

IB Extended Essay

Sin in Christianity

Research Question: How does the Idea of Sin change between the Old and New Testaments and

What is the Significance?

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Abstract

Sin changes between the Old and New Testaments based on the significance and depth of the wording. The use of Hebrew in the Old Testament promotes a softer usage and understanding of sin as a whole and does not imply that sin is unforgivable by God. The words used in the Old Testament are similar to the severity of the word bend while the words used in the New Testament are similar to the severity of the word break. The words in the New Testament hold the implied idea that sin is unforgivable and puts an emphasis on the idea that it is humankind's ingrained failure and a tendency towards pride over God is the reason behind many sins. The significance in the different languages used is that the New Testament is able to put a heavier weight on sin and may be able to prevent avid Christians from sinning. It may help more people lead better lives and make better choices but there will always be people who do bad things out of deliberate actions or ignorance toward the law.

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Introduction

Before Christianity there was Judaism and Judaism followed a piece of scripture called the Hebrew Bible, more commonly known as the Torah. Christians began to interpret any passage that included the reference to the coming of a future king as a reference to Christ. Christians first believed in Jesus and then attempted to find his life in scripture¹.

Today, Christianity is widely followed by people all over the world who want to learn more about Jesus's life and be part of his journey while being on a spiritual journey of their own. In this journey that religious people take, there are many aspects of life that are called into question, one of these questions that each religion attempts to a little bit differently is "what is good and bad?" and another is "how do we deal with it?". Christianity developed its idea of sin over time to help intensify the bad feeling that people were to get if they have sinned.

The terminology for sin has changed from the Old Testament to the New Testament to intensify the need to understand what is good and what is bad. The Old Testament does not have very explicit ideas and "spirituality ending"² doom that the New Testament words seem to imply. The Old Testament seemed to view sin as a mistake more than anything else, as opposed to the New Testament that seems to view sin as a life altering act that will in fact seal your fate forever.

The significance of sin has grown stronger with the more in depth words being developed for sin. The Old Testament lacks the depth and weight that the New Testament places on sin.

¹ "From Hebrew Bible to Christian Bible: Jews, Christians and the Word of God." PBS. April 1998. Accessed January 04, 2017.
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/first/scriptures.html>.

² Venning, Ralph. *The sinfulness of sin*. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1993.

This may be because in the Old Testament, sin always came second to the idea of God while in the New Testament, sin in itself is an entirely separate phenomena³. There are two distinct ideas of sin, the first one being failure to correspond with an objective standard and the other being an attitude that a person possesses in reference to another person who is superior. Both of these ideas are heavily talked about in the New Testament but the Old Testament talks about them very briefly. These ideas have been developed to have harsher and harsher consequences, even though each sin has the ultimate consequence of death as clearly stated in both the Old and New Testaments.

³ Venning, Ralph. *The sinfulness of sin*. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1993.

What is Sin?

Sin is the spoken, written, thought, or act of doing something that would be considered bad in the eyes of God. The ultimate punishment for all sins will inevitably be death. But the Old and New Testaments speak about death in different ways. The Old Testament puts an emphasis on other punishments that they may be subject to like the spoiled relationship with nature or the spoiled relationship with God⁴. But, the Old Testament does mention death as the very end for sin, though it does not put as much emphasis on it as the New Testament does⁵. The New Testament talks about death in a very peculiar way because it talks of it as a natural thing that occurs to all moral beings and it also speaks of death as a very unnatural thing⁶. The natural death refers to our fleshly existence upon this earth but the unnatural death refers to the spiritual death that happens when someone commits a sin⁷. All of humankind is taught to fear death and sees death as an enemy.

The Original Sin is a very big piece of the pie that shaped the idea of sin in Christianity. The Original Sin is when Adam eats an apple off of the Tree of Knowledge even though God specifically said not to. Adam was convinced by a serpent who, unknowingly to Adam, was really Satan. Satan convinced one of God's prized possessions to disobey him. Adam then had to be punished for his sin. This is the first mention of sin in the Bible and it is the foundation on which the rest of the idea of sin is built.

