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[*See also* Blessings and Curses; Death and Dying; Honor and Shame; Reward and Retribution; *and* Sin.]

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Graham H. Twelftree

SIN

This article provides an overview of the Bible's teaching on sin by taking a canonical-thematic approach, that is, a focus on the theme of sin as it occurs in the different canonical sections of the Bible in its final form. As an overview, it concentrates on major themes and refers to the secondary literature for more detailed discussion.

The Story of Sin: A Biblical Overview. "Sin 'offends God not only because it bereaves or assaults God directly, as in impiety or blasphemy, but also because it bereaves and assaults what God has made'" (Plantinga, 1995, p. 16). This well captures the biblical understanding of what sin is: anything contrary to God and his purpose for this world. And since that purpose is for humanity to reflect his character and enjoy perfect harmony with God, other people, and creation, sin is consistently described as ruining and destroying these very things: people become a broken and marred image of their Creator, break fellowship with God and rebel against him, commit great treachery and harm against one another, and rule over the creation as a despot instead of as a benevolent king. Sin defaces the sinner and acts as a relational poison with fatal consequences.

This becomes clear when sin is set in the context of the entire Bible. The bookends of the Bible describe a world without sin. In Genesis 1–2, God creates a world of perfect order that he deems "very good" (1:31). It includes man and woman, whom he makes in his image to reflect his good and benevolent rule over all he has made (1:26–27). His posture toward them is one of blessing, providing them with rich companionship in each other (2:18–25), placing them in the luxuriant garden of Eden (2:4–17), promising them fruitfulness of womb and a special role in the creation (1:28–30), and walking with them as their God

(3:8; cf. Lev 26:12). The picture is one in which humanity enjoys perfect harmony with God, one another, and the creation.

The Bible's last two chapters paint the same picture for those who follow Jesus (Rev 21–22). As in Eden, the new heavens and earth have a river and tree of life (Rev 22:1–2; cf. Gen 2:9, 10) and humanity once again walks in perfect fellowship with God (Rev 21:3, 7; 22:3–4), serves him faithfully and extends the rule of God and of the Lamb over all of creation (Rev 22:3–5; cf. 20:4), and experiences a world in which death, mourning, crying, and pain are no more (21:4; cf. 22:3). It is a restoration to Eden where humanity once more enjoys perfect harmony with God, one another, and the creation.

What happens in between these bookends is the story of humanity's sin and God's response to it. Sin enters the story at Genesis 3 and casts a shadow of darkness and death over the entire story until Revelation 21. God's response is immediate. As soon as humanity rebels (Gen 3:6–7), God brings his justice to bear against sin (3:14–19) but also shows mercy to the sinful (3:21), makes clear he will one day defeat sin fully and finally through humanity's seed (3:15), and reissues his original creational commands to a succeeding generation (9:1–3; cf. 2:28–30).

God follows this pattern consistently. In the Old Testament, he not only brings his justice to bear against sin but also extends mercy and forgiveness to the penitent (Exod 34:6–7; Ps 32:2–5). What is more, he repeatedly calls a person, or group of people, to establish his Kingdom in the world, a kingdom in which sin is banished and the seeds of righteousness are sown, watered, and cultivated in order that humanity can again feast on Eden's fruit (Gen 17:1–8; Exod 19:4–6; Lev 26:3–13; 2 Sam 7:8–29).

In the New Testament, Jesus becomes God's ultimate answer to humanity's sin. By sending Jesus to be a sacrifice for sin, God demonstrates his love for sinful humanity and his desire for them to be reconciled to him (Rom 5:8). By sending Jesus to be king of his Kingdom (Luke 1:32–33), he gives him the authority to remove and banish sin (Matt 9:2–8) and to establish a community that puts God's good and just Kingdom on full display (Matt 5:16; Eph 5:8–10; Titus 2:14; 1 Pet 2:9–12) and that seeks to repatriate the rest of humanity to it (Matt 28:18–20). It is this king who will come again to banish sin and all its effects and return his servants to an Eden in which sin will never be named again (Rev 21–22).

With this overview in place, we may now turn to see how individual sections of the Bible contribute to it.

Sin in the Old Testament. We begin with a general consideration of the Old Testament's vocabulary and metaphors for sin and then consider how different sections of the Old Testament speak about it.

Vocabulary and metaphors. The Old Testament has at least 10 different terms for sin (see Luc, 1997, pp. 87–89). If phrases are also included, the list climbs to more than 50 (Swanson, 1997, §§88.289–88.318, cited in Boda, 2009, p. 6n16). This rich vocabulary indicates not only that sin is "a central theme of [Old Testament] theology" (Cover, 1992, p. 31) but also that it is a complex reality that manifests itself in a myriad of ways.

The most commonly occurring terms are words built on the Hebrew roots *ḥṭ'* ("to miss [a mark]"), *'wh* ("to bend, twist, turn aside"), and *pš'* ("to break with, rebel"), though more important than their root is the way these words were used in specific contexts (for which, see Knierim, 1997a–c). Most broadly speaking, however, these terms refer to some sort of offense or wrong, and over the course of the Bible, they are used to refer to wrongs committed solely against God (*ḥṭ'*: 1 Kgs 16:13; *'wh*: Jer 11:10; *pš'*: Ezek 2:3) as well as to wrongs against other humans (*ḥṭ'*: Num 12:11; *'wh*: Isa 59:3; *pš'*: 1 Sam 25:28). Significantly, they occur together in some contexts to describe sin in its totality, as happens most famously when the Lord declares that he "forgives iniquity [root *'wh*], transgression [root *pš'*] and sin [root *ḥṭ'*]" (Exod 34:7, NASV; Knierim, 1997b, p. 410). God's forgiveness to those who repent is as multifaceted as the sins they commit (Pss 32:5; 103:3; 130:4; cf. 1 John 1:9).

