israel to sin" by setting up idols and alternate worship centers, thus dividing the kingdom (e.g., 1 Kings 14:16).

Ht' is used for individual acts of sin (sins) many times. Sometimes it is used in the singular to refer to an accumulation of sin or the collective sin of a people, e.g., of Sodom (Gen. 18:20), or perhaps also indicating sinful deeds in conjunction with the sin nature, e.g., the sonless Zelophehad, who died in his own sin (Num. 27:3). *Ht'* may refer to a particular sin, e.g., adultery (Gen. 20:9; 39:9) or idolatry—the golden calf (Exo. 32:30-31) and Jeroboam's setting up calves and altars in Bethel and Dan, which drove Israel away from following Jehovah (2 Kings 17:21), each of which are called a great sin.

Another root, *'shm*, indicates individual sins, acts of trespasses and offenses (Lev. 5:15; 6:2), but most commonly indicates the consequence of sin, guilt or guiltiness, the result of committing an offense. The verb occurs thirty-five times and means "to trespass, offend," or "err," e.g., "Let not Judah trespass; / And do not come to Gilgal, / Nor go up to Beth-aven, / Nor swear" (Hosea 4:15). However, the verb is understood mostly as "become guilty" (Lev. 4:13). The noun *'asham* occurs about forty-six times and refers mostly (about thirty-eight times) to the trespass offering for individual sins committed, especially in Leviticus. It is translated into Greek mostly as πλημμέλεια ("false note,

fault, offense, error"), with the notion of offering implied or supplied from the context. The feminine noun *'ashamah* occurs nineteen times and means "trespass or wrongdoing" (2 Chron. 28:10, 13) but also mostly indicates guiltiness, translated into Greek as πλημμέλεια (Ezra 9:6ff).

Another word, παράπτωμα ("transgression, offense"), occurs about fifteen times in the Old Testament and nineteen times in the New Testament, where it is used most frequently for the notion of offense, which may be inadvertent (e.g., translating *shegi'ah* as "error," Psa. 19:12) or deliberate. It is also associated with the law, which defines what constitutes an offense; for example, "The law entered in alongside that the offense might abound" (Rom. 5:20).

Sin, ἁμαρτία, is considered equivalent to two other Greek words—ἀνομία ("lawlessness") and ἀδικία ("unrighteousness"). According to 1 John 3:4, "everyone who practices sin practices lawlessness also, and sin is lawlessness." The root ἀνομ-, which occurs twenty-six times in the New Testament, means, literally, "having no law, being without law" and

> denotes being without, or not under, the principle of God's ruling over man. To practice lawlessness is to live a life outside of and not under the principle of God's ruling over man. Hence, lawlessness is sin, or, reciprocally, sin is lawlessness. (Lee, Recovery Version, v. 4, note 2)

Even in the Lord's kingdom there may be those who practice lawlessness (Matt. 13:41), and workers of lawlessness, who do many things in His name but not according to the will of His Father (7:23). The mystery of lawlessness is now operating but is restrained (2 Thes. 2:7), but at the end of the age there will be the multiplication of lawlessness (Matt. 24:12) and the manifestation of the man of lawlessness (2 Thes. 2:3, 8), the Antichrist (Dan. 7:25; 1 John 2:18).

All unrighteousness is also sin (5:17). "Every wrongdoing, everything that is not just or righteous, is sin" (Lee, Recovery Version, v. 17, note 1). The root ἀδικ- ("unrighteous(ness)") occurs almost seventy times in the New Testament. The unrighteous (those who are constituted fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, effeminate, homosexuals, etc.) will not inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6:9). Unrighteousness comes with all deceit (2 Thes. 2:10), and some take pleasure in it (v. 12).

The Root 'wh

The root *'wh* means "bend, twist, distort" (Isa. 21:3; 24:1), hence "'to deviate from the standard' or 'to twist the standard'" (Livingston 277-278). It occurs mostly as the root of the noun *'awon* or *'avon* ("iniquity"), occuring about two hundred thirty-three times, especially in Leviticus, Psalms, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Hosea.

