Hebrew in the Second Temple Period

The Hebrew of the Dead Sea Scrolls and of Other Contemporary Sources

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AB	Anchor Bible
ABD	*Anchor Bible Dictionary.* Ed. D.N. Freedman. 6 vols. New York: Doubleday, 1992
AbrNSup	Abr-Nahrain: Supplement Series
AOAT	Alter Orient und Altes Testament
AS	Assyriological Studies
ATD	Das Alte Testament Deutsch
ATDA	Alte Testament Deutsch Apokryphen
ATDan	Acta Theologica Danica
BDB	Brown, F., S.R. Driver, and C.A. Briggs. *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament.* Oxford: Clarendon, 1907
BETL	Bibliotheca ephemeridum theologicarum lovaniensium
Bib	*Biblica*
BO	Bibliotheca Orientalis
BJS	Brown Judaic Studies
BN	*Biblische Notizen*
BO	*Bibliotheca Orientalis*
BWANT	Beiträge zur Wissenschaft vom Alten und Neuen Testament
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
CBQ	*Catholic Biblical Quarterly*
CHANE	Culture and History of the Ancient near East
ConBOT	Coniectanea biblica: Old Testament Series
DCLS	Deuterocanonical and Cognate Literature Studies
DSD	*Dead Sea Discoveries*
DSSEL	*Dead Sea Scrolls Electronic Library.* Edited by Emanuel Tov. Rev. ed. Leiden: Brill, 2006
DSSSE	*Dead Sea Scrolls Study Edition.* Edited by Florentino García Martínez and Eibert J.C. Tigchelaar. 2 vols. Leiden: Brill, 1997–1998
ELO	Elementa Linguarum Orientis
ErIsr	*Eretz Israel*
FAT	Forschungen zum Alten Testament
FGS	Functional Grammar Series
FL	*Folia Linguistica*
FLSS	Foundation of Language: Supplementary Series

GD	Gorgias Dissertations
GCALL	Georgetown Classics in Arabic Language and Linguistics
Gesenius–Buhl	*Wilhelm Gesenius' Hebräisches und Aramäisches handwörterbuch über das Alte Testament, in verbindung mit H. Zimmern, W. Max Müller und O. Weber.* Ed. F. Buhl. 17th ed. Leipzig: Vogel, 1915
GKC	*Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar.* Edited by E. Kautsch, Translated by A.E. Cowley. 2d ed. Oxford: Clarendon, 1910
HALAT	Koehler, L., W. Baumgartner, and J.J. Stamm. *Hebräisches und aramäisches Lexikon zum Alten Testament.* 3 vols. 3d ed. Leiden: Brill, 1967–1995 (KBL3)
HALOT	Koehler, L., W. Baumgartner and J.J. Stamm, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament.* Translated and edited under the supervision of M.E.J. Richardson. Leiden, 1994–2000. Electronic edition (CD-Rom), 2001
HAR	*Hebrew Annual Review*
HBM	Hebrew Bible Monographs
HTKAT	Herders theologischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament
HO	Handbuch der Orientalistik
HS	*Hebrew Studies*
HSM	Harvard Semitic Monographs
HSS	Harvard Semitic Studies
HTKAT	Herders theologischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament
HTR	Harvard Theological Review
HUCA	*Hebrew Union College Annual*
IES	Israel Exploration Society
JANES	*Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society*
JAOS	*Journal of the American Oriental Society*
JBL	*Journal of Biblical Literature*
JDS	Judean Desert Studies
JJS	*Journal of Jewish Studies*
JNES	*Journal of Near Eastern Studies*
JNSL	*Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages*
Joüon–Muraoka	Joüon, P. *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew.* Ed. P. Joüon and T. Muraoka. 2 vols. Subsidia Biblica 27. Rome: Pontficio Instituto Biblico, 2006 (rev. ed. 2009)
JQR	*Jewish Quarterly Review*
JSJSup	Journal for the Study of Judaism: Supplement Series

JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament: Supplement Series
JSS	*Journal of Semitic Studies*
LASBF	*Liber annuus Studii biblici franciscani*
Le Muséon	*Le Muséon: Revue d'études orientales*
Leš	*Lešonénu*
LSAWS	Linguistic Studies in Ancient West Semitic
NJPS	*Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures: The New JPS Translation according to the Traditional Hebrew Text.* Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1985
NTOA	Novum Testamentum et Orbis Antiquus
OLA	Orientalia lovaniensia analecta
OSSM	Oxford Surveys in Syntax and Morphology
OtSt	Oudtestamentische Studiën
PBM	Paternoster Biblical Monographs
RB	*Revue biblique*
RevQ	*Revue de Qumran*
RL	*Russian Linguistics*
SBLMS	Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series
ScrHier	Scripta hierosolymitana
Shnaton	*Shnaton: An Annual for Biblical and Ancient Near Eastern Studies*
SSLL	Studies in Semitic Languages and Linguistics
SSN	Studia semitica neerlandica
STDJ	Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah
SVTG	Septuaginta: Vetus Testamentum Graecum
Textus	*Textus: Annual of the Hebrew University Bible Project*
ThWAT	*Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament.* Edited by G.J. Botterweck and H. Ringgren. Stuttgart, 1970–
TS	*Theological Studies*
TSL	Typological Studies in Language
TY	Talmud Yerushalmi
TZ	*Theologische Zeitschrift*
VT	*Vetus Testamentum*
VTSup	Vetus Testamentum Supplements
ZA	*Zeitschrift für Assyriologie*
ZAH	*Zeitschrift für Althebraistik*
ZAW	*Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*
Zutot	*Zutot: Perspectives on Jewish Culture*

HOW DOES ALMSGIVING PURGE SINS?

Gary A. Anderson

I have been working for some time on a significant semantic development that occurred in Second Temple Hebrew, probably as a result of the influence of Aramaic: the movement from thinking of sin as a weight that an individual must bear (לשאת עון) to the notion that sin is a debt (חוב) that must be repaid. A few years earlier at another Orion conference, I laid out my basic thesis for this project.[1] In this essay I would like to extend that argument in a new direction and discuss the way idioms for cleansing or purging function in Second Temple Hebrew.

A. Sin as a Debt

Let me begin by retracing my steps briefly and articulating my basic thesis about the evolution of the biblical metaphor for sin. The nucleus of my project began while I was working on the *Damascus Document*. Like most readers of this text, I was impressed by how biblical it was. Not only did it frequently cite or paraphrase the Bible but much of the idiom of the text itself was the result of a conscious imitation of biblical style. A comparison of this Qumran text with any portion of the Mishnah would reveal to the reader quite quickly just how biblicizing the Qumran dialect of Hebrew appears. Yet when I reached the third column I encountered a surprise.

> Because [all] the first members of the covenant *became liable* [הבו[2]], they were given over to the sword (Ps 78:62). They had forsaken the covenant of

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[2] The spelling is a bit unusual, as the original letter ח has been replaced by ה, which gives the reading of הבו in place of the expected חבו. This is probably the result of the general weakening of the guttural consonants that has long been noticed as a feature of Qumran Hebrew.

God and chosen their own will. They turned after their stubborn hearts so that each did his own will. (CD 3:10–12)[3]

As the writer documents the sins of Israel, he creates his text from a pastiche of biblical sources, but in the middle of his account he diverges dramatically from this biblicizing pattern and introduces a root for sin—חב—that is more at home in Mishnaic Hebrew than Biblical. About two columns later one encounters a similar situation: "The deeds of David were recorded and, except for the blood of Uriah, God forgave (עזב) them" (CD 5:5–6). This is more surprising than the reference to culpability as a form of debt, for one cannot find in either the Bible or rabbinic sources the verb עזב, "to forsake," used as a term for forgiveness. Yet Aramaic does mark the act of forgiveness with a verb—שבק—that normally means "to forsake." It would appear that the author of the CD has used עזב as a calque for this particular Aramaic verb. This should not be too surprising, for a very similar calque can be found in the prayer that Jesus teaches his disciples, "forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors" (Matt 6:12). As Raymond Brown once wrote, the language of the Our Father prayer must derive from an underlying Semitic tradition:

> The Matthean use of "debts" has a Semitic flavor; for, while in secular Greek "debt" has no religious coloring, in Aramaic *ḥôbâ* is a financial and commercial term that has been caught up into the religious vocabulary. . . . The idea of remitting (*aphienai*) debts which appears in our petition is also more Semitic than Greek, for "remission" has a religious sense only in the Greek of the LXX, which is under Hebrew influence.[4]

Let us return to the usage of עזב in CD to mark the notion of forgiveness. This same sort of usage is attested in Sir 3:13: "And even if [your father's] understanding fails, forgive him [עזוב לו], and do not put him to shame all the days of his life." It is worth noting that the Syriac has translated עזב with the term שבק. The reason for the choice of the root עזב is not difficult to explain. A debt is an obligation that one owes to another. One can either exercise one's rights and collect the sum that is owed, or forsake those rights. Both שבק and עזב refer to the act of abandoning or forsaking something. Indeed in Neh 5:10, we see Nehemiah exhorting his countrymen to be lenient toward those who are in debt. The Hebrew

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[3] All translations in this paper are my own except for those from the Hebrew Bible proper. The latter are drawn from the NJPS.