⁴ Robinson, Gnana. *A Terminological Study of the Idea of Sin in the Old Testament*.

⁵ Higon, Tony. *An Outline of the Old Testament*. Report. 1-137.

⁶ Morris, Leon. *The wages of sin: an examination of the New Testament teaching on death*. London: Tyndale Press, 1954.

All of humankind will be subject to the ability of sin which will make them mortal. This morality proves that humanity falls short of God's glory. Of all the prophets who mention sin always put the doctrine of God first while sin comes second⁸. An example of this is seen in Amos⁹, the idea of sin is generally unrighteousness or injustice because he sees God as a supreme righteous ruler. Hosea¹⁰ sees sin differently because his view of God is of unchanging love and sin to him is a change of heart from God to something else. These thoughts about sin give the idea that sin is up to the eye of the beholder but that is later on rejected because there are very specific sins that any person must not commit.

There are seven deadly sins which are explicitly mentioned¹¹. Those being sloth, gluttony, lust, greed, pride, envy, and wrath. People are forbidden to take part in these sins although they are able to be cured over time by doing the opposite action. Now as all of these are clearly stated sins, it is up to the believer to determine how significant they are and whether or not to take them completely seriously.

⁸ Davidson, A. B., and S. D. F. Salmond. *The theology of the Old Testament*. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1904.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Wheeler, K. "Seven Deadly Sins: A Guide ." Accessed January 4, 2017.
https://web.cn.edu/kwheeler/documents/Seven_Deadly_Sins.pdf.

Old Testament Words for Sin

The Old Testament uses Hebrew words because it was adapted from The Hebrew Bible. There are very common words and roots used to convey the idea of sin in different levels of severity and to allow the reader to understand the complexity of the idea of sin.

Roots that indicate intentional sin carry a heavy weight because they do not express that the sinner preformed these deeds out of ignorance but rather deliberately disregarded the laws¹². The root PŠ¹³ means to rebel and transgress in a spoken manner, this means that someone stood up and promoted breaking the law by speaking about it. This root refers to a specific action but my also mean the willful breaking away of trustworthiness and peace¹⁴. It also symbolizes the guilt that is felt after a person sins. Another root used very commonly is MRH¹⁵. This root forms a word, marah. Marah is a verb that means to be rebellious¹⁶. Rebellion is very frowned upon because people are not supposed to rebel against God or his word. To do so is giving in to the pride all humans hold and committing a sin by thinking they are better than God, their word is better than God's, and even that they should be God¹⁷.

Unintentional sins also carry some very interesting roots. The most common one being T'H¹⁸, which is defined as to wander or stray, both physically and ethically. The going astray is not intentional but rather one through stupidity and ignorance when people posses when they don't fully understand the consequences of their actions. The lack of knowledge or

¹² Robinson, Gnana. *A Terminoloigcal Study of the Idea of Sin in the Old Testament*.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

understanding is a serious sin within itself. The other words are SGH and SGG¹⁹, which are the same and represent the sin of inadvertence or sins that are committed through ignorance. These roots are more broad than T'H, and rather than putting an emphasis on the sinners wrongness, it puts an emphasis on all of mankind's fatal incapacity.

The old testament has specific roots that describe social or ethical sins such as violence or trouble. The most common of them being RŠ²⁰. This means to be guilty or wicked. The word is used for all of those who are thought to be hostile towards God and his will. Another root is 'WN²¹ which refers to trouble or sorrow. It is used to describe the trouble and sorrow caused by wicked men. It is also used to describe the evils of witchcraft and spells along with deceit and lying.