Alongside of specific terms, the Old Testament frequently uses metaphors to describe sin. Certain metaphors focus on the ways in which sin is against God: it is to rebel against him (Ezek 2:3), to forsake and despise him (Isa 1:4), and to break covenant faith with him (Deut 31:16). Idolatry in particular is described as forsaking the Lord (Judg 10:10) and as an act of spiritual prostitution and adultery (Lev 17:7; Hos 4:11–12;

Ezek 16:15–22). Sin is not first and foremost the breaking of a rule but the breaking of a relationship, an act of treachery against one's king and Creator.

Other metaphors focus on what sin does to those who commit it: it defiles both them (Ps 51.2; Ezek 14:11; 37:23) and the land on which they commit it (Lev 18:24–27; Isa 24:5), ensnares and rules over them (Ps 119:133; Prov 5:22), causes them to stumble (Ezek 7:19), makes a separation between them and God (Isa 59:2), and causes them to rot (Ezek 24:23). Sin is utterly self-destructive.

The Old Testament also uses a large number of metaphors to describe the ways in which God rescues the penitent from their sin: he cleanses it (Ps 51:2; Isa 4:4), removes it from them as far as the east is from the west (Ps 103:12), blots it out (Isa 44:22), treads it under foot and casts it into the heart of the sea (Mic 7:19), covers it (Ps 32:1), and remembers it no more (Jer 31:34). Ultimately, God himself must rescue humanity from sin's penalty and power.

Torah (Genesis—Deuteronomy). Sin is a major theme in the Bible's opening books. They first introduce us to sin (Genesis) and then devote a great deal of time to its description and how it should be addressed (esp. Leviticus and Numbers).

Genesis. Sin slithers its way into the biblical story in Genesis 3. It is characterized by disobedience to God's commands (3:11) and results in horrific consequences for humanity, including punishment from God (3:16–19) and a threefold alienation: from God (3:8–10), from one another (3:7, 12, 16), and from the creation (3:17–18; cf. Cover, 1992, p. 36). It is a complete reversal of God's intention for humanity as set out in Genesis 1–2, a point underscored by other tragic reversals in the opening chapters.

Genesis 1–2	*Genesis 3*
Living in a fruitful garden (2:15)	Cast out of the garden (3:23–24)
Naked and no shame (2:25)	Naked and ashamed (3:7)
Multiplying (1:28)	Pain in childbirth (3:16)
Keeping a fruitful garden (2:15)	Working the thorn-infested ground (3:17–19)
Taken out of the ground and given life (2:7)	Dying and returning to the ground (3:19)

Genesis 3 also tells us that en evil personality is at work in the world that is opposed to God (3:4–5) and seeks to ruin humanity and creation by means of sin (cf. 3:1–5 with 3:6–19; see Collins, 2006, pp. 170–172). Many of the New Testament authors will return to this theme (as will Job in a unique way; Job 1–2). But Genesis 3 makes equally that clear God will one day vanquish this evil one through the seed of the woman (3:15) and will in the meantime continue to care for sinful humanity (3:21; cf. Palmer, 2000, p. 416). God's response of mercy in the face of humanity's sin will be an ongoing theme in the rest of the biblical story.

Once sin enters the world, it spreads like a lethal virus to succeeding generations: Cain murders his brother (4:7), Lamech's vengeance knows no bounds in its violence (4:23), and humanity as a whole has an inclination of the heart that leans to evil all the time (6:5) and pollutes the earth so badly that God must wash it in a cosmic act of judgment (7:6–24). As Clines aptly notes, "The flood is only the final stage in a process of cosmic disintegration that began in Eden" (1978, p. 75).

But once more, sin will not have the last word. The Lord reissues the creation mandate to Noah (9:1–3) and affirms that humanity is still in God's image (9:6). And even when humanity plunges again headlong into sin (11:1–9), the Lord's response is not only to judge (11:8–9) but also to raise up a faithful line (11:20–32), through whom "the seed" of the woman can bring about blessing to the earth (12:3). No matter how sinful humanity becomes, God's ultimate plan for humanity in Eden is not thwarted because God responds in grace to humanity's sin (see further Clines, 1978, pp. 76–79).

Exodus to Numbers. These books discuss sin much more specifically for three reasons: (1) the tabernacle (the Israelites' worship center) is now up and running and with it a place to make sacrifice for sin; (2) the Lord now dwells in their midst (Exod 40), and this underscores the necessity of dealing properly with sin; and (3) the Israelites sin greatly during this time.

Broadly speaking, these books identify three categories of sin and how to deal properly with them (Sklar, 2012). For each category, repentance and atonement are necessary. "Repentance is the means by which sinners turn from their rebellion and realign

themselves with the mission the Lord has given them, and atonement is the means by which sin and impurity are removed, so that fellowship with the Lord can continue and his people can engage fully in his purposes for them" (Sklar, 2014, p. 55).