The noun *'avon* is translated "iniquity, guilt," or "punishment for iniquity" (Gen. 4:13; Lev. 26:41). In Greek it is translated ἀδικία ("unrighteousness") about eighty times, ἁμαρτία ("sin") about seventy times, and ἀνομία ("lawlessness") about sixty times. The word *'avon* indicates a more serious sin than *ht'*—something more insidious, evil, rotten, and distorted—for example, the iniquity of the Amorites (Gen. 15:16), of Sodom (19:15), of incest (Lev. 20:17, 19), and of adultery (Num. 5:15), all of which refer to or imply some deviation or twisting of God's ordination for marriage. Iniquity may refer to improper worship of and service to Jehovah. Aaron and his sons were to bear the iniquity (*'avon*) of the sanctuary, which refers to the sins or deviations that the priests committed in God's work or service (18:1; Exo. 28:38). Committing the iniquity of the sanctuary could result in death, for example, Nadab and Abihu's offering strange fire (Num. 18:3; Lev. 10:1-2), and the iniquity of the sons of Eli, who stole from the offerings and defiled the serving women (1 Sam. 2:17; 3:14).

Associated with this is the verb *'avah*, which occurs seventeen times and is translated "commit iniquity, do wrong." It is translated into Greek as ἀδικέω ("commit injustice") eight times. For example, David confesses he has acted wickedly in numbering the people (2 Sam. 24:17). The children of Israel have perverted their way and have forgotten Jehovah their God (Jer. 3:21).

Another root that may be lexically related to *'wh* (sharing two of the same root consonants) is *'wl*. The noun forms *'wl*, occurring twenty-six times, and *'wlh*, occurring thirty-four times, are mostly translated ἀδικία ("injustice, unrighteousness"). For example, the children of Israel shall do no unrighteousness in judgment, by having any respect of persons (Lev. 19:15). God Himself is without injustice and does no wrong (Deut. 32:4; Zeph. 3:5); there is no iniquity with Him, nor respect of persons, nor the taking of bribes (2 Chron. 19:7; Psa. 92:15). He hates robbery with wrong (Isa. 61:8).

Unrighteousness is related to commerce, as seen in the trading of the king of Tyre, who is a figure of Lucifer, the anointed cherub, who was perfect in his ways from the day that he was created, until unrighteousness was found in him; by the abundance of his trading, his midst was filled with violence, and he sinned. By the multitude of his iniquities in the unrighteousness of his trading, he profaned his sanctuaries (Ezek. 28:12-18). God created all the physical, material things for us to enjoy freely (Gen. 2:16) and richly (1 Tim. 6:17). However, Satan has twisted and usurped physical, material things to be part of his world system, which places a price on everything and is designed to occupy us and take us away from God. This is unrighteous. Commerce is considered wickedness and unrighteousness.

Money, or mammon, makes trading convenient, but it is

unrighteous, being called the mammon of unrighteousness (ἀδικία, Luke 16:9, 11). *Mammon* is an Aramaic word meaning something you put your trust in (from the root *'mn* ("believe, trust")). While we are in this world, we need to be prudent stewards of this unrighteous mammon (vv. 9, 11), not serving it but God (v. 13). One day money will fail. "After the satanic world is over, mammon will be of no use in the kingdom of God" (Lee, Recovery Version, v. 9, note 3).

