



Rooted in Scripture - Pointing to Jesus

BIBLE FOUNDATIONS

Hebrew Words for Sin, Repentance, and Forgiveness

What the Old Testament's Words Teach About Guilt, Turning Back to God, and Grace

The Short Answer

The Old Testament does not describe sin with only one Hebrew word. It speaks of sin as wrongdoing, guilt, rebellion, wickedness, resistance to God, and failure to live faithfully before Him. Likewise, repentance is more than feeling sorry. One of the Old Testament's most important repentance words is shuv - 'turn' or 'return.' The prophets repeatedly call God's people to turn from sin and return to the LORD. Forgiveness is also described through several complementary words. God forgives. He bears or carries away guilt. He cleanses what sin has defiled. He provides atonement. These words do not describe different ways of being saved. Together they help reveal the seriousness of sin and the richness of God's mercy. Psalm 51 brings many of these ideas together. David does not minimize his sin. He confesses it, asks God for mercy, seeks cleansing, and longs for a restored heart. Exodus 34:6-7 explains why such forgiveness is possible: God reveals Himself as compassionate, gracious, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, and forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin - while remaining perfectly just. The Gospel brings these themes to their fullest expression. Jesus bears sin, provides forgiveness, cleanses the guilty, calls people to repentance, and reconciles sinners to God. The goal is not merely to learn Hebrew vocabulary, but to understand sin more honestly, repentance more biblically, forgiveness more deeply, and the grace of God more clearly.

Exodus 34:5-7 · Psalm 32 · Psalm 51 · Isaiah 53:4-6 · Joel 2:12-13 · Micah 7:18-20

Opening Memory Anchor

God's forgiveness does not make sin small. It reveals how great His mercy is.



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PART ONE BEGINNER GUIDE

1. WHY DOES THE OLD TESTAMENT USE SEVERAL WORDS FOR SIN?

Because sin has more than one dimension. Read Exodus 34:6-7. When God reveals His character to Moses, three important words appear together: AVON - iniquity / guilt; PESHA - transgression / rebellion; CHATAAH - sin. Other passages add words describing wickedness, guilt, and resistance to God. Scripture can describe sin as wrongdoing, rebellion, wickedness, crookedness, guilt, unfaithfulness, and violation of God's commands. The vocabulary helps readers see that sin cannot be reduced to one simple definition. At its heart, sin is opposition to the God who created humanity and rightly calls people to love, trust, worship, and obey Him. Different words emphasize different aspects of that broken relationship.

Memory Anchor

Sin is more than making mistakes. It is a rupture in humanity's right relationship with God.

WORDS THAT DESCRIBE SIN, EVIL, REBELLION, AND GUILT

2. CHATA - חָטָא

Pronunciation: khah-TAH Strong's: H2398 Common Meaning: Sin / Do Wrong Key Scripture: Genesis 39:9; Judges 20:16

Chata is one of the major Hebrew verbs translated 'sin.' It can describe failing, doing wrong, or sinning against God or another person. A popular explanation says the Hebrew word for sin simply means 'to miss the mark.' There is some basis for imagery of missing in particular contexts. Judges 20:16 uses a related verbal form when describing skilled slingers who could throw a stone at a hair and 'not miss.' But this does not mean every occurrence of chata should be translated 'miss the mark.' In moral contexts, the word can describe genuine wrongdoing and guilt. Genesis 39:9 provides a clear example: Joseph refuses sexual sin because it would be great wickedness and sin against God. This is not merely an accidental failure to reach a target. It is moral wrongdoing against God.

Bible-Study Safeguard

A word's possible imagery should never be used to weaken what the passage actually says about sin.

3. CHET / CHATAAH - חֵטְא / חַטָּא

Pronunciation: KHATE / khat-tah-AH Strong's: H2399 / H2403 Common Meaning: Sin Key Scripture: Exodus 32:30; Exodus 34:7; Psalm 51

These related nouns belong to the same broad word family as chata. They describe sin or wrongdoing. Chataah can also refer to a sacrificial offering associated with sin or purification, depending on context. Psalm 51 repeatedly uses sin vocabulary because David is not trying to excuse what he has done. He brings his guilt honestly before God.

4. AVON - אֲוֵן

Pronunciation: ah-VOHN Strong's: H5771 Common Meaning: Iniquity / Guilt Key Scripture: Exodus 34:7; Psalm 32:5; Psalm 51:2

Avon is frequently translated 'iniquity.' Depending on context, it can refer to wrongdoing itself, the guilt associated with wrongdoing, or sometimes consequences connected with that guilt. Psalm 32:5 says David acknowledged his sin and did not hide his iniquity. The word reminds readers that sin is not merely an external act. Wrongdoing creates real moral guilt before God.

