

The **Bible** Unpacked

Comprehensive Study Series

The Bible's teaching presented
for Bible students

Paul Mallison

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for Bible students

9. The Problem of Sin

Paul Mallison

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A Quick Word

This series of studies aims to present a compilation of the Bible's teachings in a clear and readable order. There are 40 booklets in the series, based on the 40 chapters of the book *The Bible Unpacked - Comprehensive Edition*. Each booklet has two sections, which can be used for two or more studies.

See *Topics in This Series* towards the end of this booklet for a full listing of all the topics. Note that studying booklets alternatively from the two major sections (*What to Know* and *What to Do*) would add variety.

The material contains Bible verses. Before the verses are headings, which reflect what the verses say – in particular the parts of the verses in *italics*. The verses are sometimes followed by a comment.

The verses often have a brief introduction. Usually these state who is speaking and often who they are speaking to. Apart from God and Jesus Christ, the main speakers are:

- Moses – who led the Israelites and taught them God's laws;
- David – Israel's greatest king who wrote many of the psalms, most of which are essentially prayers;
- Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel and other prophets – who spoke to the people of Israel on God's behalf; and
- Paul, Peter, John and other leaders of the early church – who spoke to various groups and wrote letters to believers.

Much care has been taken in order to correctly interpret the verses. Nevertheless, if you encounter a verse that is used to teach something that is contrary to or goes beyond your understanding, assess its use by doing such things as: reading the passage it is from; and considering how its teaching fits in with Scripture as a whole (e.g. interpret OT teaching in the light of NT teaching).

For more information on *The Bible Unpacked* and free downloads, go to the website: www.thebibleunpacked.net.

Suggestions for Study Groups

Preliminary matters:

- Beforehand the leader should: check the context of any verses they are not familiar with; and review the questions. If need be, they should compose questions more applicable to the group.
- Each person should have a Bible, for things such as checking a verse's context. It would also be helpful to have Bible commentaries on hand.
- Pray before beginning the study. Ask God for help in understanding the meaning of the verses and to affect your lives through them. Also pray together at the end.

Doing the study:

- Ideally, read the material and answer the questions prior to the meeting. Then share answers and discuss any issues arising from the material in the meeting.
- Alternatively, read the material and answer the questions in the meeting – reading either aloud as a group or individually (prior to sharing answers). If reading as a group, **try having one person read the headings, another read the verses and another read the comments.** Additionally, a fourth person could read the Bible references.

General or concluding questions:

If time permits, conclude with one or more of the following questions:

- What is something that you either: **did not know** before; gained **greater insight** into; or **needed reminding** of?
- What verse would be helpful to memorize and bear in mind during the next week?
- In taking the verses seriously, is there anything you should change in:
 - (a) how you relate to God and/or to other people; or
 - (b) any other area of your life (e.g. attitudes, values or behavior)?

If so, are there any specific steps you could take to do this?

I. General

Knowing what sin is and what its consequences are is vital to understanding God's relationship with humankind and to appreciating the need for Jesus Christ's mission. It also helps us not to sin by: clarifying what sin is (which this chapter does in general terms); and providing great motivation to avoid sin.

a) Sin Is Breaking God's Law

Breaking God's law is sin . . .

1JN 3:4 *Whoever sins is guilty of breaking God's law, because sin is a breaking of the law.* GNT

NEH 9:29 [LEVITES, TO GOD:] *And you warned them in order to turn them back to your law. Yet they acted presumptuously and did not obey your commandments, but sinned against your rules, which if a person does them, he shall live by them, and they turned a stubborn shoulder and stiffened their neck and would not obey.* ESV

. . . Even unintentionally breaking God's law is sin

LEV 4:27 [MOSES, TO THE ISRAELITES:] *If any person in the community sins by accident and does something which the LORD has commanded must not be done, he is guilty.* NCV™

As such, all wrongdoing is sin . . .

1JN 5:17A *Doing wrong is always sin ...* NCV™

. . . and not doing what we should do is sin

JAMES 4:17 *So whoever knows what is good to do and does not do it is guilty of sin.* NET

Likewise, doing evil is sin

PS 51:4 [DAVID, TO GOD:] *Against you – you above all – I have sinned; I have done what is evil in your sight. So you are just when you confront me; you are right when you condemn me.* NET

Give a definition of sin.