Another root, *'wh*, may be related to *'wh* lexically (sharing two of the same root consonants) and semantically (sometimes translated "iniquity"). Its most common form is the noun *'aven*, occurring about eighty times. *'Aven* has a number of meanings, such as "trouble" (translated into Greek μόχθος, κόπος "labor, trouble" seven times), "sorrow" (πόνος and κακός "pain, evil" thirteen times), "vanity" (μάταιος "vanity without purpose" four times and κενός "vanity, empty" one time) and, by extension, "idol" (1 Sam. 15:23; Isa. 41:29; 66:3), as well as "trouble stemming from iniquity" and, hence, "iniquity" or "wickedness." It is translated ἀνομία ("lawlessness") thirty-one times, ἀδικία ("unrighteousness") six times, and ἄτοπος ("something out of place, unusual, improper") four times. The sense of trouble stemming from iniquity occurs especially when it is parallel with its synonym *'amal* ("trouble, mischief"), e.g., the children of Israel conceive mischief (*'amal*) and bring forth iniquity (*'aven*) (59:4; cf. Job 15:35; Psa. 7:14). *'Aven* occurs twenty-three times in the expression *worker(s) of iniquity*, which is translated into Greek mostly as "workers of lawlessness" (ἀνομία, 59:2; 64:2; 92:7, 9) and once as "workers of unrighteousness" (ἀδικία, Psa. 28:3; cf. Luke 13:27). In the New Testament those prophesying, casting out demons, and doing works of power in His name whom the Lord did not know or acknowledge are called "workers of lawlessness" (Matt. 7:23). This expression may indicate iniquity in terms of the improper worship and service of Jehovah.

'Amal occurs sixty-five times and is translated "trouble, labor, toil," using μόχθος ("labor, trouble") twenty-four times, especially in Ecclesiastes, κόπος ("labor, trouble") fourteen times, πόνος ("pain, evil") fourteen times, κακός ("evil") one time, and ὀδύνη ("pain, grief, sorrow") four times. This word mostly indicates the consequences of sin, which will be dealt with in a following article.

The Root psh'

The root *psh'* signifies a "willful, knowledgeable violation of a norm or standard" (Cover 32). It has two main senses—"transgress, step over" or "rebel, revolt against" a mark or standard (1 Kings 12:19). It is perhaps the most serious of the three main words for *sin*, identifying the transgressor with God's enemy, Satan, the ultimate rebel against His authority (Isa. 14:13-14). *Psh'* occurs ninety-three times as a noun and forty-one times as a verb and is translated into the Greek roots ἀσέβ- ("ungodly") about

thirty-six times; ἄνομ- ("lawless") about thirty-two times; παρανομ- ("transgressor," lit., "alongside or against the law") three times; and ἀθετ- ("setting aside," lit., "not set, breach of faith, transgression"), ἁμαρτ- ("sin"), and ἀδικ- ("unrighteous") about twelve times each.

One of the first occurrences of the root *psh'* refers to the brothers of Joseph, who transgressed, or stepped over the line, by kidnapping their brother, selling him as a slave, and deceiving their father (Gen. 50:17). In another occurrence, Jeremiah complains of Jerusalem's transgressing, or rebelling, against God her Husband, who is trying to restore His apostate and treacherous wife, because she has committed fornication, following after many gods (Jer. 2:8, 29; 3:13-14). Her acts are not just a twisting of God's ordination ("iniquity," 2:22; 3:13) but an outright rebelling against and rejection of God in the marriage relationship. She has a harlot's forehead, refusing to be ashamed (v. 3). Israel also transgressed against God's law (Hosea 8:1) in parallel with *'br* ("to trespass against God's covenant").

The root *'br* ("pass over, cross over"), semantically related to the root *psh'*, is also used sometimes to indicate transgression in the sense of overstepping or crossing over a boundary or line. The boundaries or lines may be embodied in laws, statutes, commandments, or even a covenant. For example, "The earth is polluted under the weight of its inhabitants; / For they have transgressed [*'br*] laws, they have violated [*hlf*] statutes, / They have broken [*prr*] an eternal covenant" (Isa. 24:5). Transgression may be unintentional, but it is usually intentional, especially when there is a violation of a specific command, e.g., the Israelites trying to enter the land of Canaan after the spies had returned with their report (Num. 14:41), and Saul preserving the best spoil of the Amalekites (1 Sam. 15:24). To transgress the covenant is parallel with not listening to Jehovah's voice (2 Kings 18:12; Judg. 2:20). It frequently means to go and serve other gods and bow down to them in violation of the engagement covenant at Sinai (Josh. 23:16; Deut. 17:2-3). Achan's sin of stealing a garment devoted to destruction, silver, and gold and his being deceitful were both acting unfaithfully (*m'l*) and transgressing, or trespassing, the covenant (Josh. 7:1, 11, 15). The root *'br* is frequently translated by the Greek root παραβα- ("transgress, overstep"), which occurs in the New Testament sixteen times and is frequently associated with the law, which defines transgression, laying down boundaries that should not be crossed over, for "where there is no law, neither is there transgression" (Rom. 4:15).

