

**SIN, ERROR**

NOTES FROM THE ARTICLE

Prepared by W. L. Michel, June 1998

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The texts and translations will have to be entered at another time.

The paragraph on “Apocalyptic” and “Qumran” is worth a discussion in order to understand the context of the thinking of Paul of Tarsus on “Sin.”

I. General.

1. Sin in the Ancient Near East. 2. The root *h/hṭ*?. 3. Distribution and Derivatives; Semantic Field. 4. Concrete Basic Meaning?

II. Early Historical Books.

1. Communal Background. 2. Reward-Punishment Nexus. 3. *chātā āh* and *chātā ṭh*. 4. Connection with *nś*?. 5. Cultic Associations.

III. Psalms.

IV. Prophets.

1. *chātā ṭh* as History of Sin. 2. Objects of Criticism. 3. Future Elimination of Sin.

V. *chēt*?

VI. P and Ezk. 40-48

1. Occurrences. 2. Ritual, not Sacrifice. 3. Connection with *nephesh*, *āshām*, *qōdhesh*. 4. Legislation and Individualization. 5. Removal through Substitutionary Death. 6. *āshām* Ritual. 7. Cleansing of the Sanctuary. 8. Annual Festivals. 9. Usage before P?

VII. Apocalyptic.

“... in this literature sin becomes a negative force encompassing all mankind, brought into being by men of their own accord (1 En.98:4).

‘All that are born are corrupted with wickedness,  
full of sins, burdened with guilt’  
(2 Esdr. 7:68f; cf. v. 46; 8:35).”

**2 Esdras 7:46-, 62f.**

- 46 “But what of those for whom I prayed? For who among the living is there that has not sinned, or who is there among mortals that has not transgressed your covenant?  
47 And now I see that the world to come will bring delight to few, but torments to many.  
48 For an evil heart has grown up in us, which has alienated us from God, and has brought us into corruption and the ways of death, and has shown us the paths of perdition and removed us far from life--and not merely for a few but for almost all who have been created.”
- 62 “... ‘Oh earth, what have you brought forth, if the mind is made out of dust like the other created things?  
63 For it would have been better if the dust itself had not been born, so that the mind might not have been made from it.  
64 But now the mind grows with us, and therefore we are tormented, because we perish and we know it.  
65 Let the human race lament, but let the wild animals of the field be glad; let all who have been born lament, but let the cattle and the flocks rejoice.  
66 It is much better with them than with us; for they do not look for a judgement, and they do not know of any torment or salvation promised to them after death.  
67 What does it profit us that we shall be preserved alive but cruelly tormented?  
68 For all who have been born are entangled in (r Syr *defiled with*) iniquities, and are full of sins and burdened with transgressions.  
69 And if after death we were not to come into judgment, perhaps it would have been better for us.”

## 2 Esdras 8:34-36.

- 34 “But what are mortals, that you are angry with them; or what is a corruptible race, that you are so bitter against it?  
35 For in truth there is no one among those who have been born who has not acted wickedly; among those who have existed there is no one who has not done wrong.  
36 For in this, O Lord, your righteousness and goodness will be declared, when you are merciful to those who have no store of good works.”

From *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocryphal / Deuterocanonical Books*. New Revised Standard Version. New York: Oxford University Press, 1991, AP 316, 317

“For the origin of these sins, two explanations are possible.

On the one hand, the fallen angels are accounted as those who brought sin to the earth (1 En. 104ff.; 64:1ff.); on the other, Adam (or Eve, Sir. 25:24) is held accountable for the sins of all his descendants (2 Esdr. 3:21ff; 7:11f,48ff; 2 Bar.23:4; 48:42; 54:15)”

## 2 Esdras 3:20-21

- 20 Yet you did not take away their evil heart from them, so that your law might produce fruit in them.  
21 For the first Adam, burdened with an evil heart, transgressed and was overcome, as were also all who were descended from him.  
21 Thus the disease became permanent; the law was in the hearts of the people along with the evil root/ but what was good departed, and the evil remained. (AP 305f.)

“Eschatological hope, by contrast, looks forward to a time when the earth will be free of sin and the elect will no longer sin, either through carelessness or through pride (1 En.10:22, 5:8f).

## VIII. Qumran

“The origin of sin is now ascribed to the sovereignty of Belial, which brings about *avônôth*, *pishê* *‘ashmā/ma ‘āsīm*, and *chattôth*.

The angel of darkness leads even the Israelites as *bēnê tshedheq* astray into the nexus of sin and calamity (1QS 3:22). The human individual thus becomes an edifice of *chātā ‘āh*, and is therefore consigned to dust and vermin (1QH 1:22; 11:20; 1QS 11:9).

There is hope for the sinner, however, if he repents and leaves the *chātā ‘āh* sphere (1QH 6:6). For Qumran, too, sin remains an almost concrete, spatial sphere; therefore no one can free himself from it by his own power. Atonement is necessary, which is vouchsafed by divine agency.

Entities like the divine *rûach* or *tsēdhāqāh* make atonement for (*al*) man by removing and destroying his sphere of sinfulness, as was promised by Moses (1QS 3:8; 11:15; 1QH 17:12).”

“Such atonement takes place within the bounds of the *yachadh*. Entrance into the covenant is marked by a confession of sin, ... (1QS 1:25), which identifies the beginning of liberation from the nexus of sin and calamity. ...”