Is unintentionally breaking God's law as bad as intentionally breaking it?

When can doing nothing be sin? (Answer this generally, and then give one or two examples.)

Pray for persecuted Christians

b) Sin Is against God

The fact that sin is against God is also reflected by the previous section, where sin is defined as breaking God's law.

Sin is action against God . . .

LEV 26:40 [GOD, SPEAKING OF HIS WAYWARD PEOPLE:] *But if they confess their iniquity and the iniquity of their fathers in their treachery that they committed against me, and also in walking contrary to me, ...*
ESV

NEH 1:6B-7 [NEHEMIAH, TO GOD:] *I am confessing the sins of the Israelites that we have committed against you – both I myself and my family have sinned. ⁷We have behaved corruptly against you, not obeying the commandments, the statutes, and the judgments that you commanded your servant Moses.* NET

. . . Even acting wrongfully against other people is sinning against God

2SAM 12:10, 13A [GOD, TO DAVID:] *So now the sword will never depart from your house. For you have despised me by taking the wife of Uriah the Hittite as your own! ... ¹³Then David exclaimed to Nathan, "I have sinned against the LORD!"* NET

Sin is in fact rebellion against God

PS 5:10B [DAVID, TO GOD:] *Drive them out of your presence because of their many sins and their rebellion against you.* GNT

David correlates "their many sins" with "their rebellion against you".

As such, sin involves: turning away from God and his commands; . . .

ISA 59:12B-13A [ISAIAH, SPEAKING ON BEHALF OF HIS PEOPLE:] *Our sins testify against us. Our rebellious acts are with us. We know our wrongdoings. ¹³We have rebelled and denied the LORD. We have turned away from our God.* GW

DAN 9:4-5 [DANIEL:] *O Lord, great and awesome God who is faithful to his covenant with those who love him and keep his*

commandments, ⁵*we have sinned!* We have done what is wrong and wicked; we have rebelled *by turning away from your commandments and standards.* NET

. . . and going our own way

ISA 53:6 We have all strayed like sheep. *Each one of us has turned to go his own way,* and the LORD has laid *all our sins* on him. GW

Thus, sin is hated by God . . .

ISA 61:8A *For I, the LORD, love justice and hate robbery and sin.* NET

ZEC 8:17 *Do not plan evil in your hearts against one another. Do not favor a false oath – these are all things that I hate,’ says the LORD.* NET

. . . and God can be grieved by sin

PS 78:40 [A PSALMIST, SPEAKING OF ISRAEL’S REBELLION AGAINST GOD:] *How they rebelled against him in the desert, grieving him in the wilderness!*

ISV

How or why is sin “against God”?

Why is acting wrongfully against other people sinning against God?

In what situations do you find it particularly hard not to go your own way, as opposed to God's way?

Pray for persecuted Christians

c) Sin Is Universal

All people have sinned . . .

1KI 8:46A [SOLOMON, TO GOD:] When your people sin against you—and *there is no one who does not sin ...* GNT

ROM 3:23 *All of us have sinned and fallen short of God's glory.* CEV

The expression "fallen short of God's glory" most likely means that all have failed to measure up to a standard compatible with God's glory.

. . . No one is righteous before God

PS 143:2 [DAVID, TO GOD:] Do not enter into judgment with your servant, for *no living person is righteous in your sight.* ISV

People in fact have a sinful nature . . .

GAL 5:24 And those who belong to Christ Jesus have put to death *their human nature with all its passions and desires.* GNT

PS 51:5 [DAVID:] Look, *I was guilty of sin from birth, a sinner the moment my mother conceived me.* NET

. . . As such, people have minds inclined towards evil

GEN 8:21A And the LORD smelled the soothing aroma [from Noah's offerings] and said to himself, "I will never again curse the ground because of *humankind*, even though *the inclination of their minds is evil from childhood on.*" NET

People are led into sin by their sinful nature . . .

ROM 7:18–19 [PAUL:] *I know that nothing good lives in me; that is, nothing good lives in my corrupt nature. Although I have the desire to do what is right, I don't do it.* ¹⁹I don't do the good I want to do. Instead, *I do the evil that I don't want to do.* GW

. . . Correspondingly, people are led into sin by their corrupt hearts and minds

MARK 7:21–22 For *from within, out of the human heart, come evil ideas, sexual immorality, theft, murder, ²²adultery, greed, evil, deceit, debauchery, envy, slander, pride, and folly.* NET

ROM 8:7 For *the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot.* ESV

The term "the flesh" refers to people's sinful nature.