Category of sin	*Example*	*How to atone*
Unintentional sin (Lev 4:2, 13; 5:14; Num 15:22; etc.)	Perhaps not realizing you were ritually impure and failing to deal with it properly	Repentance, confession, sacrifice (Lev 5:5, 10; Num 15:25)
Intentional but not (necessarily) apostate sin (Lev 5:1; 6:1–7)	Failing to testify about a crime (Lev 5:1)	Repentance, confession, sacrifice (Lev 5:5–6; 6:6–7)
Apostate sin (Num 15:30)	Refusing to enter the Promised Land (Num 14:1–35)	Sacrificial atonement not possible (cf. Num 15:22–28 with 15:30–31), but a mediator could intercede on the repentant sinner's behalf (Num 14:13–20)

These books also note that sin can defile the sinner (Lev 16:30) as well as the land (Lev 18:25–29; Num 35:33; cf. Ezek 36:17–18). As in Genesis 3, humanity's sin causes the world itself to suffer.

Two specific sins are especially significant in these books: (1) the Israelites' idolatry with the golden calf (Exod 32), by which they forsook the Lord (32:7–10) and broke their covenant with him (cf. 32:19b), and (2) their refusal to obey the Lord's command to enter the Promised Land (Num 14:1–4), by which they rejected his covenant promises and thus the Lord himself (14:8–12). Sin often manifests itself as a betrayal of covenant faithfulness and, when done against the Lord, as treason against the covenant king.

Deuteronomy. As the Pentateuch draws to a close, the covenant people are again confronted with the choice of Eden: "See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction" (Deut 30:15). Sadly, the Lord himself states, they will soon choose the latter (31:14–22); and the prophetical books will bear this out. But he is equally clear this is not the choice they have to make (30:11, 14). Those who are in covenant relationship with God can choose to follow him and not be devoured by the sin that crouches at their door (cf. Gen 4:7).

Former Prophets (Joshua—Kings). These books tell the Israelites' story from their entry into the Promised Land (Josh 3) to their exile from it as a result of their sin (2 Kgs 17; 25). Sin is a major theme: "From the beginning Israel forgets, rebels, hustles, craves, tests, envies, forsakes, despises, disbelieves, grumbles, disobeys, abandons, angers, provokes, compromises, nauseates (Ps 106)" (Goldingay, 2006, p. 254).

By far the most common sin mentioned is idolatry. It is the very last thing Joshua warns them about (Josh 24:14–27) and yet the very thing they rush into just two chapters later (Judg 2:11–13). It recedes into the background during David's reign (1 Sam 16—2 Sam 24) but surges forth again under his son, Solomon (1 Kgs 11:1–8, 31–33). And despite brief periods where some kings encourage the Israelites to faithfulness (2 Kgs 18:1–6; 23:1–25), their idolatrous tendencies are encouraged by most kings, especially Jeroboam (1 Kgs 12:25–33) and Manasseh (2 Kgs 21:1–9). Significantly, idolatry is given as the prime reason the Israelites were exiled (2 Kgs 17:7–18; 21:10–15; 23:26–27), and the cycle of Eden continues: rebels are again banished from the Promised Land.

These books also explain that the Lord responds to the Israelites' idolatry, and to sin in general, in various ways (see Boda, 2009, pp. 186–188). These include providing faithful leadership (Josh 24:14–28; Judg 2:11–19; 1 Sam 7:1–4), providing Israel his Word (Josh 1:7–9; 2 Kgs 17:13; 22:1–23:25), and bringing judgment and discipline to bear (Judg 2:11–15; 1 Sam 3:11–14; 15:24–29; 2 Kgs 17:7–18). In each case, the Israelites are to respond with repentance, and this underscores a key biblical theme: the Lord constantly calls his sinful people to return to him; even with judgment, his ultimate goal is not destruction but restoration (Boda, 2009, p. 189; see Judg 10:10–16; 1 Sam 7:2–17; 12:8–11; 1 Kgs 8:33–36, 46–53).

Latter Prophets (Isaiah—Ezekiel, the 12 Minor Prophets). While these prophets also focus on idolatry, in which the sinner deals faithlessly with God (Isa 2:8; Ezek 5:11; Mic 1:7; Hos 8:4), they also list dozens of other sins, in many of which the sinner deals faithlessly with people. A majority of these sins fall into one of three general categories: violence, sexual immorality, and oppressing others (for a representative sample, see Ezek 18:10–13; 22:1–12). Within this third category, it is significant to note how often the prophets rebuke those who sin against others for the sake of financial gain, especially those weaker than themselves (Isa 3:14–15; Amos 5:11–12; 8:4–6; Mic 7:3; cf. 1 Tim 6:10). The gross injustice that results from human greed is not simply a modern phenomenon.

The prophets' solution is not sacrifice. The people's sins had reached a level of rank apostasy, for which there was no sacrifice (see "Exodus to Numbers"), and their religious rites were offensive because they were not accompanied by covenant faithfulness (Isa 1:11–15; 58:1–5; Jer 7:4–11). Instead, the Israelites were to repent by turning from evil and practicing good (Isa 55:7; Amos 5:14–15; Mal 3:6–12) and to put their hope in the Lord's compassion and love (Jer 31:3, 20; Hos 11:1–11; Mic 7:18–20). The Lord would bring calamity to bear against them to punish their sin (Isa 10:1–3; Jer 5:9–11) but also to discipline, correct, refine, and restore them (Hos 3:3–5; Jer 5:3; Mal 3:2–4; Hos 6:1–3; Goldingay, 2006, pp. 335–342). He also promises to give them a new heart so they could walk faithfully with him (Isa 44:1–5; Jer 24:1–7; 31:33–34; Ezek 36:26–28) and speaks of a coming servant who would bear on himself the people's sin so that they might be healed (Isa 53:4–5, 8; cf. Lev 16:21–22). These last observations in particular emphasize another biblical theme: while sinners must repent of their sin, the Lord himself must ultimately deal with their sin and enable them to live righteously.

