

ANTHROPOLOGY AND HAMARTIOLOGY:

The Origin and Definition of Sin

A Study for Bible Institute of Gulf Coast Baptist Church - Spring 2026

During the second half of this course we will interact with various Scripture passages that address the definition and origin of sin, as well as those that demonstrate distinctions between the various “sin” words, and also show how sin has affected mankind, how sin interferes with the believer’s ability to live the Christian life, and how the believer can both deal with sin and how to get things right with God after they sin. The goal of this study is to provide a basic understanding of the insidious nature of sin and that while it has enslaved all unbelievers and hinders the believer from living out the Christian life, God has made a way for man to be redeemed and delivered from sin’s power.

Sin in the Old and New Testaments

The Hebrew word primarily translated “sin” in the Old Testament is *chattah*. This same word is also used in regards to that which is offered as a sacrifice for sin but the majority of usages of *chattah* refer to an act that is offensive to God. Examples of such are found in 2 Kings 10:31, “*But Jehu took no heed to walk in the law of the LORD God of Israel with all his heart: for he departed not from the sins of Jeroboam, which made Israel to sin.*” The context of this verses lines up neatly with the definition of the New Testament word for “sin” which is the Greek word *hamartia*. *Hamartia* refers to a missing of the mark, not by accident but by deliberate choice to do so.

The Definition of Sin

Bible scholars have provided a variety of definitions for sin. The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology explains that the word *hamartia*, “originally meant to miss, miss the mark, lose, not share in something, be mistaken. The Greek view of a mistake is intellectually orientated - *hamartano* is the result of some agnosia, ignorance.” While that was the ancient Greek understanding of that word, the Bible demonstrates that sin is not a mistake but a determined choice to miss the mark that God has established. Martin Luther stated that “Sin is essentially a departure from God.”, and Charles Ryrie wrote, “Sin may also be defined as against the character of God...” While these and many other definitions of the word may differ the common theme is that sin is directed toward God and that it is a choice to rebel against God.

While it is not always possible, it is always best to allow Scripture to define theological terms. In his first epistle, the apostle John provides helpful information as to the nature of sin. “In 1 John 3:4 the Bible defines sin as lawlessness, the acting without regard to the fact that God has placed restraints upon man. This Greek construction in this passage is to equate both of the nouns with each other. The article with both the subject and the predicate makes them coextensive and thus interchangeable. Later on in chapter 5, John does not use the article, further giving the reader information about unrighteousness and sin. ‘*All unrighteousness is sin...*’ this beginning to verse 17 would seem to remove any doubt that there is a difference between sin and unrighteousness.

However, the Greek construction gives the reader more information. The use of these Greek words without the article emphasizes that which has the character and quality of the other word. John is saying here that all unrighteousness has the quality or character of sin, but they are two distinct words that scripture has drawn a distinction between.”¹ In summary, sin is essentially acting out from the mindset that “God’s not the boss of me”.

The Nature of Sin

What is sin like? What does it do? Passages of scripture in both the Old and New Testament answer these questions and provide insight into the nature of sin.

ALL sin is directed against God - Psalm 51:5

Sin separates man from God - Isaiah 59:2

Sin results in death - Romans 6:23; James 1:14-15

Sin results in bondage - John 8:34; Romans 6:16-18

Sin results in ruin - Psalm 38:3-5; Romans 7:22-24

The Origin of Sin

Rebellion against God? Absence of fellowship with the Creator? Death, slavery, misery? None of these sound “*very good*” so where did sin come from? Did God create sin? Some have misrepresented God’s sovereignty as being behind sin’s origin in this world due to a poor exposition of Isaiah 45:7. In this passage God states that “*I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the Lord do all these things.*” While a cursory reading of this verse may lead one to the conclusion that God is the author of sin, a healthy hermeneutic corrects this error. The English word “evil” is translated from the Hebrew *rah*. This word is better understood as “calamitous” or that which results in misery. Contextually the passage refers to God’s control over disastrous events. While it is true that God is sovereign over His creation, it is equally true that He did not create sin (1 John 1:5; James 1:13). Not only did God not create sin but He also hates sin (Proverbs 8:13).

If God did not author sin, where did sin come from? The answer to this question is found in the books of Ezekiel and Isaiah. Both of these prophets were inspired to give us insight into sin’s origins. In Ezekiel 28, the prophet is pronouncing judgement upon the King of Tyre, and by extension he is also pronouncing judgement upon the fallen spirit-being behind the king’s behavior.

The context of the chapter points to this individual being none other than Satan, God’s adversary and the “*prince of the power of the air*”. This much is made obvious in verses 13-14, “*Thou art the anointed cherub that covereth; and I have set thee so: thou wast upon the holy mountain of god; thou hast walked up and down in the midst of the stones of fire.*” This refers to Satan’s original God-given position as “the” exalted spirit being when he was known as Lucifer. In verse 15, Ezekiel wrote, “*thou wast perfect in thy ways from the day that thou wast created, till iniquity was found in thee.*” Lucifer was created and existed without sin until “iniquity” or better yet “unrighteousness” was found in him. According to Isaiah 14:11, Lucifer’s unrighteousness consisted of an over

¹ Thomas, Steve. Notes. Anthropology and Hamartiology: Definition and Origin of Sin. 2022;

exaggerated opinion of himself. Ezekiel also states that, *“thine heart was lifted up because of thy beauty, thou hast corrupted thy wisdom by reason of thy brightness...”* Lucifer’s over inflated opinion of himself is considered as being unrighteous and this attitude existed before he acted in rebellion against God.

Lucifer’s estimation resulted in a determination, *“For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds: I will be like the most High.”* (Isaiah 14:13-14) Lucifer foolishly concluded that he had just as much right to be seated on the throne of heaven as God himself. This determination was followed by an attempt on his part to storm heaven and to *“be like the most High.”* These passages demonstrate a progression of unrighteousness that ultimately led to Lucifer’s sin. Sin did not originate with God but rather with His created beings.

Conclusion

“God is the one who is assaulted when an individual sins. God created the universe and it was pure. Sin changed this. God has set restrictions upon man and man does not like this. Man acts as if there is no authority over him and lives life as such. This activity is sin, acting outside of God’s set boundaries or laws. Lucifer was the first individual to sin, seeking something other than what God had provided him in his function as the anointed cherub that covered the Glory of God. When God created the human race, they were innocent, but with a volition that was unbound, meaning they could choose options that they were presented with, even if those options were wrong and calamitous. Adam and Even made such a choice, and Adam as the federal head of the human race, plunged mankind into sin. God gave consequences for those choices, and man is suffering today because of it.”²

² Ibid.