Note: God is aware of all sins . . .

JER 16:17 [GOD, SPEAKING OF THE PEOPLE OF JUDAH:] For *I see everything they do. Their wicked ways are not hidden from me. Their sin is not hidden away where I cannot see it.* NET

. . . and God remembers sin

HOS 7:2 [GOD, SPEAKING OF THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL:] *They do not realize that I remember all of their wicked deeds. Their evil deeds have now surrounded them; their sinful deeds are always before me.* NET

Why did Paul do evil that he did not even want to do?

Why do we naturally have a "sinful nature"?

What can be done to change the inclination of our minds from evil, an inclination that exists "from childhood on" (Gen 8:21a)?

Pray for persecuted Christians

d) Sin Has Intrinsic III Effects

Shame

EZRA 9:6 [EZRA:] I prayed, “My God, I am too ashamed and embarrassed to lift up my face to you, my God, because our sins are so many. They are higher than our heads. Our guilt even reaches up to the sky. NCV™

Spiritual defilement . . .

EZEK 14:11A [GOD:] I will do this to keep the Israelites from deserting me and *defiling themselves by their sins*. GNT

. . . and thus spiritual uncleanness

Ps 106:39 Thus *they* [sinful Israelites] *became unclean by their acts*, and played the whore in their deeds. ESV

Separation from God . . .

ISA 59:2 [ISAIAH, TO THE PEOPLE OF JUDAH:] *But your sinful acts have alienated you from your God; your sins have caused him to reject you and not listen to your prayers*. NET

Because sin defiles us and makes us spiritually “unclean”, it necessarily separates us from God. For God is holy – set apart from sin and consequent spiritual “uncleanness”.

. . . and spiritual death (at least initially)

COL 2:13 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] *When you were spiritually dead because of your sins and because you were not free from the power of your sinful self*, God made you alive with Christ, and he forgave all our sins. NCV™

This verse refers to what is known as spiritual death. Spiritual death involves being cut off from God – “dead to God” – without his Holy Spirit, who brings spiritual life.

Enslavement to sin

JOHN 8:34 Jesus answered them, “I tell you the solemn truth, *everyone who practices sin is a slave of sin*.” NET

ROM 7:14–15 [PAUL:] For we know that the law is spiritual – but *I am unspiritual, sold into slavery to sin.* ¹⁵For I don't understand what I am doing. *For I do not do what I want – instead, I do what I hate.* NET

Foolishness and spiritual darkness

ROM 1:18, 21–22 God's anger is revealed from heaven against all *the sin and evil of the people whose evil ways prevent the truth from being known.* ... ²¹They know God, but *they do not give him the honor that belongs to him, nor do they thank him. Instead, their thoughts have become complete nonsense, and their empty minds are filled with darkness.* ²²*They say they are wise, but they are fools;* ... GNT

The "truth" (v. 18) is the truth about God revealed to all through the testimony of creation (cf. vv. 19–21a). By sin and evil, such people suppress the truth – from themselves as well as others. Verses 21–22 further demonstrate that ungodliness, with its disregard of God, leads to spiritual darkness and foolishness.

What does defilement mean? How does sin "defile" people?

What does it mean to be "spiritually dead" (Col 2:13)?

What does enslavement to sin involve?

Pray for persecuted Christians

e) Sin Brings God's Judgment – Ultimately Death

When one sins, one becomes guilty

LEV 6:3–4A If you find something that someone lost and lie about it under oath, or *commit any other sin like this*, ⁴*you are sinning and will be guilty.* GW

As a consequence, sin makes one subject to God's anger . . .

EPH 2:3 Actually *all of us were like them and lived according to our natural desires, doing whatever suited the wishes of our own bodies and minds.* In our natural condition *we, like everyone else, were destined to suffer God's anger.* GNT

Here Paul refers to how all people have lived sinful lives, making them subject to God's anger.

. . . God's anger against sinners is manifested in judgment

ISA 13:9, 11 Look, the LORD's day of judgment is coming; it is a day of cruelty and savage, raging anger, destroying the earth and annihilating its sinners. ...[GOD:] ¹¹*I will punish the world for its evil, and wicked people for their sin. I will put an end to the pride of the insolent, I will bring down the arrogance of tyrants.* NET

Sin results in physical death . . .