Writings. This section may be divided between those books that are highly poetic in nature (Psalms, Proverbs, Job) and those which are related to Israel's later history (Lamentations, Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, Chronicles).

Psalms, Proverbs, Job. These books often contrast the "wicked" (or "sinner") and the "righteous." The wicked are those who are characterized by committing great evil, not only against God but especially against others (Pss 10:3–11; 14:1–7; Prov 20:19; 21:10; see also Cover, 1992, p. 37). By way of contrast, the righteous are characterized by repenting of their sin (Ps 32:3–6), walking in the Lord's ways (1:1–6), and thus acting justly toward others (37:21; Job 29:11–17; Prov 29:7).

Generally speaking, the wicked will face God's judgment in this life and the righteous will experience his blessing (Pss 1; 11:4–7; 34:15–22; 37; 64; 92:5–15). Theologians call this the "retributive principle"; it emphasizes, among other things, that wickedness is to be avoided at all costs and righteousness pursued with all one's strength.

Proverbs usually speaks from the perspective of this principle. It frequently speaks of wisdom and righteousness (1:3, 7; 2:1–20) as well as folly and wickedness (4:14; 19:3; 28:26). The former lead to life; the latter, to death (3:33; 10:16, 27) (though Proverbs is aware of exceptions; 20:22; 21:6 [cf. Boda, 2009, p. 374]).

Many of the psalms also speak from the perspective of this principle, for example, the frequent calls for the Lord to judge the wicked and to vindicate the righteous (10:1–18; 17:1–15; 22:1–21; 74:1–23). But these very calls make clear that the righteous often suffer and the wicked often prosper, meaning that the retributive principle is just that: a principle, not a law.

The book of Job emphasizes this. His friends conclude his suffering is due to his sin (11:13–20; 22:4–11), but the opening chapters make clear that Job is upright (1:1, 5, 8; 2:3) and that his suffering is due to other factors (Job 1–2). His friends were right to think that suffering can be connected to sin but wrong to think the connection is automatic (see Kidner, 1985, p. 61). Those who suffer are sometimes the most upright, a fact meant to encourage the righteous sufferer and to warn others against easy and automatic judgments that link a person's suffering to his or her sin.

Books relating to Israel's later history (Lamentations, Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, Chronicles). While suffering is not an automatic sign of sin, it certainly can be, and many of the remaining books in the writings—which

come after the apostate Israelites have been exiled from their land—explain how sinners are to respond to the Lord's judgment. Lamentations emphasizes not only that Jerusalem's destruction is the Lord's judgment for the Israelites' sin (1:5, 8–9, 12–15, 17–18; 2:1–10, 17–22) but also that the proper response is to accept it as the Lord's discipline (3:25–30, 39), repent of wickedness (3:40), and look to the Lord with hope for deliverance (3:20–24, 31–36).

Many of these themes are found in the lengthy penitential prayers recorded in Daniel, Ezra, and Nehemiah. While these prayers have distinct emphases (see Boda, 2009, pp. 465–468, 475–480, 483–488), they also overlap significantly.

Physical posture in prayer: fasting, sackcloth, ashes, physical disfigurement (all signs of mourning)	Ezra 9:3; 10:6; Neh 1:4; 9:1; Dan 9:3
Confession: past and present generations have not followed the Lord's commands given through Moses and the prophets	Ezra 9:6–7a, 10–11a; Neh 1:6b–7; 9:16–17a, 26, 28a, 29b, 30b, 33–35; Dan 9:5–6, 7b–8, 9b–11a
Acknowledgment of the Lord's righteousness and that Israel's suffering is just	Ezra 9:7b, 13; Neh 1:8b; 9:27a, 28a, 30b, 33; Dan 9:7a, 11b–13a, 14, 16
Acknowledgment of the Lord's mercy and covenant faithfulness to Israel (at times even in the midst of their sin)	Ezra 9:8–9; Neh 1:5; 9:32; Dan 9:4, 15a

Chronicles underscores these themes and emphasizes not only that repentance involves humbling oneself before the Lord but also that he is quick to respond with forgiveness and grace (2 Chr 12:1–7; 33:10–13; 34:23–28). Once more, the Lord's ultimate goal in judgment is restorative: he desires not to crush his sinful people but to call them back to life-giving fellowship with him.

Sin in Intertestamental Literature. It is appropriate to say a brief word on the topic of sin as found in Jewish literature coming after the time of the Hebrew Bible and before—or in some cases during or just after—the writing of the New Testament.

Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha. This literature dates roughly from 300 B.C.E. to 200 C.E. In it, "the [Old Testament] Law continued to be the measuring rod of good and evil (Sir 35:1; 41:8; *Pss. Sol.* 14:2)," though it is also true that "a tendency emerges to describe sin more abstractly, as a force or realm that is antagonistic to both God and humanity" (Harrington, 2010, p. 1230; cf. *T. Jud.* 20:1).

There is also much more discussion, especially in the Pseudepigrapha, on why sin and evil are so common in the world. Charlesworth (1983) identifies at least four explanations: because of Eve's sin (*LAE* 18:1; cf. Sir 25:24), because of Adam's sin (*4 Ezra* 3:20–22; cf. 7:118–119), because individuals choose to sin (*2 Bar.* 54:15, 19; cf. *1 En.* 98:4–5), and (based on a certain understanding of Gen 6:1–7) because of the involvement of evil angels with humanity (*1 En.* 54:6; 64:1–2; cf. 6:1—16:4). Common to all of these is the view that God is not the source of human sin or evil, an idea in keeping with the Old Testament and perhaps especially relevant to Jews who lived during a time when God's people were experiencing much suffering (cf. Charlesworth, 1983).