5. PESHA - פֶּשַׁע

Pronunciation: PEH-shah Strong's: H6588 Common Meaning: Transgression / Rebellion Key Scripture: Exodus 34:7; Isaiah 53:5; Psalm 51:1

Pesha often carries the idea of rebellion or transgression. It can describe the breaking of loyalty or rightful authority. This adds an important dimension to biblical sin. Sin is not merely weakness. Sometimes it is rebellion. Human beings do not merely fail to live perfectly. They resist the rightful authority of their Creator.



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6. RA - רָע

Pronunciation: RAH Strong's: H7451 Common Meaning: Evil / Bad / Wicked / Harmful Key Scripture: Genesis 6:5; Deuteronomy 30:15; Jonah 3:10

Ra is one of the Old Testament's most common words for what is bad, harmful, wicked, or evil. Its exact meaning depends on context. Sometimes it describes moral evil; sometimes something harmful, disastrous, or unpleasant. Genesis 6:5 uses the word in a clearly moral context when describing humanity's wickedness before the flood. Jonah 3:10 says God saw that Nineveh turned from its evil way. Ra therefore helps readers see why context matters even with a familiar English word such as 'evil.'

7. MARAH - מָרָה

Pronunciation: mah-RAH Strong's: H4784 Common Meaning: Rebel / Resist / Be Rebellious Key Scripture: Numbers 20:24; Deuteronomy 1:26, 43

Marah describes rebellion or resistance against rightful authority. It is especially significant in passages describing Israel's resistance to God. Numbers 20:24 recalls rebellion against God's command. Deuteronomy repeatedly uses forms of marah for Israel refusing to obey the LORD's command. Pesha and marah overlap, but they are not identical. Pesha often emphasizes transgression or rebellion. Marah highlights resisting or rebelling against authority. Both show that biblical sin can involve deliberate refusal to submit to God.

8. ASHAM - אָשָׁם

Pronunciation: ah-SHAHM Strong's: H816 Common Meaning: Guilt / Guilt Offering Key Scripture: Leviticus 5:14-19; Isaiah 53:10

Asham can refer to guilt and can also describe the guilt offering prescribed in Leviticus. Biblical guilt is not merely a feeling. Someone can feel guilty without actually being guilty, and someone can be guilty while feeling little remorse. Biblical guilt concerns real moral accountability. In Leviticus, asham can name the guilt offering, while chataah can name the sin or purification offering. These are related but distinct sacrificial categories. Their exact functions should be learned from Leviticus itself rather than assuming the offerings were interchangeable. Leviticus shows that guilt before God required more than pretending nothing happened. God provided a means of atonement and restoration.

Memory Anchor

Guilt is not merely feeling bad about sin. It is real accountability before God.

WORDS THAT DESCRIBE REPENTANCE

9. SHUV - שׁוּב

Pronunciation: SHOOV Strong's: H7725 Common Meaning: Turn / Return / Turn Back Key Scripture: Joel 2:12-13; Hosea 14:1-2

Shuv is one of the most important Old Testament words for understanding repentance. It is an ordinary Hebrew verb meaning turn, return, go back, or come back. The prophets repeatedly use it when calling Israel back to God. Joel 2:12 says, 'Return to me with all your heart.' Repentance therefore involves more than regret. It involves turning from sin and returning to God. This does not mean repentance earns salvation. It means genuine repentance changes direction.

Memory Anchor

Biblical repentance is not merely feeling sorry. It is turning from sin and returning to God.

10. DOES REPENTANCE SIMPLY MEAN "CHANGING YOUR MIND"?

Not completely. The New Testament Greek word metanoia is commonly explained as a 'change of mind,' although its biblical use is richer than that slogan alone. The Old Testament frequently portrays repentance through shuv: turn, return, come back. That imagery helps protect repentance from becoming merely intellectual. Biblical repentance involves the whole person. A person recognizes sin, confesses it, turns from it, returns toward God, and the resulting life begins moving in a different direction. This does not mean repentance requires instant perfection. A repentant person may still struggle. The key question is not, 'Has this person become flawless?' but, 'Which direction is this person turning?'