Another root that captures the notion of unfaithfulness (as well as trespass) is *m'l*, which occurs about sixty-six times, mostly in later books. It has the sense of overstepping the boundaries of and rejecting God's ordination of one wife to one husband (Gen. 2:24; 2 Cor. 11:2; 1 Tim. 3:2). *M'l* is used for a wife going astray and being unfaithful to her

husband (Num. 5:12), or the Israelites marrying foreign wives, which was actually being unfaithful to God (Ezra 10:2; Neh. 13:27). The verb frequently has Jehovah as its object, i.e., acting unfaithfully against or being unfaithful to Jehovah as the Husband to His people (Lev. 6:2), and is associated with verbs such as *znh* ("be a harlot, commit fornication"), a frequent indictment by Jehovah of His people (1 Chron. 5:25; cf. Hosea 9:1; 4:12; Ezek. 6:9). The Midianites caused the children of Israel to act unfaithfully against Jehovah in the matter of Peor, committing fornication and worshiping idols (Num. 31:16). *M'l* is translated by a wide variety of Greek words, the most common being ἀφίστημι ("cause to move from a reference point, stand away from, be apostate") occurring about seven times; ἀθετέω four times; ἀ-συν-θετέω ("set aside, be faithless, not bound by covenant") seven times; παρ-οράω or ὑπερ-οράω ("overlook, disregard, neglect") two times each; and πλημμελέω ("make a mistake, be at fault, be out of tune or harmony") six times. The variety of words and their meanings do not quite capture the notion of being unfaithful in marriage, perhaps indicating that the translators were uncomfortable with the notion of being unfaithful in marriage as regards Jehovah.

Psh' in the sense of rebel against God occurs in parallel with roots *mrd* (Ezek. 2:3; 20:38) and *mrh* (Lam. 3:42; Psa. 5:10; Exo. 23:21) both meaning "rebel." *Mrd* ("rebel") occurs as a verb twenty-five times, and it is mostly translated into Greek by the root ἀφ-ίστημι ("to stand away from, apostasy") and refers to rebellion against a human king (2 Kings 18:7) and against God (Num. 14:9; Josh. 22:18; Neh. 9:26; Dan. 9:9). The root *mrh* frequently refers to rebellion, especially in the experience of the children of Israel in the wilderness, against God's word or commandment (Num. 20:24; 27:14; Deut. 1:26, 43; 1 Sam. 12:14; Psa. 107:11), against God (Deut. 9:7, 24; 31:27; Neh. 9:26; Psa. 78:40; Ezek. 20:8, 13; Hosea 13:16), against His Spirit (Psa. 106:33; of holiness, Isa. 63:10), against the eyes of His glory (3:8), and against His ordinances (Ezek. 5:6).