Dead Sea Scrolls. In the Dead Sea Scrolls (ca. third century B.C.E. up to 70 B.C.E.), human sin is described sometimes as stemming from larger spiritual forces battling one another (cf. 1QS 3:20–24 with 1QM 17:6–7) and at other times "as an inherent human condition in which each person must struggle from birth (1QH^a 12:29–30)" (Harrington, 2010, p. 1230). Sin results in various forms of divine judgment (1QH^a 7:29; 12:35; CD 1:3–4; 1QS 2:8) or in being ostracized from the community (1QS 5:13–14), and the proper response to it is to confess, "plead for mercy, swear never to sin again, and pray for divine aid in the future (1QH^a 4:18–24; 6:17; 14:6; cf. CD 15:3)" (Harrington, 2010, p. 1231; she notes that sacrificial atonement was not an option because this community was opposed to the Jerusalem priesthood).

Uniquely, some of the documents from Qumran expanded the relationship between moral wrongdoing and ritual impurity: "in the Hebrew Bible, moral

impurity and ritual impurity remained distinct: Sin did not produce ritual impurity, sinners were not ritually defiling, and sinners did not need to be purified. At Qumran, sin was considered to be ritually defiling, and sinners had to purify themselves" (Klawans, 2000, p. 90). In this community, sin thus expands in scope and the means of dealing with it must expand as well (repentance and ritual cleansing).

Sin in the New Testament. As we did with the Old Testament, we begin with a general consideration of the New Testament's vocabulary and metaphors for sin and then consider how different sections of the New Testament speak about it.

Vocabulary and metaphors. Like the Old Testament, the New Testament also has a rich vocabulary for sin: Louw-Nida lists 30 individual terms in its general entry on "sin, wrongdoing, guilt" (1989, §88.289–88.318) and scores of other terms to describe more specific sins (§88.105–88.288; for a discussion of the most commonly occurring terms, see Günther, 1986, and Bauder, 1986). This shows again how central sin is to the New Testament story and how many different forms it takes. "Humans have discovered an astonishing number of ways to manifest their estrangement from their creator" (Moo, 2013, p. 111).

The most commonly occurring terms for sin in the New Testament are found in the word groups related to the nouns *hamartia* ("sin, sinfulness"), *adikia* ("wrongdoing, unrighteousness, injustice"), *parabasis* ("transgression"), and *paraptōma* ("offense, wrongdoing, sin"). Taken together, these terms refer to a large range of offenses against God and against people (see entries in BDAG and again Günther, 1986; Bauder, 1986).

The real damage caused by sin becomes especially clear when the New Testament's metaphors for it are also considered, many of which overlap with those of the Old Testament. Significantly, just as God is the positive answer to sin in the Old Testament metaphors, the positive answer to sin in the New Testament metaphors is Jesus.

As the context of these verses demonstrates, all these metaphors are held together by Jesus's sacrificial death and resurrection from the dead, by which he fully atoned for sin and demonstrated his power over it (see Peterson, 2012, pp. 273–549). Believing in

If sin...	*Jesus...*
brings death,	gives life (Rom 6:23; Eph 2:5; Col 2:13)
is disease,	is cure (1 Pet 2:24)
defiles,	cleanses (1 Cor 6:11; Heb 10:22; 1 John 1:9)
is darkness,	is light (John 3:19; 8:12; 12:46)
is a condemning burden,	bears it (Heb 9:28; 1 Pet 2:24)
is our hostility to God, making us his enemies,	reconciles us to God and makes peace (Rom 5:1–11; 2 Cor 5:16–21)
is slavery,	redeems, frees, and claims sinners as his own (Mark 10:45; John 8:34–36; Acts 20:28; Titus 2:13–14; Rev 1:5–6; Peterson, 2012, p. 274)
calls for penalty,	pays it (Rom 3:25–26; Gal 3:13; 1 Pet 2:24; 3:18)
is oppression by evil forces,	defeats them (Eph 2:1–5; Rev 12:9–11)

Jesus thus becomes humanity's hope for forgiveness from sin and for victory over it. As the following overview shows, this is emphasized in every section of the New Testament.

Synoptic Gospels and Acts. If the Lord's purpose in creation was for humanity to reflect his character so that the world was filled with his kingdom of love, mercy, goodness, justice, and peace (see above, "The Story of Sin: A Biblical Overview"), the Gospels emphasize that the Lord has sent Jesus as the long-awaited king of that Kingdom and to inaugurate it in a way the world has never seen (Matt 1:16–17, 21; Mark 1:1–15; Luke 1:32–33; note that the Hebrew word "Messiah" and the Greek word "Christ" are ways of referring to this long-awaited king). This means that sin must be banished and righteousness flourish, and Jesus accomplishes this in various ways.

As king, Jesus has authority to forgive the Kingdom's subjects (Matt 9:2–8). Indeed, his very name means "the Lord saves" (1:21). Unexpectedly, he does not do this simply by divine decree but by sacrificing himself for sinners so they may be forgiven (26:28; Mark 10:45). This is seen as an expression of God's love and mercy for sinful humanity (Luke 1:77–79). God is both righteous judge and merciful savior, the

latter of which the religious leaders often failed to understand (Matt 9:11–13; Luke 7:36–50; 15:1–32).