ROM 5:12 Therefore, just as *sin entered the world through one man* [Adam], *and death through sin, so death spread to everyone, because all have sinned.* ISV

People may experience God's wrath and judgment for sin in various forms during their lifetime, but common to all is the judgment of physical death. Note that the verse makes reference to death initially coming as a consequence of Adam's original sin.

. . . Furthermore, sin brings the prospect of eternal "death"

ROM 6:21, 23 [PAUL, TO BELIEVERS:] So what benefit did you then reap from those things that you are now ashamed of? For *the end of those things is death.* ... ²³*For the payoff of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.* NET

Particularly in view of the contrast with "eternal life" (v. 23), "death" (vv. 21, 23) appears to primarily refer to or at least encompass what is sometimes referred to as eternal "death". Because of his justice God demands that unforgiven sin be punished with eternal "death" or destruction, involving eternal separation from God in hell. A complementary reason for this "death" is that sin makes separation from God necessary, because of his holiness.

What is the justification behind the horrifying effects of God's anger and judgment in Isaiah 13:9, 11 (in *God's anger against sinners is manifested in judgment*)?

Why does sin result in people facing eternal "death"?

Choose one aspect of the teaching on sin (from this section or one of the earlier ones) that you think people often overlook. If people took this to heart, how might it lead them to turn from sin?

II. The Law's Provision for Israel's Sin

See also:

■ *I. Jesus Christ and the Law's Diminished Role*, Ch. 14

In the law on which his covenant with Israel was based, God made provision for atonement to be made for anyone who sinned, and so for the sinner to be forgiven. This allowed the Israelites to remain in their covenant relationship with him, providing that they did not actually give up following God and his laws, as per the terms of the covenant. Sadly Israel would fail to hold to the covenant, willfully forsaking God's laws and persisting in sin.

The NT contains numerous references to the Mosaic Law's provision for Israel's sin. An understanding of what this provision involved enables us to more fully comprehend why Jesus Christ came and the significance of his work. For many of the concepts involved in Jesus Christ's work have their origin in the law's stipulations for making offerings for atonement for sin. These aspects of the law actually foreshadowed – and would be superseded by – what Jesus Christ would do and implement.

Note that most of the following passages involve instructions given by God to Moses for the Israelites, with either God or Moses speaking.

a) Offerings for Atonement for Sinners

See also:

■ *Jesus Christ's Death and Atonement for Sin*, Ch. 13

The law made provision for the offering of a life of an animal, to make atonement for one who had sinned

NUM 15:27–28 *If any person sins unintentionally, then he must bring a yearling female goat for a purification offering.²⁸ And the priest must make atonement for the person who sins unintentionally — when he sins unintentionally before the LORD — to make atonement for him, and he will be forgiven.* NET

Under the Mosaic Law, when a person sinned the person had to bring an animal for a priest to sacrifice as an offering of a life to make atonement for the person. Biblical atonement is where God accepts such an offering or sacrifice of a living being as a substitute for the life of a person who has sinned – the person's life otherwise being required as punishment for their sin. As such, God accepts the sacrifice as payment for the person's sin. The result is that sin is taken away – and so the sinner is forgiven, pronounced righteous and reconciled to God.

The major offerings for making atonement: The burnt offering; . . .

LEV 1:4, 9B *He [a person who had sinned] shall lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering, and it shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him. ...⁹... And the priest shall burn all of it on the altar, as a burnt offering, a food offering with a pleasing aroma to the LORD.* ESV

One of the main uses of a burnt offering was for making atonement for sinners, where it appears to have been used for one's sin in general. Other kinds of uses were: as an expression of devotion to God; as an expression of thanksgiving to God; and to accompany/supplement an appeal to God. It was the only offering where the whole of the animal was burnt up on the altar; as such it expressed one's complete devotion to God.

. . . the sin offering; . . .