11. NACHAM - נָחַם

Pronunciation: nah-KAHM Strong's: H5162 Common Meaning: Relent / Regret / Be Sorry / Be Comforted Key Scripture: Genesis 6:6; Exodus 32:14; Jonah 3:10

Nacham is a challenging word because its meaning varies significantly by context. It may describe regret, sorrow, relenting, comfort, or consolation. Some passages use forms of nacham when describing God 'relenting' from announced judgment. This does not mean God discovers that He made a moral mistake, nor should every occurrence be forced into the English theological category 'repent.' Jonah announces judgment against Nineveh; the people turn from their evil ways; God does not bring the announced destruction. The passage reveals both the seriousness of divine warning and God's willingness to show mercy when sinners turn from evil. Context must determine the sense of nacham in each passage.



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WORDS THAT DESCRIBE FORGIVENESS

12. SALACH - סָלַח

Pronunciation: sah-LAHKH Strong's: H5545 Common Meaning: Forgive Key Scripture: Numbers 14:19-20; Psalm 103

Salach is one of the Old Testament's clearest verbs for forgiveness. Moses prays in Numbers 14:19 for God to pardon Israel according to the greatness of His steadfast love. God answers that He has pardoned. Forgiveness flows from God's mercy and character. It is not a declaration that sin never mattered. God forgives real guilt.

13. SELICHAH - סְלִיחָה

Pronunciation: seh-lee-KHAH Strong's: H5547 Common Meaning: Forgiveness / Pardon Key Scripture: Psalm 130:4

Selichah is a noun related to salach. Psalm 130:4 declares that with God there is forgiveness. Forgiveness is not merely an occasional action disconnected from God's character. The psalmist looks toward God as the One with whom forgiveness is found. The verse also connects forgiveness with reverence: God's mercy does not make Him less worthy of holy fear. It gives sinners reason to return to Him.

14. NASA - נָשָׂא

Pronunciation: nah-SAH Strong's: H5375 Common Meaning: Lift / Carry / Bear / Forgive Key Scripture: Exodus 34:7; Micah 7:18

Nasa is a broad Hebrew verb. Depending on context, it can mean lift, carry, bear, take away, or forgive. Exodus 34:7 uses a form of nasa when describing God forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin. The broader word family creates powerful biblical imagery: guilt can be pictured as something borne or carried. But context must still control interpretation. Nasa does not mean 'forgive' every time it appears. Because nasa is a verb with a broad semantic range, the actual grammatical form and surrounding syntax also matter. Readers who want the larger grammatical framework can see Study #247's discussion of Hebrew verb stems.

15. WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SALACH, SELICHAH, AND NASA?

They belong to overlapping forgiveness language but should not simply be treated as identical. Salach is a verb expressing forgiveness or pardon. Selichah is a related noun meaning forgiveness or pardon. Nasa has a much broader range involving lifting, carrying, bearing, or taking away and can communicate forgiveness in particular contexts. Together they enrich the biblical picture. God pardons guilt. Forgiveness is found with Him. God also removes or bears what sin has brought. Psalm 32 captures the relief of forgiven guilt. Psalm 130 celebrates forgiveness with God. Micah 7:18-19 celebrates the God who pardons iniquity and casts sins into the depths of the sea. The imagery differs. The mercy comes from the same God.

CLEANSING AND ATONEMENT

16. KAPHAR - כָּפַר

Pronunciation: kah-FAHR Strong's: H3722 Common Meaning: Make Atonement Key Scripture: Leviticus 16:29-34

Kaphar is central to Old Testament atonement language. The word appears repeatedly in Israel's sacrificial system. Leviticus 16 provides the clearest large-scale example: the Day of Atonement. Israel's sin is serious. God is holy. Yet God Himself provides a way for sinful people to remain in covenant relationship with Him. Atonement should therefore not be treated as humanity inventing a way to persuade a reluctant God to show mercy. The sacrificial system is God's provision.

17. TAHER - טָהַר

Pronunciation: tah-HAIR Strong's: H2891 Common Meaning: Be Clean / Purify / Cleanse Key Scripture: Psalm 51:7; Leviticus 16:30

Taher belongs to biblical purity and cleansing language. Psalm 51 uses cleansing imagery because David understands that sin has left him morally defiled. He asks God to cleanse him. The language points beyond avoiding punishment. David wants restoration, purity, and renewed fellowship with God.

18. KABAS - כָּבַס

Pronunciation: kah-BAHS Strong's: H3526 Common Meaning: Wash / Launder Key Scripture: Psalm 51:2, 7

Kabas literally involves washing clothing. Psalm 51 turns this ordinary washing image into a vivid prayer: 'Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity.' David is not asking merely for his record to look better. He wants God to cleanse what sin has stained.