But Jesus also brings justice to bear against sin (Matt 3:11–12; 24:36–51; Luke 13:1–9). To avoid it, sinners must repent of sin and follow him, the one who can save them from sin and lead them in righteousness (Matt 4:17; Mark 2:15–17; Luke 9:23–26; 24:47). This explains why one of the most frequently mentioned sins in the Gospels is to reject Jesus (Matt 9:1–8; 21:28–46; Mark 3:1–6; Luke 4:14–30). To reject the Lord's king is to reject the Lord himself (Luke 10:13–16).

Jesus also emphasized that repenting from sin includes both heart and life. To a religious culture focused on ritual purity of the body, Jesus underscored that sin is a moral impurity that begins in the heart (Matt 12:34–35; Mark 7:14–23). Repentance thus involves an internal reorientation of the heart to God's ways (Matt 5:21–22, 27–28; Mark 7:6b–7). And because righteousness is demonstrated by action, repentance also involves turning away from sinful acts toward just acts (Luke 3:3–14; 19:8–10). Luke's Gospel especially emphasizes that this will involve repenting of the love of money by caring for the less fortunate (12:33; 14:12–14; 16:14–15, 19–31). Those who understand God's mercy and love toward them in Jesus cannot help but show this same mercy and love to others.

In Acts, Jesus is again presented as the one who can save from sin's penalty. People must therefore repent and put their faith in Jesus, the long-awaited king who can forgive their sins (5:31; 10:43; 16:31; 17:30–31). As in the Gospels, a primary sin is refusal to repent and believe the good news about Jesus (3:1–4:22; 17:18–32; 19:23–41). Those who do repent and believe began to live uprightly (19:17–20), shown again especially in caring for the poor (2:45; 4:32–37; 20:35). Jesus therefore inaugurates God's Kingdom in that his followers have their sins forgiven through him (the banishment of sin) and follow him in demonstrating God's character of justice, mercy, and love to the world (the manifestation of righteousness).

Johannine literature. We may divide this literature into the Gospel of John, the letters of John (1–3 John), and the book of Revelation.

Gospel of John. John's Gospel repeats many of the above themes: Jesus is the king who has authority to forgive sins (1:49; 5:21; 6:40; 18:36), he makes this forgiveness possible by presenting himself as a sacrificial lamb to take away sin (1:29), and God's provision of Jesus to do this is a sign of God's love for sinners (1:29; 3:14–16). In addition, John has an especially strong focus on sin as darkness and Jesus as the light that delivers people from its darkness (1:5; 3:19–20; 8:12; 12:46) and on Jesus as the Son of God who perfectly represents the Father and who is sent by the Father to rescue people from sin (3:16–18; 5:19–24; 6:35–40; 8:36; 20:31). In keeping with this, the most frequently occurring sin in this Gospel is disbelieving Jesus and his teaching (6:66; 7:2–5, 32; etc.). It is also the most severe because it is to reject God himself and God's own plan of salvation from sin, leaving the sinner under God's judgment (3:31–36; 8:24; 12:44–50), the very thing from which Jesus came to deliver people (3:17; 12:47). Repentance thus involves changing one's mind about Jesus, believing in him as God's provision of forgiveness for sin, and following him (3:15–18; 8:12; 10:27–30; 12:26; 20:31).

First to Third John. The letters of 1–3 John also make clear that forgiveness for sin happens by believing in Jesus, who is both the advocate for sinners and the sacrifice for their sins (1 John 2:1–2; 4:10) and thus serves as both prophetic and priestly intercessor (cf. Exod 32:11–14; Num 16:46–47) and as atoning sacrifice (cf. Lev 17:11). These letters also emphasize that those who follow Jesus no longer "walk in the darkness" (i.e., have lives characterized by sin) but "walk in the light" (i.e., have lives characterized by righteousness) (1 John 1:5–7; 2:6, 29; 3:6–10; 3 John 1:11). Repenting from sin involves not only rooting out evil but also producing a harvest of good.

Revelation. Revelation emphasizes that Jesus, by his sacrificial death, frees his followers from sin's domain (death) and transfers them to the Lord's domain (life) (5:9–10; 7:14–17). Jesus's followers thus turn away from practicing sins, which are listed in several places and include idolatry, demon worship, magic, sexual immorality, murder, and lying (9:20–21; 21:8; 22:15). Those who reject Jesus and practice such things can expect to face God's judgment, which is seen as an expression of his justice (16:7; 18:5, 20; 19:2) and will come at levels both local (2:16, 22–23) and worldwide

(9:1–11; 14:9–11). God will bring his justice to bear against sin in a full and final way.

Revelation also returns to a theme found in Genesis: there is an evil one who leads people into sin (12:9; 20:2–3; cf. Gen 3:1–7) but who will be defeated by the seed of the woman (cf. Gen 3:15). This seed is Jesus (Rev 12:4–5), who both vanquishes the evil one (12:9–10) and leads his followers to do the same (12:10–11; cf. Beale, 2011, p. 220). To follow the evil one in sinful ways is thus a losing battle, with great suffering to come, while following Jesus leads to the blessing for which humanity was created: a life free from the curses of sin and pain and death and full of the blessings of peace and joy and perfect fellowship with God and the Lamb (7:15–17; 21:1–5; 22:1–5).