LEV 5:5–6 ... when he realizes his guilt in any of these and confesses the sin he has committed, ⁶*he shall bring to the LORD as his compensation for the sin that he has committed, a female from the flock, a lamb or a goat, for a sin offering. And the priest shall make atonement for him for his sin.* ESV

. . . and the guilt offering

LEV 5:17–19 “If a person sins and violates any of the Lord’s commandments which must not be violated (although he did not know it at the time, but later realizes he is guilty), then he will bear his punishment for iniquity ¹⁸and must *bring a flawless ram from the flock, convertible into silver shekels, for a guilt offering to the priest. So the priest will make atonement on his behalf for his error which he committed (although he himself had not known it) and he will be forgiven.* ¹⁹*It is a guilt offering; he was surely guilty before the LORD.”*

NET

The guilt offering was quite similar to the sin offering, in both the process and purpose. The main difference appears to be that it was required in matters where restitution was quantifiable and so could be made for the wrongdoing. The guilt offering was made along with the restitution and a twenty percent surcharge.

Atonement was also made annually for all of the people

LEV 16:17, 24 Nobody is to be in the Meeting Tent when he [Aaron, the high priest] *enters to make atonement in the holy place until he goes out, and he has made atonement on his behalf, on behalf of his household, and on behalf of the whole assembly of Israel.* ... ²⁴Then he must bathe his body in water in a holy place, put on his clothes, and *go out and make his burnt offering and the people’s burnt offering. So he is to make atonement on behalf of himself and the people.* NET

LEV 16:29–30 This is to be a perpetual statute for you [the Israelites]. *In the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, you must humble yourselves and do no work of any kind, both the native citizen and the foreigner who resides in your midst,* ³⁰*for on this day atonement is to be made for you to cleanse you from all your sins; you must be clean before the LORD.* NET

The Day of Atonement was to be observed once each year, for the high priest to cleanse the Israelite nation as a whole of all sin. It was the most important observance of the OT rituals, the only time the high priest could enter the Most Holy Place.

Explain as simply as you can the concept of making atonement for a person who has sinned.

Why was there a need for different kinds of offerings for sin?

Why was the Day of Atonement so important?

b) Aspects of Making Offerings for Sin

Animals brought as offerings were to be without any blemish

LEV 4:32 *If this person [who had sinned] brings a lamb as his offering for sin, he must bring a female that has nothing wrong with it.* NCV™

All offerings were only to be made at the place God chose for his presence amongst his people

DEUT 12:13–14 *Make sure you do not offer burnt offerings in any place you wish, ¹⁴for you may do so only in the place the LORD chooses in one of your tribal areas – there you may do everything I am commanding you.* NET

Ex 29:11 [GOD:] *Kill the bull there in my holy presence at the entrance of the Tent.* GNT

The various kinds of offerings were only to be made on the altar at the place of God's presence amongst the people that was signified by the ark of the covenant. Initially this was at the Tent of Meeting (the tabernacle) and later at the temple. This was partly to ensure that the offerings were offered by the priests, God's chosen mediators between the people and himself. Additionally, it safeguarded against inappropriate offerings and procedures – and against worship of other gods.

The sinner laid hands on the offering, identifying the animal with themself

LEV 1:4 *He must lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering, and it will be accepted for him to make atonement on his behalf.* NET

This practice appears to have signified that the animal was a substitute for the sinner. Moreover, it may also have signified the transfer of the person's sins to the animal (cf. Lev 16:21–22).

The blood of the offerings for sin featured in making atonement, . . .

LEV 4:16–20 *Then the high priest must bring some of the blood of the bull to the Meeting Tent, ¹⁷and that priest must dip his finger in the blood and sprinkle some of the blood seven times before the LORD*

toward the front of the veil–canopy. ¹⁸He must put some of the blood on the horns of the altar which is before the LORD in the Meeting Tent, and all the rest of the blood he must pour out at the base of the altar of burnt offering that is at the entrance of the Meeting Tent. ¹⁹“Then the priest must take all its fat and offer the fat up in smoke on the altar. ²⁰He must do with the rest of the bull just as he did with the bull of the sin offering; this is what he must do with it. So the priest will make atonement on their behalf and they will be forgiven. NET

As this passage illustrates, the blood of animals sacrificed as offerings to make atonement for sinners featured prominently in the instructions given for presenting the offerings. The reason was the correlation of blood with life (as discussed in the following subsection). The blood signified the life of the animal, given as a substitute for the life of the sinner (as reflected in the previous subsection).