Memory Anchor

Forgiveness addresses guilt. Cleansing addresses defilement. Atonement shows that reconciliation with a holy God is costly - and graciously provided by God.

PSALM 51 - A VOCABULARY OF REPENTANCE

19. WHAT DOES PSALM 51 TEACH ABOUT TRUE REPENTANCE?

Read Psalm 51 slowly. David uses several of the ideas already studied: PESHA - transgression; AVON - iniquity; CHATAAH - sin; KABAS - wash; TAHER - cleanse. But the psalm is more than a vocabulary lesson. David appeals to God's mercy, names his sin, does not blame someone else, asks to be washed and cleansed, asks for a clean heart and renewed spirit, longs for restored fellowship with God, and desires changed obedience.

A helpful biblical pattern is: RECOGNIZE SIN -> CONFESS SIN -> APPEAL TO GOD'S MERCY -> SEEK CLEANSING -> DESIRE INNER RENEWAL -> RETURN TO FAITHFUL OBEDIENCE. Repentance is neither, "I made a tiny mistake; it does not matter," nor, "I sinned, therefore there can never be hope for me." Biblical repentance says: "My sin is real, and God's mercy is real."



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PART TWO **WANT TO GO DEEPER?** **INTERMEDIATE**

20. DOES REPENTANCE EARN GOD'S FORGIVENESS?

No. Repentance is not payment for grace. Imagine someone owing a debt they cannot repay. Feeling sorry does not pay the debt. Promising to change does not erase the debt. Likewise, repentance does not place God in the sinner's debt. Forgiveness remains mercy. Psalm 51 begins with David appealing not to his own repentance but to God's character: 'Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love.' David repents because he needs mercy. He does not use repentance to purchase mercy. The New Testament preserves this relationship. Repentance and faith are genuine responses to the Gospel. They are not achievements that make sinners deserving of salvation.

Memory Anchor

Repentance does not purchase grace. It turns toward the God who gives grace.

21. IF GOD FORGIVES, WHY IS ATONEMENT NECESSARY?

This question reaches the heart of the Gospel. Why can God not simply say, 'Sin does not matter'? Because God is perfectly holy and just. Exodus 34:6-7 holds two truths together: God forgives, and God does not treat guilt as morally meaningless. Biblical forgiveness is therefore not divine indifference. The sacrificial system teaches Israel that sin brings guilt, defilement, separation, and death. Leviticus repeatedly shows God providing atonement. But animal sacrifices were never the final destination of the biblical story. Read Hebrews 10:1-14. The New Testament explains that the sacrifices pointed beyond themselves. Jesus provides the decisive sacrifice for sin. At the cross, sin is not minimized, justice is not abandoned, mercy is not withheld, and forgiveness is freely offered. Romans 3:21-26 describes God as both just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. The cross reveals that forgiveness is free to the sinner because its cost is borne by Christ.

22. HOW DOES ISAIAH 53 CONNECT SIN, BEARING, AND FORGIVENESS?

Read Isaiah 53:4-6. The Servant bears suffering associated with the sins of others. Isaiah says He was pierced for our transgressions - PESHA - and crushed for our iniquities - AVON. The LORD lays on Him the iniquity of us all. The passage develops the biblical theme of one who bears what belongs to others. The New Testament repeatedly connects Isaiah's Servant with Jesus: Matthew 8:16-17; Luke 22:37; Acts 8:26-35; 1 Peter 2:21-25. This is not a connection created merely because similar vocabulary sounds interesting. The New Testament explicitly identifies Jesus with Isaiah's suffering Servant. He bears sin so that sinners can be reconciled to God.

23. DOES GOD "FORGET" FORGIVEN SINS?

Scripture sometimes says God will 'remember' sins no more. See Jeremiah 31:34. This does not mean an all-knowing God literally loses information. Biblical remembering and not remembering often concern how someone acts in relation to what is remembered. When God promises, 'I will remember their sin no more,' the emphasis is covenantal forgiveness. He will not hold forgiven sin against His people as grounds for condemnation. The new covenant promise is therefore not divine amnesia. It is divine mercy.



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24. DOES FORGIVENESS ALWAYS REMOVE EARTHLY CONSEQUENCES?