[4] R.E. Brown, "The Pater Noster as an Eschatological Prayer," *TS* 22 (1961): 175–208; reprinted in idem, *New Testament Essays* (Milwaukee: Bruce, 1965), 217–53. The citation is taken from the reprint, p. 244.

reads: נעזבה־נא את־המשא הזה, which the NJPS translates: "Let us now abandon those claims." Abandonment, in this instance, means the gracious act of foregoing on one's legal right to call in a debt.

The significance of this transformation did not become clear to me until I read an article by Baruch Schwartz on the common biblical idiom for culpability, לשאת עון, "to bear a sin." As he demonstrated so clearly, this metaphor can point in two directions. In a situation of culpability, it means, "to assume the weight of sin upon one's back"; in contexts of forgiveness, "to remove the weight of sin from another's back."[5] As the concordance indicates, this idiom is by far and away the most common for denoting the ill effects of sin. As one can see from the following chart, the conjunction of נשא and עון occurs some 108 times in the Bible whereas its closest competitor סלח עון occurs just 17 times:

Hebrew Verb	Translation	Number of Occurrences
נשא	"to bear (or bear away) a sin"	108
סלח	"to forgive a sin" (etymology unknown)	17
כפר	"to wipe away a sin"	6

Strikingly, when we turn to the Targums we find that our Aramaic translator does render this phrase accurately into Aramaic when the reference is to the bearing of a real physical burden, but when we see the Hebrew idiom used to speak about sins it is replaced with another idiom—that of sins conceived of as a debt.[6] So לשאת עון, meaning, "to bear the weight of a sin," is translated לקבלא חובא, "to assume a debt;" while לשאת עון, "to bear away a sin," is translated למשבק חובא, "to remit or absolve a debt." The replacement is systematic, and from this we can come to a rather important conclusion: whereas First Temple Jews understood sin primarily as a weight to be born, in the Second Temple sins had come to be debts.[7]

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[5] B.J. Schwartz, "Term or Metaphor: The Biblical Expression 'To Bear a Sin'," *Tarbiz* 63 (1994): 149–71 (in Hebrew). Also see idem, "The Bearing of Sin in Priestly Literature," in *Pomegranates and Golden Bells: Studies in Biblical, Jewish, and Near Eastern Ritual, Law, and Literature in Honor of Jacob Milgrom* (ed. D.P. Wright, D.N. Freedman, and A. Hurvitz; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1995), 3–21.

[6] The Targums in question are Onqelos, Neophyti and Pseudo-Jonathan. The equivalences are standard though not without an occasional variation.

[7] I am not presuming that the Targums date to the Second Temple period. But the consistency of translation by all three of the major Targums suggests a very ancient practice, one that I believe stretches back to the Second Temple period. One should compare the

Perhaps the best way to appreciate this change is simply to pick up a rabbinic dictionary and consult the various terms that have to do with debts and debt-repayment. Many of them double as terms for sin and its consequent punishment or forgiveness. Consider, for examples the terms פרע "to pay" (and פורענות "punishment"), גבה "to collect on a debt," חב, "to owe, be in debt," מחל [Hebrew] / שבק [Aramaic], "to forsake, forgive," and שטר־חוב, "bond of indebtedness." All of these terms originated in the conventional world of financial commerce but then developed secondary meanings that pertained to the culpability for or forgiveness of sin. Many of them had their origin in Aramaic (as a quick examination of the Syriac dictionary will disclose) and found their way into the contemporary Hebrew lexicon. Though handbooks on the New Testament frequently explain this propensity to describe sin as debt as the unique contribution of Second Temple Judaism, it would be more accurate to say that the idea had its origin in the Aramean world more generally. From there it spread both to early Judaism and, somewhat later, to Christianity.

B. Repaying the Debt in Full

I mentioned that the replacement of נשא עון in the Targum by קבל or שבק חובא was complete. Though this is correct for the most part, it does not do justice to the scope of the transformation when the idiom of sin as debt becomes the dominant metaphor. For the metaphor of sin as burden the picture is quite simple. Forgiveness is marked by the removal of a burden. The same is true for a stain—forgiveness refers to the state of being cleansed. But a more complicated picture attends the metaphor of sin as a debt. For when one falls into debt two different solutions are possible. Either one pays the full sum of what is owed or the obligation to repay is graciously remitted by the holder of the bond. The same set of alternatives exists when this metaphor becomes illustrative of human sin: the sinner can either make full payment on what is owed by means of some sort of physical suffering, or the sin can be gracious remitted by the offended party. The latter is marked by ἀφίημι in Greek, עזב in Hebrew, and שבק in Aramaic.

An excellent example of making full payment can be found at the very beginning of Second Isaiah. In the beginning of an oracle that is designed

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use of the verb ἀφίεναι in Greek to translate נשא. The Greek is not as consistent as the Targums but it is certainly a product of the Second Temple period.