... for the life of a creature is in its blood – and as such blood is not to be eaten

LEV 17:11–12 [GOD:] ... for the life of every living thing is in the blood. So I myself have assigned it to you on the altar to make atonement for your lives, for the blood makes atonement by means of the life. ¹²Therefore, I have said to the Israelites: No person among you is to eat blood, and no resident foreigner who lives among you is to eat blood. NET

Blood sustains life and as such is to a large degree correlated with life. Because of this correlation the Israelites were not to eat blood – a command that NT believers continued to uphold (cf. Acts 15:20, 29; 21:25). This command was particularly pertinent in the context of making offerings. For in some kinds of animal offerings the meat was to be eaten, and so the people were required to first drain the blood from it.

Why did animals brought as offerings have to be without any defect?

What was the significance of blood being shed in offerings for sin?

Is it permissible for us today to consume blood (e.g. eat meat with blood in it)?

Pray for persecuted Christians

c) The Role of the Priests

God designated Aaron and his descendants as priests

Ex 28:1 [GOD, TO MOSES:] And you, *bring near to you your brother Aaron and his sons with him from among the Israelites, so that they may minister as my priests – Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar, Aaron’s sons.* NET

Ex 29:8–9 [GOD, TO MOSES:] Then you shall bring his sons and put coats on them, ⁹and you shall gird Aaron and his sons with sashes and bind caps on them. *And the priesthood shall be theirs by a statute forever.* Thus you shall ordain Aaron and his sons. ESV

When God made his covenant with Israel, he instituted the Aaronic or Levitical priesthood as an integral aspect of the covenant law, in particular in regard to the regulations concerning the people’s relationship with himself.

The priests were responsible for God’s sanctuary, the offerings and teaching the people

NUM 18:7A But you [Aaron] *and your sons with you are responsible for your priestly duties, for everything at the altar and within the curtain.* NET

LEV 21:6 They [the priests] must be holy to their God and show respect for God’s name, because *they present the offerings made by fire to the LORD, which is the food of their God. So they must be holy.* NCV™

LEV 10:11 You [the priests] *must teach the people all the laws that the LORD gave to them through Moses.* NCV™

The offering of incense by the priests

Ex 30:7–8 *Aaron must burn sweet-smelling incense on the altar every morning when he comes to take care of the oil lamps. ⁸He must burn incense again in the evening when he lights the lamps, so incense will burn before the LORD every day from now on.* NCV™

Sweet smelling incense was regularly offered by priests to God, primarily in being burned before him, but also in being added to some other offerings. This was to honor God with such a beautiful

and pleasing aroma. The fact that the incense was costly was also honoring to God, in it being offered up to him.

Most notably, the priests made offerings for people when they sinned, to make atonement for them

LEV 19:22 *And the priest shall make atonement for him [a person who had sinned] with the ram of the guilt offering before the LORD for his sin that he has committed, and he shall be forgiven for the sin that he has committed.* ESV

The high priest made atonement for Israel as a whole

LEV 16:32–34A *“The priest who is anointed and ordained to act as high priest in place of his father is to make atonement. He is to put on the linen garments, the holy garments,³³ and he is to purify the Most Holy Place, he is to purify the Meeting Tent and the altar, and he is to make atonement for the priests and for all the people of the assembly.³⁴ This is to be a perpetual statute for you to make atonement for the Israelites for all their sins once a year.”* NET

What were the key aspects of the work of the priests?

Why was there a need for a priest to offer a sacrifice to God on behalf of a person?

What parallels can be made with the role of the priests and Jesus Christ's work as the high priest of God's people under the new covenant?

Pray for persecuted Christians

d) Ceremonial Cleanness

Alongside the regulations governing atonement for sin, the law had regulations for ceremonial cleanness and uncleanness – of which the latter, at least at times, like sin required atonement. These regulations regarding cleanness were based on the need for God's people to be holy as he is holy. Holiness is essential if God's people are to exist with him, for he does not abide with nor tolerate that which is not holy.

The stipulations as to what denoted ceremonial uncleanness were – largely at least – based on what was physically dirty or unhealthy. In contrast to such things God's own holiness involves absolute purity and perfection – morally and otherwise. Maintaining ceremonial cleanness in God's presence – particularly in deliberately approaching him, such as in worship – was in accordance with and an acknowledgement of God's holiness. As such the law demanded the Israelites be ceremonially clean.

Uncleanness also makes an apt parallel to and is correlated with that which is morally unholy. As such, maintaining ceremonial cleanness reinforced the need to maintain spiritual or moral cleanness – discerning and avoiding both sin and sources of it.