The roots *srr* ("be stubborn"), which occurs seventeen times, *srh*, and *swr* (both meaning "turn aside, apostatize, revolt, rebel"), which occur eight times and about three hundred times respectively, are also semantically related to *psh'* in the sense of rebelling. The children of Israel who wandered in the wilderness are called a "stubborn (*srr*) and rebellious (*mrh*) generation" (Psa. 78:8). They "acted arrogantly and would not listen to [God's] commandments; / And they sinned against [His] ordinances… / And they turned a stubborn [*srr*] shoulder / And stiffened their neck and would not listen" (Neh. 9:29). They had a stubborn and rebellious heart (Jer. 5:23). Jehovah stretched out His hands all day long to a rebellious people who did not answer when He called and did not listen when He spoke (Isa. 65:2, 12). It is mostly translated ἀπειθέω ("not persuaded, disobey, refuse to believe, disbelieve"). *Srh* is directed mostly against Jehovah, as in speaking revolt or rebellion (59:13; Jer. 28:16; 29:32) or apostasy against Him (Deut. 13:5). *Swr* is used in the sense of turning away from the right way, the way of obeying the commandments of Jehovah to worshiping other gods and idols (Judg. 2:17; Deut. 9:12). *Swr* is also used for turning away from following Jehovah (1 Sam. 12:20) or turning away from Jehovah Himself (Jer. 32:40).

Another root that indicates apostasy is *shwb* ("return"), especially in the noun *meshubah*, which occurs thirteen times, and is used to refer to Israel in her committing fornication and adultery in forsaking Jehovah (3:6, 8). While Israel is called apostate, another root, *bgd* ("treacherous, unfaithful"), is used to refer to both Israel and Judah. It is translated mostly ἀ-[συν]θετέω ("reject, refuse, do away with"). Judah acted treacherously, just as a woman acts treacherously by departing from her husband (v. 20; 5:11), profaning the sanctuary of Jehovah and marrying the daughter of a foreign god (Mal. 2:11).

The root *m's* means "reject" or "despise." It occurs over seventy times and is used a number of times to refer to Israel rejecting God (e.g., requesting meat instead of manna (Num. 11:20), requesting a king (1 Sam. 8:7; 10:19), and rejecting His word (15:26; Jer. 8:9), His law (Amos 2:4), ordinances (Ezek. 5:6), and statutes and covenant, following vain idols and following after the surrounding nations in their customs (2 Kings 17:15)).

There are two other common roots, *r''* ("evil") and *rsh'* ("wicked"), that indicate both the source and the consequences of sin. We sin because we are evil, but the more we sin, the more evil and wicked we become. As Knierim states,

> "The soul of the wicked [רָשָׁע] desires evil"…(Prov. 21:10a) presupposes that the desire…of the wicked is caused by what he/she is…He/she desires evil because he/she is evil. A person may become evil by acting in evil ways or may act in such ways because he/she is evil. (433-434)

The Root r''

The Hebrew root *r''* ("evil"), occurring about seven hundred sixty times, refers to something contrary to God's nature and relates to both the source and the expression of sin. The adjective *ra'* occurs two hundred twenty-six times and means "bad" (disagreeable, unpleasant, displeasing, of low value, sad, unhappy), or "evil" (unkind, ethically bad, wicked). The nouns *ra'* or *ra'ah* occur four hundred thirty-six times and mean "evil, distress, misery, injury," or "calamity." The denominative verb *ra'a'* occurs ninety-eight times and means "be evil, be bad, do wrong,"

but mostly it is used in the sense of causing injury to or doing evil to (hiphil). Perhaps the original notion of the root *r''* means "to be broken" (Job 34:24; Psa. 2:9; Isa. 8:9; 24:19), indicating something that is no longer able to fulfill the purpose for which it was created. The noun and adjective are mostly translated by the Greek words πονηρός and κακός. Πονηρός means "intrinsically evil, pernicious, causing pain and trouble, labor and hardship," whereas κακός means "evil," more in the sense of bad or worthless. In the New Testament Satan himself is called πονηρός, the evil one (Matt. 6:13; John 17:15; 1 John 3:12; 5:19).