No. Forgiveness and consequences are related but not identical. David provides an important example. God forgave David after his sin involving Bathsheba and Uriah (2 Samuel 12:13), yet serious consequences followed. Forgiveness restores the sinner's relationship with God. It does not necessarily erase every earthly consequence produced by sin. A person may be forgiven and still need to make restitution, accept discipline, face legal consequences, repair damage where possible, rebuild trust, or live with consequences that cannot be undone. Grace does not make accountability unnecessary.

25. DOES FORGIVING SOMEONE MEAN TRUSTING THEM AGAIN IMMEDIATELY?

No. Biblical forgiveness should not be confused with automatic restoration of trust. Forgiveness can reject personal vengeance and release the demand to personally make another person pay. Trust concerns whether someone has demonstrated reliability. Reconciliation normally requires participation from both sides. Someone can forgive while still maintaining appropriate boundaries. This distinction becomes especially important in situations involving abuse, violence, manipulation, coercion, repeated betrayal, criminal behavior, or unsafe relationships. Scripture does not require a person to pretend evil did not happen, remain in danger, require authorities to ignore crimes, or restore trust before trustworthiness has been demonstrated. Romans 12:18 says, 'If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.' That wording recognizes that reconciliation is not always entirely within one person's control.

Pastoral Safeguard

Forgiveness must never be used as a spiritual weapon to silence victims, hide abuse, avoid accountability, or force unsafe reconciliation.

26. WHAT IF SOMEONE KEEPS COMMITTING THE SAME SIN?

Scripture calls believers to genuine repentance, but genuine repentance does not mean believers instantly become incapable of repeating a sin. Sanctification is often a process. The important distinction is between STRUGGLING AGAINST SIN and MAKING PEACE WITH SIN. A person struggling may fall, confess, seek help, establish safeguards, and continue fighting. A person making peace with sin may defend it, hide it, rationalize it, or refuse to turn. Christians should avoid two opposite errors: 'If the sin happened again, the repentance must have been fake' - not necessarily; and 'As long as someone says sorry, continued deliberate sin does not matter' - also false. Biblical repentance produces fruit over time (Matthew 3:8). The goal is not sinless performance as proof of salvation, but a life increasingly turned toward God.

27. WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN CONVICTION AND CONDEMNATION?

Scripture describes the Holy Spirit exposing sin (John 16:8). Conviction brings sin into the light and calls the sinner toward repentance and Christ. Condemnation declares guilt and judgment. For those who are in Christ Jesus, Romans 8:1 declares, 'There is therefore now no condemnation.' This does not mean believers stop being convicted of sin. It means conviction no longer needs to drive the Christian toward hopelessness. God exposes sin in order to lead His people toward confession, cleansing, restoration, and growth. A useful distinction is: CONVICTION - 'This is sin. Bring it to God. Turn from it.' CONDEMNATION - 'You are beyond grace. Hide from God. There is no hope.' The Gospel gives sinners a reason to come into the light.

HOW DO THESE HEBREW WORDS FIT TOGETHER?

SIN	CHATA / CHET / CHATAAH	Wrongdoing before God
EVIL	RA	What is wicked, morally wrong, harmful, or opposed to good
REBELLION	PESHA / MARAH	Transgression and resistance against rightful authority
INIQUITY AND GUILT	AVON / ASHAM	Real moral accountability
TURN	SHUV	Turn from sin and return to God
FORGIVENESS	SALACH / SELICHAH / NASA	God pardons and bears away guilt
CLEANSING	TAHER / KABAS	God cleanses what sin has defiled
ATONEMENT	KAPHAR	God provides reconciliation with Himself
RESTORATION		Renewed fellowship and faithful living

This progression should not be treated as a rigid salvation formula. It is a teaching aid showing how several biblical ideas relate to one another.



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THE GOSPEL CONNECTION

The Hebrew vocabulary of sin, repentance, forgiveness, cleansing, and atonement prepares readers to understand why the Gospel is such good news. Humanity's problem is not merely lack of information. Sin is real - CHATA. Human beings practice what is evil - RA. They rebel against God - PESHA, MARAH. Sin creates real guilt - AVON, ASHAM. God calls sinners to turn - SHUV. Yet repentance cannot erase guilt by itself. Sinners need forgiveness - SALACH, SELICHAH. They need guilt borne away - NASA. They need cleansing - TAHER, KABAS. They need atonement - KAPHAR.