Because God is holy, his people must be holy – which included avoiding uncleanness

LEV 11:44–45 I am the LORD your God. *Keep yourselves holy for me because I am holy. Don't make yourselves unclean* with any of these crawling animals. ⁴⁵I am the LORD who brought you out of Egypt to be your God; *you must be holy because I am holy.* NCV™

Uncleanness largely came through contact with things that were unclean

LEV 5:2 *If someone unintentionally touches anything ritually unclean, such as a dead animal, he is unclean and guilty as soon as he realizes what he has done.* GNT

Creatures were designated as either clean or unclean for eating

LEV 11:46–47 *“These are the instructions about animals, birds, and every living creature that swims in the water and every creature that swarms on the ground. ⁴⁷These instructions help you distinguish between clean and unclean, the animals you may eat and those you may not eat.”* GW

Uncleanness would defile God’s dwelling place amidst his people – and so required isolation . . .

LEV 15:31 *The LORD told Moses to warn the people of Israel about their uncleanness, so that they would not defile the Tent of his presence, which was in the middle of the camp. If they did, they would be killed.* GNT

DEUT 23:10–11 [MOSES, TO THE ISRAELITES:] *If someone among you becomes unclean due to nocturnal emissions, he must leave the camp and stay outside. ¹¹As evening approaches he must wash himself with water. Then at sunset, he may return to the camp.* ISV

. . . As such, while any person was unclean they could not participate in worship practices

NUM 9:6A *But some of the people could not celebrate the Passover on that day because they were unclean from touching a dead body.* NCV™

2CHR 23:19 *He [Jehoiada the priest] posted guards at the gates of the LORD’s temple, so no one who was ceremonially unclean in any way could enter.* NET

Cleansing typically involved washing and a purification period

LEV 17:15 *If a person, either a citizen or a foreigner, eats an animal that died by itself or was killed by another animal, he must wash his clothes and bathe in water. He will be unclean until evening; then he will be clean.* NCV™

Uncleanness often required offerings for atonement

LEV 14:19–20 *The priest shall offer the sin offering, to make atonement for him who is to be cleansed from his uncleanness. And afterward he shall kill the burnt offering. ²⁰And the priest shall offer the burnt*

offering and the grain offering on the altar. *Thus the priest shall make atonement for him, and he shall be clean.* ESV

Uncleanness was contrary to God's holiness and, in accordance, also his law. As such atonement for uncleanness was required.

Note: Spiritual purity is paralleled with cleanness, and sin with uncleanness

PROV 20:9 Who can say, *"I have kept my heart clean; I am pure from my sin"*? NET

LAM 1:8A *Jerusalem has sinned greatly, therefore she has become unclean.* ISV

What made ceremonial uncleanness incompatible with being in God's presence?

Why did ceremonial uncleanness (at times at least) require a sin offering?

With its parallels to sin, what does the teaching on ceremonial uncleanness teach us about the effect of sin on our relationship to God?

e) Epilogue: Israel's Persistence in Sin

Despite the Mosaic Law's provision for Israel's sin, the Israelites as a whole persisted in sin – rebelling against God and breaking his covenant with them. This showed that ultimately the law was not sufficient to deal with sin.

Israel's sin and rebellion in the desert

Ps 78:17, 40–41 *They continued to sin against him, to rebel in the desert against the Most High. ... ⁴⁰How often they rebelled against him in the wilderness! How often they caused him grief in the desert! ⁴¹Again and again they tested God, and they pushed the Holy One of Israel to the limit.* GW

God gave Israel his law early on in its journey from Egypt to the promised land. Despite this, Israel regularly sinned and rebelled against God throughout its desert journey.

Israel's sin and unfaithfulness during the time of the judges

JUDG 2:18–19 *When enemies made life miserable for the Israelites, the LORD would feel sorry for them. He would choose a judge and help that judge rescue Israel from its enemies. The LORD would be kind to Israel as long as that judge lived. ¹⁹But afterwards, the Israelites would become even more sinful than their ancestors had been. The Israelites were stubborn—they simply would not stop worshipping other gods or following the teachings of other religions.*

CEV

Note that the “judges” – from which the book of Judges takes its name – were the occasional leaders of Israel during the time following Joshua (and the settling of the promised land) until the death of Samuel, Israel's last judge.