Paul and later Pauline letters (Romans—Philemon). Like the rest of the New Testament, the 13 letters traditionally attributed to Paul emphasize that sin is humanity's fundamental problem and that Jesus is the only solution. With reference to God, sin is a failure to reflect his glorious character into the world (Rom 3:23; Moo, 2013, p. 115), a denial of who he is (1:18–23), and a choice to indulge in evil rather than obey his commands (1:28–32; Eph 2:3). With reference to others, sin consists in various activities that bring harm to others (Rom 3:13–17; Gal 5:19–21; 2 Tim 3:1–5), in contrast to showing them God's love and care (cf. Eph 4:32—5:2 with 4:28–31). While all of these things call forth God's righteous judgment (Rom 1:18; 2:2; 6:23a), he also demonstrates his love to sinful humanity by providing Jesus as an atoning sacrifice (5:8). Jesus takes the punishment due for sin (5:6–9; 1 Thess 5:9–10) and makes a way for his followers to be considered righteous (Rom 4:5–8; 2 Cor 5:18–21) and to be adopted as God's children (Rom 8:14–17; Gal 4:1–7; Eph 1:5). Those who do follow him are not characterized by wickedness but by following Jesus in reflecting God's own character into the world (Gal 5:16–24; Eph 4:20—5:2; Col 3:10–17; Titus 2:14), in this way returning to God's purpose in creation (cf. Col 3:10 with Gen 1:26). Repentance is thus turning from sin, believing in Jesus as the savior from sin, and following him in righteous living.

These letters also describe sin from other angles. Sometimes they speak of sin with regard to Old Testament law. The law defines what sin is and makes clear that all are sinners because all have broken the law (Rom 3:20, 23; 7:7; Gal 3:22). And because lawbreaking leads to curse (Gal 3:10; cf. Deut 27:26), it is impossible to be saved by it. Salvation comes only by faith in Jesus who took the law's curse on himself in his sacrificial death (Gal 3:13; Titus 2:14).

Sin is also spoken of by making a contrast between two men: Adam and Christ (Rom 5:12–21). Adam first sinned and by this means introduced death into the world, "and so death spread to all people because all sinned" (5:12 lit.). Conversely, Christ came as the sinless second Adam, making a way for sin to be forgiven by the sacrifice of himself. Those who remain "in Adam" remain in the realm of death; those who are "in Christ" by faith are now considered righteous and enter the realm of life (5:15–19; cf. 3:23–26; 5:6–9; 1 Cor 15:22).

In addition to Jesus's sacrificial death, these letters speak of his resurrection as central to dealing with sin. This is because death results from sin (Rom 5:12; 1 Cor 15:56; cf. Gen 2:17; 3:19). If you cannot defeat death, you have not defeated sin. By his resurrection from the dead, Jesus shows he has defeated sin; he shares this victory with those who follow him and will thus be raised from the dead at the last day (1 Cor 15:20–23, 53–57).

In terms of what leads to sin, these letters identify internal and external factors. Internally, people are led into sin by the desires of "the flesh" (Rom 8:5–8; 1 Cor 3:3; Gal 5:17, 19–21), that is, the "natural human condition…[that is] determined by the perspective of this world, in contrast to the world to come" (Moo, 2013, p. 120). Jesus addresses this by granting his followers the Spirit, who enables them to put to death the deeds of the flesh and walk in God's righteous path (Rom 8:1–11; Gal 5:16, 22–25). This in turn means "[sin's] presence and action in the Christian are only the death throes of a mortally wounded foe" (Bromiley, 1988, p. 525).

Externally, these letters speak of an evil one who tempts people to commit sin (2 Cor 2:11; 1 Thess 3:5; 2 Tim 2:26) and, more generally, of evil spiritual forces and powers that the believer battles against (Eph 6:12; see Moo, 2013, pp. 126–127). God has defeated all of these evil forces in Jesus, meaning Jesus's followers

are delivered from their tyranny and declared to be forgiven citizens of Jesus's Kingdom: "He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins" (Col 1:13–14; cf. Gal 1:4; Eph 2:1–7; Col 2:15).

General letters and Hebrews (James—2 Peter, Jude). As with the other biblical books, each of these letters has unique emphases when discussing sin. James emphasizes that sins are the fruit of the heart's evil desires (1:13–15, 21; 3:14–16; 4:1–2) and that sinners must repent by rooting them out of their lives as they humble themselves before the Lord and his word, knowing that the Lord himself will draw near to help in the battle against sin (1:21; 4:6–10). James also warns strongly against sins directed at others (1:26; 2:1–13; 3:1–12; 4:11; 5:1–6), making clear that those who practice such things do not truly follow God because they deny the "royal law found in scripture, 'Love your neighbor as yourself'" (2:8; cf. 1:26–27; 2:14–26). For James, faith in God and righteous action toward others go hand in hand, while sinful action toward others is a clear sign of a lack of true faith in God.

Both 1 and 2 Peter emphasize that Jesus is the one who saves from sin (1 Pet 2:24; 3:18; 2 Pet 1:1) and sets his followers apart to live righteous lives (1 Pet 1:13–17; 2:11–12; 3:8–9; 2 Pet 1:5–9). God's salvation from sin is always tied to his mission of establishing his righteous Kingdom in this world through his people. Also, 2 Peter warns that false prophets and false teachers will lead people into all sorts of sins (2:1–22) and that they and those who follow them will face judgment (2:9b–13a). Holding firm to the apostles' teaching is thus central to avoiding sin.

Jude emphasizes the same, warning of false believers who are characterized by immorality and false teaching, especially a denial of Jesus Christ as Lord (1:4, 8, 10–13, 16). Jude is clear that these things lead to God's judgment (1:5–7, 13–15) and exhorts believers to avoid such sin by abstaining from any type of immorality (1:23) and by remaining faithful to the apostles' teaching (1:3, 17–20). His letter ends with strong encouragement that the Lord himself helps his people to avoid sin and to be faithful (1:24).