The Old Testament sacrificial system teaches that reconciliation with the holy God cannot be achieved by simply pretending sin does not matter. Then Isaiah speaks of a Servant. He is pierced for transgressions - PESHA. He is crushed for iniquities - AVON. He bears the sins of others. The New Testament announces that this Servant is Jesus. Jesus lives without sin. He willingly gives His life. He bears sin. He dies. He rises from the dead. He calls sinners to repent and believe the Gospel. Through Him, forgiveness is offered freely.

The cross does not reveal a loving Jesus rescuing sinners from an unwilling Father. The Father sends the Son in love. The Son willingly gives Himself. The Spirit applies God's saving work. Salvation is the work of the triune God. At the cross, God's holiness remains holy; God's justice remains just; God's mercy remains merciful; God's love acts; God's promises are fulfilled; and sinners can be forgiven without sin being declared insignificant.

The Gospel is therefore not: 'Sin does not matter.' The Gospel is: 'Sin matters so deeply that Christ bore it - and God's grace is so great that sinners who come to Him can truly be forgiven.'

Memory Anchor

At the cross, God does not deny the seriousness of sin. He provides the answer to it.

QUICK REFERENCE

SIN, EVIL, AND GUILT	CHATA - חָטָא	H2398	Sin / Do Wrong	Genesis 39:9
	CHET - חֵטְא	H2399	Sin	Exodus 32:30
	CHATAAH - חָטְאָה	H2403	Sin / Sin or Purification Offering depending on context	Exodus 34:7
	AVON - עוֹן	H5771	Iniquity / Guilt	Psalms 32:5
	PESHA - פֶּשַׁע	H6588	Transgression / Rebellion	Isaiah 53:5
	RA - רָע	H7451	Evil / Bad / Wicked / Harmful	Genesis 6:5
REPENTANCE	MARAH - מָרָה	H4784	Rebel / Resist	Numbers 20:24
	ASHAM - אָשַׁם	H816	Guilt / Guilt Offering	Leviticus 5:15
	SHUV - שׁוּב	H7725	Turn / Return	Joel 2:12-13
	NACHAM - נָחַם	H5162	Relent / Regret / Comfort	Jonah 3:10
FORGIVENESS	SALACH - סָלַח	H5545	Forgive	Numbers 14:19-20
	SELICHAH - סְלִיחָה	H5547	Forgiveness / Pardon	Psalms 130:4
	NASA - נָשָׂא	H5375	Lift / Carry / Bear / Forgive	Exodus 34:7
CLEANSING AND ATONEMENT	KAPHAR - כָּפַר	H3722	Make Atonement	Leviticus 16
	TAHER - טָהַר	H2891	Clean / Purify	Psalms 51:7
	KABAS - כָּבַס	H3526	Wash	Psalms 51:2
GOD'S CHARACTER - SEE STUDY #249	RAHUM - רַחוּם	H7349	Compassionate / Merciful	Exodus 34:6
	HESED - חֶסֶד	H2617	Steadfast Love / Faithful Love	Exodus 34:6



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HOW TO STUDY THESE WORDS RESPONSIBLY

1. START WITH THE PASSAGE.

Read the paragraph or chapter before opening a dictionary.

2. IDENTIFY THE ACTUAL HEBREW WORD.

Do not assume every English occurrence of 'sin,' 'evil,' 'repent,' or 'forgive' represents the same Hebrew word.

3. COMPARE SEVERAL ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS.

Translation differences can reveal places where a Hebrew word has a wider range.

4. CHECK THE GRAMMATICAL FORM.

Hebrew verbs can change function depending on their stem and form. A word such as *nasa* demonstrates why the lexical root alone may not tell the reader exactly what the verb is doing in a particular sentence. See Study #247 for a fuller introduction to Hebrew verb stems.

5. LOOK AT OTHER OCCURRENCES.

Observe how the biblical authors actually use the word.

6. LET CONTEXT CONTROL MEANING.

Do not import every dictionary definition into one verse.

7. DISTINGUISH WORD MEANING FROM THEOLOGY.

A theological doctrine may draw upon many passages and words. It should not be forced into the dictionary definition of one Hebrew term.

8. BE CAUTIOUS WITH ETYMOLOGY.

A word's historical root does not automatically determine its meaning in every biblical passage.

9. AVOID "SECRET HEBREW" CLAIMS.

Hebrew does not reveal a hidden Gospel through symbolic meanings assigned to individual letters.

10. FOLLOW THE BIBLICAL STORY.

Observe how sin, rebellion, repentance, forgiveness, sacrifice, cleansing, and atonement develop across Scripture.