Evil is presented as a source that leads to independence and separation from God, as indicated by the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gk. πονηρός, Gen. 2:9). The greatest evil is the forsaking of Jehovah and replacing Him with substitutes, as indicated in Jeremiah 2:13: "My people have committed two evils [*r'h*, Gk. πονηρός]: / They have forsaken Me, / The fountain of living waters, / To hew out for themselves cisterns, / Broken cisterns, / Which hold no water." As a result of unbelief, murmuring, and gathering together against Jehovah (Num. 14:27, 35), those who wandered in the wilderness became constituted an evil generation (Deut. 1:35; Num. 32:13). The advocating of apostasy from Jehovah their God to force them out of the way in which Jehovah their God has commanded them to walk is called "the evil," which needs to be utterly removed from their midst (Deut. 13:5); as is serving and bowing down to other gods (17:2-7). Other sins that are so considered include not listening to the priest or judge (v. 12), being a false witness against a brother (19:18-19), being a stubborn and rebellious son (21:18-21), fornication and adultery (22:21-22, 24), and kidnapping (24:7). Serving other gods, forsaking Jehovah, and not serving Jehovah are also considered doing what is evil in the sight of Jehovah (e.g., Judg. 10:6; 1 Kings 15:34).

The Root rsh'

The root *rsh'* ("wicked") occurs about three hundred sixty times: two hundred sixty-three times as an adjective, fifty times as an abstract noun, and fifty times as a verb. *Rsh'* refers to the constituting effect of sin. The wicked are characterized as practicing iniquity, committing all kinds of abominations, acting unfaithfully in their unfaithfulness, and sinning sins (Ezek. 18:24). Great wickedness characterizes humankind prior to the flood: "Every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Gen. 6:5). As a result, the earth became corrupted before God and filled with violence (v. 11). Transgression (or rebellion, *psh'*) speaks to the wicked within his heart (Psa. 36:1). This continual, unrelenting practice of sin and the unrepentant state constitutes sinners as wicked and evil. The root *rsh'* is most frequently translated ἀσεβής ("ungodly"), followed by ἁμαρτωλός ("sinful"), and then ἄνομος ("lawless").

The root ἀσέβ- ("ungodly, a lack of reverence toward God") occurs sixteen times in the New Testament. The flood came upon the world of the ungodly (2 Pet. 2:5), and Sodom and Gomorrah were reduced to ashes to be set as a negative example to those who intend to live an ungodly life (v. 6). Ungodly men pervert the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ (Jude 4).

The wicked are associated with iniquity twenty-five times and with sin twenty-seven times. The three words *wicked*, *iniquity*, and *sin* are associated as part of a confession: "We have sinned and committed iniquity and acted wickedly" (1 Kings 8:47; 2 Chron. 6:37; Psa. 106:6; Dan. 9:5).

A Brief History of Sin

The three main roots for *sin—ht', psh',* and *'wh*—occur in the same verse eight times in the Old Testament. Their collocation can be seen as encapsulating the whole experience of sin: God's attitude to sin (Exo. 34:7), God's Old Testament provision for sin (Lev. 16:21), our attitude toward sin (Job 13:23; Psa. 32:5), the multiplication of sin due to improper dealing with sin (Isa. 59:12), God's dealing with the multiplication of sin (Ezek. 21:24), God's promise to take care of the problem of sin (Jer. 33:8), and His final intervention in dealing with the problem of sin intrinsically (Dan. 9:24).

In this brief account of the history of sin, we focus on the development of sin in the history of the created race and the called race; we will look at God's way to deal with the problem of sin in another article. The history of the Old Testament contains a litany, a prolonged or tedious account, of sin, iniquity, and transgression against the mark ordained by God embodied in His eternal economy and in the law of the Ten Commandments. Sometimes more than one commandment is broken at the same time and listed together as an indictment of Israel.

In the first eleven chapters of Genesis we see the development of sin in the history of the created race. The first sin of eating the tree of the knowledge of good and evil misses the mark of God's economy, which is embodied in the tree of life. Cain also misses the mark of God's way of redemption, offering to God vegetables rather than animal sacrifices. Cain's anger at the rejection of his offering morphs into the murder of his brother and lying to God, with his iniquity, guilt, and punishment greater than he could bear (4:8-9, 13). The twisting of God's ordination for marriage occurs with the polygamous marriage of Cain's descendant (v. 19); the illicit union of fallen angels with the daughters of men (6:2-4), which was accompanied by great wickedness and evil imaginations (v. 5) and the violence of Noah's generation (vv. 11-13). Eventually, the created race is in total rebellion against God at

the tower of Babel, rejecting Jehovah and His name by men trying to make a name for themselves and worshipping many gods and idols (11:2-9; cf. Josh. 7:21; Dan. 1:2).