Like much of the New Testament, Hebrews is clear that Jesus's followers must turn from sin (12:16; 13:4) and practice love and good deeds (10:24). But it especially emphasizes their need to remain faithful to Jesus (2:1–4; 3:6—4:14; 10:19–39; 12:1–29), supporting this with two complementary points. First, in contrast to the Old Testament sacrificial system, which has sinful priests (who must sacrifice for their own sins) and sacrifices that result only in external ritual cleansing (not internal conscience cleansing), Jesus is a sinless priest who gave his own life as the perfect sacrifice for sin that can fully cleanse a sinner's conscience (4:15; 7:26–27; 9:7–14, 25–28; 10:1–14). Belief in Jesus is now the God-appointed way of dealing with sin, which leads to the second point: to turn away from Jesus is to turn away from the only means of forgiveness for sins available and thus to experience God's judgment for sin (2:1–3a; 3:1—4:13; 10:26–31). Once again, only Jesus can solve humanity's problem with sin.

Sin Today. I have noted that the Bible presents sin as self-destructive to the sinner and as ruining and destroying the sinner's relationship to God, to others, and to the creation. Since the Bible's completion, the discussion of sin has had a long and complex history in the biblical faiths (for an overview of the discussion in Judaism, see Jacobs, 2007, pp. 624–625; Wigoder, 2002, p. 723; in Christianity, see Connolly, 2005, pp. 1116–1120). The challenge these faiths have faced throughout the centuries has been to maintain all of the above aspects of the biblical teaching.

In the past two centuries especially, it seems that conservative expressions of biblical faith have tended to place strong emphasis on sin as personal rebellion against God and on the corresponding destructive judgment sinners will experience. At the same time, liberal expressions have tended to place strong emphasis on sin being embodied in social and environmental injustice and on the corresponding existential destruction of the self that sinners experience for living inauthentic lives. But the biblical witness is that all of these emphases are true. Accordingly, God calls people, on the one hand, to acknowledge and turn from their sinful rebellion against him, in all its myriad and dark manifestations, and to look to him as the only one who can fix their sin problem and

deliver them from its power. On the other hand, God also calls them to walk with him, to transcribe his character into the world not only at the personal level but also at the social level, so that the blessing of Eden might flow as far as the curse is found. God's call is always salvific and missional, a call out of sin and toward his original purpose in creation: for humanity to reflect his character into the world so that it might be filled with his goodness, justice, love, and mercy—all this for God's glory and humanity's blessing (Williams, 2005, pp. 59–62, 137–139).

To be authentically human is to participate fully in this mission. "Real freedom is the right to be properly related to God, to other human beings, and to the world about" (Williams, 2005, p. 153). It is this type of freedom that Jesus speaks of when he says, "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matt 11:28–30). It is an invitation to be delivered from sin's burden and to follow Jesus as he teaches his followers how to fulfill their mission of relating properly to God, to others, and to the world. It is for this, not for sin, that humanity has been created.

[*See also* Adam (Primeval History); Atonement; Blessings and Curses; Cult and Worship; Devils and Demons; Ethics, Biblical; Expiation; Forgiveness; Good and Evil; Guilt and Innocence; Idols and Idolatry; Redemption; Sacrifice and Offerings; Satan; *and* Sickness, Disease, and Healing.]

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Jay Sklar

SLAVERY

See Freedom and Slavery.

SON OF GOD

The New Testament's presentation of Jesus as Son of God reflects a mosaic of perspectives forged from the Hebrew Bible and Septuagint. That portrait focuses on key historical moments (resurrection, crucifixion, baptism, conception) in which Jesus was "made" Son of God as well as formulates proto-orthodox beliefs in Jesus's eternally "begotten" divine nature. These Christological developments emerged from a diverse milieu of Jewish, Greek, and Roman concepts of filial relations in heavenly and earthly realms. Boundaries between divine and human spheres were more porous in antiquity than moderns typically allow; familial associations of exceptional human beings with deities had as much to do with positions of worldly power as with speculations about metaphysical essence.

Jewish Contexts. The Hebrew Bible occasionally portrays a divine council of heavenly beings surrounding, yet subordinate to, the supreme Creator God as "sons of God" (*'ĕlōhîm*) or "sons of the Most High" (*'elĕyôn*; Gen 6:2, 4; Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7; Pss 29:1; 82:1, 6; 89:6–7). While these figures usually function as God's faithful, worshipful servants, in two cases they precipitously fall from favor: either as sexual predators upon human daughters, resulting in titanic offspring (*nĕpilîm*, "fallen ones" [Gen 6:4]), or as unjust national gods partial to the wicked and sentenced to die "like mortals, and fall like any prince" (Ps 82:2, 6–7).

The Creator God enters into a covenantal bond with the people of Israel as his collective "firstborn son" (*bĕn bĕkôr*). The pivotal adoptive moment occurs when God rescues his kidnapped "son" from Egyptian slavery (Exod 4:22; Hos 11:1), thereby granting Israel a peculiar privileged, responsible status in God's household. Unfortunately, Israel does not always prove to be a faithful "son," prompting disciplinary and restorative action from the ever loyal and loving Father (Jer 3:19; 31:9, 20; Hos 11:1–9).

During Israel's monarchical period the people's role as God's "son" begins to crystallize in the person of the king. The prophet Nathan brokers a new covenant between God and David's royal house, promising an unending succession of David's biological and God's adoptive heirs: "I [the Lord God] will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me"(2 Sam 7:13–14). This covenant comes to be celebrated in coronation ceremonies that reinforce adoptive relations with anointing rituals: "The kings of the earth set themselves…against the LORD and his anointed [*māšîaḥ*]…. 'I have set my king on Zion, my holy hill.'