The Old Testament used Hebrew words to describe sin rather than Greek like the New Testament²². These words are 'avah, 'aval, 'avar, ra', ma'al, pasha, and chatha²³. 'avah is described as being bent or crooked, both metaphorically and physically²⁴. 'aval is defined as iniquity because it is translated to mean the lack of integrity²⁵. 'avar means to cross over or transgress which is symbolic of crossing someone or disobeying the guidelines in which something was set²⁶. Ra' means the rule of evil²⁷. Ma'al is the breach of trust, mostly used to

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Grenz, Stanley J. *Theology for the community of God*. Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1994.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

refer to the broken trust between the sinner and God²⁸. Pasha means to revolt or to refuse subjection to a greater authority²⁹. This word is quite common in the Bible but the word Chatha is the most commonly used. Chatha means to miss the right point³⁰. It refers to missing the right point both deliberately and ignorantly, referring mostly to specific actions, but it does rarely refer to a state of being or existence.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

New Testament Words for Sin

The New Testament uses Greek rather than Hebrew. This causes a lack of common roots but does not cut down on the severity of the words used. Many of these words are very similar to those used in the Old Testament, but they do carry a different level of severity. These words are much stronger in their interpretation and in their definitions.

Parabis means the transgression of a boundary and can be simplified into the breaking of a boundary³¹. Parakoe is defined as disobedience to a voice, who in a religious sense would mean God³². The sin would be not listening to or disregarding God's word. Paraptoma is the metaphorical idea of falling where one should have stood because they simply lacked the courage or the resources³³. This word is used when not enough pride is used in a hard situation even though pride does happen to be one of the seven deadly sins. Agnoema is defined as the non-observance of a law³⁴. This law could be either a common law or one of God's laws. Plemmeleia is seen as a discord in the harmonies of God's universe, meaning that there is a disruption in the normal way of doing things³⁵. That there is a beast loose among the bunnies, who is causing chaos and mayhem. A very weighted term is hubris. Hubris describes the pride which makes man defy god³⁶. This is the kind of pride that is not looked fondly upon and is very subject to punishment and eternal damnation. The most widely used term for sin in the New Testament is hamartia. Hamartia means to miss the mark and parallels the Hebrew word

³¹ Grenz, Stanley J. *Theology for the community of God*. Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1994.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

Chatha³⁷. Hamartia refers to sin as a specific act and also gives insight to the defective internal dimension of mankind³⁸. It puts a lot of emphasis on the idea that all people fall short of God's glory and even if you are full of pride, you are still not and will never be God. Hamartia may also refer to sin as an element or principle within humans³⁹.

This idea of sin is developed a lot more than the idea that is in the Old Testament. There are words that are more narrow in focus and are not very broad at all. This may be because man has had time to figure out the sins that are not explicitly written down in the Bible. People now know the consequences of these sins and have begun to act accordingly. Sin is very easy to be interpreted, as seen with the prophets in the Old Testament. Sin may vary depending on the action and the place of the world you are in, but the New Testament word choice shows that everyone is the same the punishment is universal.

The New Testament spoke of death being not only physical but you may also experience spiritual death when you sin⁴⁰. This spiritual death is not universal despite the physical death being inevitable.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ *New Testament Greek Words for Sin*. Report. Bible College . 1-6.

⁴⁰ Leon Morris, *The Wages of Sin: An Examination of The New Testament Teaching On Death*. London: The Tyndale Press, 1955. Pbk. pp.28

Old Testament vs New Testament on Sin

A general meaning of sin that has been adapted from both testaments, is that sin can be defined as failure⁴¹. Failure, on its own, is a very negative term and refers to falling short of a goal. Sin and its relation to failure could be interpreted as a way to explain how human kind always gravitates toward sins that result in bad consequences rather than the good deeds that result in positive consequences. The New Testament has a greater emphasis on sin and it is more recognized. The Old Testament has a lesser, unsure definition of sin that isn't totally based off of human kind's tendency to be prideful and the disappointing failure that sin is depicted as in the New Testament. Both testaments consider that pride may be the root of sin. With pride being at the root of sin, there is an important truth that both of the testaments hint at. That truth is "our human unwillingness to acknowledge God's sovereignty, which constitutes a fundamental rebellion against divine rule, lies at the root of many sinful actions."⁴² This means that because people do not acknowledge the absolute rule that God has in Christianity, they are more likely to claim that is why they have sinned and failed to be of good intentions.