11. LOOK TO JESUS WHERE SCRIPTURE LEADS.

The New Testament explicitly connects Jesus with the suffering Servant, sacrifice, priesthood, forgiveness, and the new covenant.

Bible-Study Safeguard

Original-language study should make readers more careful with Scripture - not more confident in meanings Scripture never communicated.

REVIEW AND RETENTION

1. What are several major Old Testament words describing sin and guilt? Chata/chataah, avon, pesha, ra, marah, and asham.

2. What does chata mean? To sin or do wrong, depending on context.

3. Why is 'sin simply means missing the mark' incomplete? Because although missing imagery occurs in some contexts, moral uses of chata describe genuine wrongdoing and guilt.

4. What does avon emphasize? Iniquity, guilt, or related consequences depending on context.

5. What does pesha emphasize? Transgression or rebellion.

6. What does ra mean? Evil, bad, wicked, or harmful depending on context.

7. What does marah emphasize? Rebellion or resistance against rightful authority.

8. What does asham mean? Guilt or guilt offering depending on context.

9. How is the asham offering different from the chataah offering? They are related but distinct sacrificial categories in Leviticus and should not be treated as interchangeable.

10. What Hebrew word is especially important for understanding repentance? Shuv.

11. What does shuv mean? Turn or return.

12. Is repentance merely feeling sorry? No. Biblical repentance involves turning from sin and returning toward God.

13. Does repentance earn forgiveness? No. Repentance is a response to grace, not payment for grace.

14. What does salach mean? Forgive or pardon.

15. What does selichah mean? Forgiveness or pardon.

16. What does nasa mean? Lift, carry, bear, or forgive depending on grammatical form and context.

17. What does kaphar mean? Make atonement.

18. What do taher and kabs contribute to the picture? They emphasize cleansing and washing.

19. Why does Psalm 51 matter for this study? It brings together sin, guilt, confession, mercy, washing, cleansing, renewal, and restored fellowship with God.

20. Does forgiveness always remove earthly consequences? No.

21. Does forgiving another person require immediate restoration of trust? No. Forgiveness, trust, reconciliation, accountability, and boundaries are related but distinct issues.

22. What does Isaiah 53 teach about the Servant? He suffers in connection with the transgressions and iniquities of others, and the New Testament explicitly identifies Jesus with this suffering Servant.

23. Why is atonement necessary if God is forgiving? Because God's forgiveness does not mean His holiness and justice cease to matter. Scripture presents God Himself as providing the means of reconciliation.

24. What is the ultimate goal of studying these Hebrew words? To understand Scripture more carefully, grasp the seriousness of sin and greatness of God's mercy, and see more clearly the Gospel fulfilled in Jesus.



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FINAL MEMORY ANCHORS

- Sin is more than making mistakes. It is a rupture in humanity's right relationship with God.
- Biblical evil must be interpreted in context; it can describe moral wickedness or what is harmful or disastrous.
- Rebellion language reminds readers that sin can involve deliberate resistance to God.
- Guilt is not merely feeling bad about sin. It is real accountability before God.
- Biblical repentance is not merely feeling sorry. It is turning from sin and returning to God.
- Repentance does not purchase grace. It turns toward the God who gives grace.
- God forgives real guilt.
- Forgiveness is found with God.
- Forgiveness does not mean sin never mattered.
- Forgiveness addresses guilt.
- Cleansing addresses defilement.
- Atonement reveals God's provision for reconciliation.
- God's mercy and justice do not compete.
- Forgiveness does not always remove earthly consequences.
- Forgiveness does not require pretending evil never happened.
- Forgiveness and restored trust are not identical.
- Biblical repentance produces fruit, but repentance should not be confused with instant perfection.
- At the cross, God does not deny the seriousness of sin. He provides the answer to it.
- The Gospel does not say sin is small.
- The Gospel reveals that God's grace is greater.

SCRIPTURE READING PATH

Genesis 3 - Humanity's rebellion and the entrance of sin
Genesis 6:5-8 - Human wickedness and God's judgment
Genesis 39:1-12 - Joseph refuses to sin against God
Exodus 32 - The golden calf and Israel's sin
Exodus 34:5-7 - God forgives iniquity, transgression, and sin
Leviticus 4-5 - Sin offerings, guilt offerings, and forgiveness
Leviticus 16 - The Day of Atonement
Numbers 14:11-20 - Moses asks God to forgive Israel
Numbers 20:23-24 - Rebellion against God's command
Deuteronomy 1:19-46 - Israel's refusal to obey and rebellion against the LORD's command
Deuteronomy 30:15-20 - Life and good, death and evil
2 Samuel 11-12 - David's sin, confrontation, forgiveness, and consequences
Psalm 32 - Confession and the joy of forgiveness
Psalm 51 - Sin, confession, cleansing, and restoration
Psalm 78 - Israel's broader pattern of rebellion and God's faithfulness
Psalm 103:8-14 - God's compassion and forgiveness
Psalm 130 - Forgiveness with God
Isaiah 1:16-20 - Washing, repentance, and forgiveness
Isaiah 53:4-12 - The Servant bears sin
Jeremiah 31:31-34 - The new covenant and sins remembered no more

