

Sin implies Guilt (Hebrew: 'âshâm, Greek: ěňochĥs)
A series on the meaning of sin (part 6)

Many Hebrew terms overlap each other in meaning, which contributes to the challenges of any word study. Simplifying a word's definition risks an incomplete understanding and a biased interpretation of God's word. This word study series attempts to tackle the web of words behind "sin," which the reader can use as a starting point for a deeper study.

While sin describes doing wrong in the sight of God, guilt is strongly associated and, in some instances, synonymous with it. Guilt implies criminal responsibility in a court of law; in God's court of law, the accused is guilty before the law.

'Āshâm (Strong's #H817)

This Hebrew masculine noun defines sin as an implication of guilt. When portraying sin as a form of guiltiness, it is with the view that the sinner acknowledges their guilt in the offense and is prepared to compensate for it by making an offering.

Abimelech said, "What is this you have done to us? One of the people might easily have lain with your wife, and you would have brought guilt (**'âshâm**) upon us." (Gen 26:10)

He shall also bring his guilt (**'âshâm**) offering (**'âshâm**) to the Lord for his sin which he has committed, a female from the flock, a lamb or a goat as a sin offering. So the priest shall make atonement on his behalf for his sin. (Lev 5:6)

It is a guilt (**'âshâm**) offering (**'âshâm**); he was certainly guilty before the Lord." (Lev 5:19)

The guilt (**'âshâm**) offering (**'âshâm**) is like the sin offering, there is one law for them; the priest who makes atonement with it shall have it. (Lev 7:7)

Surely God will shatter the head of His enemies,
The hairy crown of him who goes on in his guilty (**'âshâm**) deeds (**'âshâm**). (Ps 68:21)

But the Lord was pleased
To crush Him, putting Him to grief;
If He would render Himself as a guilt (**'âshâm**) offering (**'âshâm**),
He will see His offspring,
He will prolong His days,
And the good pleasure of the Lord will prosper in His hand. (Isa 53:10)

For neither Israel nor Judah has been forsaken
By his God, the Lord of hosts,
Although their land is full of guilt (**'âshâm**)
Before the Holy One of Israel. (Jer 51:5)

Ěňochĥs (Strong's #G1777)

The Greek adjective ěňochĥs is used to refer to a person subject to a certain penalty under the law; but, in the Septuagint (LXX), ěňochĥs is used for a person who receives a death penalty for significant crimes that God views abhorrent.

If there is a man who commits adultery with another man's wife, one who commits adultery with his friend's wife, the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death. If there is a man who lies with his father's wife, he has uncovered his father's nakedness; both of them shall surely be put to death, their bloodguiltiness (**ěňochĥs**) is upon them. If there is a man who lies with his daughter-in-law, both of them shall surely be put to death; they have committed incest, their bloodguiltiness (**ěňochĥs**) is upon them. If there is a man who lies with a male as those who lie with a woman, both of them have committed a detestable act; they shall surely be put to death. Their bloodguiltiness (**ěňochĥs**) is upon them. (Lev 20:10-13)

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A series on the meaning of sin (part 6) (page 2)

The meaning of ěňochōs, in the context of a death penalty, is carried through to the New Testament. However, in contrast to the Old Testament where punishment is immediate, judgment in the New Testament is delayed.

You have heard that the ancients were told, 'You shall not commit murder' and 'Whoever commits murder shall be liable (**ěňochōs**) to the court.' But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty (**ěňochōs**) before the court; and whoever says to his brother, 'You good-for-nothing,' shall be guilty (**ěňochōs**) before the supreme court; and whoever says, 'You fool,' shall be guilty (**ěňochōs**) enough to go into the fiery hell. (Matt 5:21-22)

"Truly I say to you, all sins shall be forgiven the sons of men, and whatever blasphemies they utter; but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty (**ěňochōs**) of an eternal sin"—because they were saying, "He has an unclean spirit." (Mark 3:28-30)

Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty (**ěňochōs**) of the body and the blood of the Lord. (1 Cor 11:27)

Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and might free those who through fear of death were subject (**ěňochōs**) to slavery all their lives. (Heb 2:14-15)

References:

1. Brown C, ed., *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, vols. 2 and 3, Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, (1979).