The Old Testament has a very mellow way of looking at sin and sees that sin may be forgivable whereas the New Testament puts a heavier weight on sin and looks at it more harshly. Both of the Testaments view sin as failure or missing the mark/right point of something. Both documents show that everything good and evil is done by us, not born with us. The texts say that

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Bettenson, Henry, and Chris Maunder. *Documents of the Christian church*. 3rd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.

each man is capable to be sin free and realizes that some men will not be. They have the idea that babies are much like Adam before he sinned, innocent and free of judgement from God.

The idea of the protection on innocence is very prevalent because people want to be seen as perfect and untouched by evil, but that evil is most likely unavoidable. Both the Old and New Testaments assert that all of human kind are sinners and that sinning is inevitable. Although human kind was created by God to do good things, we readily grow self-centered and apathetic. Despite God's good intentions, human kind will always fall short of his glory because of our readiness to sin, including attempting to become God himself or convince others that he has more power than God. Human kind has not been able to overcome this ability to sin because they are too prideful. Over time, the concept of sin in Christianity has developed from a mere idea, but rather into a known idea that is taken very seriously because sin does happen to be a very bad thing to do, even though all of human kind is hard wired to sin.

The Old and New Testament differ in terms of the emphasis of sin but tend to follow the same basic idea of the word. The basic idea that both testaments convey is the idea that sin is "viewed fundamentally as failure"⁴³. It is viewed as "missing the mark"⁴⁴ or falling short of God's glory⁴⁵. Both testaments also agree on the idea that "sinful acts arise from within us, from the center of our existence. Hence, sin dwells in our "hearts" or in our "flesh"⁴⁶. When translated into Greek and Hebrew, the two languages the Bible relies on to term sin, "flesh" does not refer to the skin of a body, but rather it is a term that is used to describe "the whole human person in

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

their moral weakness.”⁴⁷ It gives a name to the phenomena that human kind tends to rebel against God in all acts of life. Human predicament, also known as sin, is a result from a “corrupt heart”⁴⁸. This means that sin is lodged within a human’s personal being. The mind and the heart are typically symbols that work together and it is no different in the essence of religion, “He speaks of sin as causing our foolish hearts to be “darkened” (Rom. 1:21)⁴⁹ and our minds to be “corrupt” (1 Tim. 6:5)”⁵⁰. The concept of sin is significant because it is described as something that lays in human kind’s core being. As sin will not only affect the sinner but also the people around them, the sinner will think about their actions and justify their sins as they ask for their forgiveness from God, and because human kind is hard wired to sin, God will forgive them.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ *The Holy Bible containing the Old Testament and the New Testament*. Cambridge: Printed by John Field, 1663.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

The Significance

The significance of sin is that it shows how much power that God possess over mankind. Both of these texts see that pride may be the root of sin as well as the idea that mankind is better than God. People fail to acknowledge that God has absolute rule , they are more likely to claim that is why they have sinned and failed to be of good intentions. If people know what it takes to sin, they will begin to blame sinning on other people and lack of knowledge about sin⁵¹. Some people don't even know when they are sinning but claim to be pure and innocent. That innocence is something to be sought out by mankind simply because it is pure in the eyes of God⁵². To be innocent is to be sin free and that is desired by many people of the Christian faith. People need to be pushed in the direction of the New Testament because of its emphasis on purity and innocence and its heavy weight upon sin.

Sin is significant because it is the determining factor about whether or not someone is subject to eternal damnation. People who disregard God's will and only think of themselves will never experience the afterlife to its fullest, but those who repent and commit as little sins as possible will be able to experience that. Sin is a scary idea to people because it will indicate what happens to them in the afterlife, which is already so uncertain. Christians have really deep concerns for sin and the New Testament has intensified their concerns due to the increased weight upon their shoulders to stay innocent and pure.

⁵¹ Venning, Ralph. *The sinfulness of sin*. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1993.

⁵² Ibid.

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