Solomon's unfaithfulness and the consequent division of the kingdom . . .

1KI 11:9–13 *The LORD was angry with Solomon because he had shifted his allegiance away from the LORD, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him on two occasions ¹⁰and had warned him about this very thing, so that he would not follow other gods. But he did not obey*

the LORD's command. ¹¹So the LORD said to Solomon, "Because you insist on doing these things and have not kept the covenantal rules I gave you, I will surely tear the kingdom away from you and give it to your servant. ¹²However, for your father David's sake I will not do this while you are alive. I will tear it away from your son's hand instead. ¹³But I will not tear away the entire kingdom; I will leave your son one tribe for my servant David's sake and for the sake of my chosen city Jerusalem." NET

Solomon followed his father David as king, David having followed Saul, Israel's first king. Solomon's son was Rehoboam. During Rehoboam's reign the kingdom was divided.

... Jeroboam's subsequent archetypical apostasy in the northern kingdom

2KI 17:21–22 When he [God] tore Israel away from the family of David, the people of Israel made Jeroboam (Nebat's son) king. *Jeroboam forced Israel away from the LORD and led them to commit a serious sin.* ²²The Israelites followed all the sins Jeroboam committed and never turned away from them. GW

Following the division of Israel, Jeroboam was the first king of the breakaway northern kingdom, which was simply called "Israel". Jeroboam was concerned that if his people went to worship at the temple in Jerusalem – in the southern kingdom of Judah – he would risk losing his kingdom. He thus decided to institute false gods and an alternative system of worship. The false worship that Jeroboam instituted persisted throughout the existence of the northern kingdom of Israel, until the kingdom's demise.

Some kings in Judah did lead the people in godly ways, . . .

2CHR 14:2–4 *Asa did what the LORD his God desired and approved.* ³He removed the pagan altars and the high places, smashed the sacred pillars, and cut down the Asherah poles. ⁴He ordered Judah to seek the LORD God of their ancestors and to observe his law and commands.

NET

2CHR 19:4 *Jehoshaphat lived in Jerusalem. He went out among the people from Beer Sheba to the hill country of Ephraim and encouraged them to follow the LORD God of their ancestors.* NET

. . . but ultimately both kingdoms of Israel failed to keep God's laws and broke his covenant

JER 11:10 [GOD:] *They have gone back to the evil ways of their ancestors of old who refused to obey what I told them. They, too, have paid allegiance to other gods and worshiped them. Both the nation of Israel and the nation of Judah have violated the covenant I made with their ancestors.* NET

Why do you think that Israel turned to sin and persisted in it, especially after all God had done for her?

What lessons can we learn from the accounts of the sin of Israel and her kings?

How are God's people today better able to resist sin?

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Through prayer, encouragement and practical assistance we can assist and fellowship with persecuted Christians in their suffering. You can play a vital part in this through contacting one of the organizations listed below. Most produce regular news/prayer letters.

Barnabas Fund – www.barnabasfund.org

It provides material and spiritual support based on locally identified needs.

Christian Faith and Freedom – www.cffreedom.org

It advocates on behalf of and aids persecuted Christians.

Christian Solidarity International – www.csi-int.org

CSI works to defend religious liberty and help persecuted Christians.

Christian Solidarity Worldwide – www.csw.org.uk

It advocates for freedom of religion and justice for persecuted believers.

Open Doors – sb.od.org; www.opendoors.org.au

It equips believers for persecution and maintaining a witness to the Gospel.

Religious Liberty Commission – www.worldevangelicals.org/commissions/rlc

RLC defends and aids persecuted Christians. See also www.idop.org.

Religious Liberty Prayer Bulletin – rlprayerbulletin.blogspot.com.au

It provides weekly bulletins. Send a blank email to join-rlpb@hub.xc.org.

The Bible League – www.bibleleague.org/persecuted; www.bibleleague.com

It supplies Bibles to persecuted Christians and also provides training.

Voice of the Martyrs – www.persecution.com; www.persecution.com.au

VOM helps persecuted Christians spread the gospel. It also gives material aid.

World Watch Monitor – www.worldwatchmonitor.org

It reports the story of Christians under pressure for their faith.

Then the King will answer, 'I tell you the truth, anything you did for even the least of my people here, you also did for me.' Matthew 25:40 NCV

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