The same development of sin occurs in the account of the called race, the descendants of Abraham. As they dwell in the land of Canaan, its inhabitants (e.g., the Amorites) violate the governing and controlling principle of one husband for one wife and the preserving of human life, by committing iniquity in gross sexual immorality and child sacrifice (Gen. 15:16). So also do the people of Sodom and Gomorrah, who are wicked with heavy sins due to their iniquity (18:20; 19:15). The children of Israel were charged to not join to the inhabitants and their iniquities. However, eventually the iniquity of the daughter of God's people was considered even greater than the sin of Sodom (Lam. 4:6). Even David, who was a man according to God's heart, sinned by coveting the wife of Uriah, which lead to the breaking of the last five commandments: coveting was followed by adultery, lying, murder, and theft, the taking of Uriah's wife to himself (2 Sam. 11). The unrestrained lust of David and Solomon his son, who took many foreign wives, leading to idolatry (Neh. 13:26), became a seed of rottenness and led to the corruption of the whole monarchy and ultimately to the carrying away in captivity to Babylon.

Fornication is frequently associated with idolatry, which is spiritual fornication and a deviation or twisting in the worship of God. The iniquity of Peor occurred when Balaam caused the children of Israel to worship idols and commit fornication with the daughters of Moab and the Midianites (Num. 22:17; 25:1-2; 1 Cor. 10:6-8). The making and worship of the golden calf was a great sin before Jehovah (Exo. 32:30-32; Deut. 9:18), as was the calf itself (v. 21). Jeroboam's setting up calves of gold in Bethel and Dan became a sin (1 Kings 12:29-30; 13:34) with the kings of Israel walking "in the way of Jeroboam and in his sin by which he caused Israel to sin" (15:34; cf. v. 26; 16:19, 26; 2 Kings 3:3; 10:31; 13:2, 11; 14:24; 15:9, 18, 24, 28; 17:22).

Finally, in the litany of sins is the matter of transgression and rebellion against God and His ordination. Rebellion can be considered related to the commandments to honor one's parents and to keep the Sabbath, both being God's ordination.

Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses, God's deputy authority, and this resulted in Miriam's leprosy (Num. 12:10-11). Korah, Dathan, and Abiram also spoke against and rebelled against Moses, and their sins were swept away with them and their belongings when the ground opened and swallowed them up (16:26-33). When the people spoke against God and against Moses, God sent fiery serpents among them, and the people confessed that their speaking was a sin (21:7).

Psalm 106:7-46 traces the history of the children of Israel and can be summarized in a chiastic structure of rebellion, rebellion, idolatry, despising, idolatry and fornication, rebellion, idolatry, rebellion (Boda 439). Over fifty times the children of Israel rebelled against God and His word; they are called a rebellious house (Ezek. 2:6), the consummation of their sin against God. They also rejected Him and His ordinances, so He rejected them and sent them away into captivity.

Conclusion

When human beings fell, they missed the mark, strayed from the way, and fell short of the goal of God's economy, which is to become the same as God in life, nature, and expression as His counterpart, His wife. Sins, iniquities, and transgressions or rebellion miss the mark of God's life of righteousness embodied in the tree of life, distort and mix up God's ordination according to His holy nature, and reject God's authority, issuing in expressing God's enemy, Satan, rather than God's glory. Sin, iniquity, and rebellion also damage the relationship humans have with God and with one another and issue in evil and wickedness. This brings in other consequences to sin and presents a black background for God as the Redeemer and Savior to come as the cure for the problem of sin as well as the way to bring humanity back to the goal of God's economy.

by Roger Good

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