Ezekiel 18:21-32 - Turn and live
Ezekiel 36:22-28 - Cleansing and a new heart
Hosea 14:1-9 - Return to the LORD
Joel 2:12-13 - Return with all your heart
Jonah 3 - Nineveh turns from evil
Micah 7:18-20 - God pardons iniquity
Matthew 3:1-12 - Repentance and its fruit
Mark 1:14-15 - Repent and believe the Gospel
Luke 15 - Repentance, restoration, and the Father's joy
Luke 22:14-20 - Jesus and the new covenant
Luke 24:44-47 - Repentance and forgiveness proclaimed to the nations
Acts 2:22-41 - Repentance and faith in Christ
Romans 3:21-26 - God is just and the justifier
Romans 5:6-11 - Reconciliation through Christ
Romans 8:1-4 - No condemnation in Christ
2 Corinthians 5:17-21 - Reconciliation
Hebrews 9-10 - Sacrifice, atonement, and Christ
1 Peter 2:21-25 - Jesus bears sins
1 John 1:5-2:2 - Confession, forgiveness, cleansing, and Christ our advocate

WHERE CAN I LEARN MORE?

Helpful tools include a Bible with cross-references and translation notes; a concordance connected to Strong's numbers; a reliable Hebrew-English lexicon; an interlinear Bible used alongside a normal Bible translation; STEP Bible for examining Hebrew words, forms, and occurrences; Blue Letter Bible for accessible Strong's and concordance tools; and BibleProject resources on sin, sacrifice, atonement, holiness, and biblical word studies. For deeper study, readers may consult technical Hebrew lexicons, Hebrew grammars, and reputable commentaries on Exodus, Leviticus, Psalms, Isaiah, and the Minor Prophets. Studies #247-#249 may also be useful: #247 - 100 Important Hebrew Words for Deeper Study; #248 - Names of God in Hebrew; #249 - Hebrew Words That Reveal God's Character.

Resource Safeguard

Listing a resource does not mean 3Nails endorses every theological position, methodology, statistic, strategy, publication, or conclusion it produces. Compare resources. Examine words in context. And continually return to Scripture.



Rooted in Scripture - Pointing to Jesus

FINAL THOUGHT

Sin is easy to minimize. It can be renamed a mistake, a weakness, a bad choice, a personality flaw, or something everyone does. Scripture speaks more honestly. Chata - sin. Ra - evil. Pesha - rebellion. Marah - resistance against God. Avon - iniquity and guilt. Asham - real accountability. But Scripture does not leave sinners standing beneath vocabulary describing guilt. God speaks another word: Shuv - return. That invitation exists because of who God is. He is compassionate - Rahum. He is rich in steadfast love - Heseled. He forgives - Salach. With Him there is forgiveness - Selichah. He bears away guilt - Nasa. He cleanses - Taher. He washes what sin has stained - Kabas. And He provides atonement - Kaphar.

Psalms 51 shows a guilty man with nowhere to hide. David does not defend himself, rename his sin, or bargain with God. He appeals to mercy. He asks to be washed, asks for a clean heart, and asks to be restored. Scripture's story continues beyond David. Sacrifices are offered. Priests minister. Prophets call sinners to return. Isaiah announces a Servant who will bear the sins of others. Then Jesus comes. The New Testament identifies Him as that suffering Servant. He bears sin, gives His life, rises from death, calls sinners to repent and believe, and offers forgiveness that sinners could never purchase for themselves.

This is why studying Hebrew words for sin should never end merely with a better definition of sin. It should lead toward repentance. Studying repentance should lead toward the God to whom sinners return. Studying forgiveness should reveal the greatness of His mercy. Studying atonement should lead toward the cross. And the cross leads to Jesus. Sin is real. Guilt is real. Repentance matters. Forgiveness is possible. Grace is greater.

Rooted in Scripture - Pointing to Jesus.