"to comfort" the people Israel, we hear that the prophet is exhorted to declare: "that [Jerusalem's] term of service is over, that her iniquity is expiated; for she has received at the hand of the Lord double for all her sins" (40:2). The key phrase here is נרצה עונה, which has been translated somewhat freely as "her iniquity is expiated." In fact, the verse literally says: "her sin has been accepted." Everyone concedes that this literal translation makes no sense. There must be two different meanings to the root רצה, one "to be acceptable" (reflecting Levitical usage) and the other "to repay" (a meaning that is common in Mishnaic Hebrew). In an earlier article, I argued that these two meanings should not be understood to derive from two different roots as some recent dictionaries have suggested.[8] Rather, the meaning of repayment can be seen as a logical extension of the earlier sense of being acceptable.

Let me summarize briefly. In Leviticus, the verb רצה is used most commonly in association with the שלמים sacrifice. This should not surprise us, as this sacrifice has a close connection with the act of making a vow, and a vow can be considered as an exchange of goods. For the supplicant promises to "pay" God with a sacrifice should God provide him with the "goods" he desires, namely, an answer to prayer. As in contractual obligations of this sort, it is important for the party who is about to make "a payment" (the supplicant) to receive assurances from the recipient (God) that he is satisfied with the exchange. It should be noted that in the book of Psalms the process is described as paying off (שלם) what one had vowed (cf. Pss 22:26; 50:14; 56:13; 61:9; 65:2; 66:13; 76:12; 116:14 and 18). As a result of these contractual elements it should not surprise that in the book of Leviticus, the priest takes special care to designate the sacrifice as "acceptable" (cf. Lev 7:18). For if the sacrifice is so received, one may safely presume that God can make no further claims on the individual. Both parties have been satisfied.

Once the relationship of the שלמים sacrifice to the vow is understood, the usage of רצה in Isa 40:2 comes into clearer focus. For just as one who has made a vow needs to be assured that the sacrificial animal constitutes a satisfactory payment for what is owed, so the one who has sinned and fallen into debt with God needs to know that the suffering he has undergone will constitute full payment for what is owed. And this is precisely the logic that is presumed in our Isaianic text: Jerusalem has suffered more than double her allotted term of service in Babylon and as a result God

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8 Anderson, "Israel's Burden," 19–24.

declares that "her term of service has been filled" (מלאה צבאה) because "[the debt owed on] her sin has been accepted [as full payment]." There is no need to posit two roots here. The core meaning of רצה is unchanged: in place of a vowed animal, Isaiah speaks of the acceptance of a period of suffering. Israel's debt obligation can now be stamped "paid in full."

If we examine the terminology of forgiveness in Second Temple materials, we will find a curious phenomenon: there is a marked tendency to use terms that connote "completion" to indicate the act of forgiveness (e.g., תם, שבת, שלם, and כלא).[9] Terms such as these do not occur in First Temple period sources to mark the forgiveness of sins. Their sudden appearance in the Second Temple period must have been occasioned by some outside factor. In my estimation this is excellent evidence that the sins in questions were understood as debts, for it is precisely this metaphor that can best account for such a lexical choice.[10] Consider the following texts:

1) [The debt owed for] your sin has been completed (תם); he will exile you no longer.[11] (Lam 4:22a)

The midrash captures the sense of this text quite well when it writes: "On that very day, Israel received איפכי for her sins."[12] The word איפכי is a loan from the Greek ἀποχή meaning "receipt, quittance." Hence we could complete the translation: "On that very day, Israel received a receipt that the debt of her sins had been paid in full."

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[9] The one exception would be Gen 15:16 where we read that God cannot remove the Amorites now because their sins are not yet "complete" (לא שלם עון האמרי). The idea here is that the debts of an offender must add to up to a certain level before the possessor of the bond of indebtedness can initiate legal action.

[10] One could, I suppose, also suggest that the apocalyptic notion of set periods for human wickedness would provide an appropriate background for these terms. On this question, see my longer discussion in G.A. Anderson, *Sin: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 85–89.

[11] My translation.

[12] *Gen. Rab.* 42:3; see the discussion of D. Sperber, *A Dictionary of Greek and Latin Legal Terms in Rabbinic Literature* (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1984), 52. (Cf. *Lam. Rab.* 4:25; though there we have the expression איפכי שלימה, which is something of a tautology, for a quittance does not need the modifier "full, complete." Presumably the author of *Lam. Rab.* understood איפכי as simply meaning "payment" and felt the need to underscore that the payment was made "in full."

2) Seventy weeks have been decreed for your people and your holy city until [the debt owed] for your iniquity is completed and your sin is brought to completion (לכלא הפשע ולהתם חטאות). (Dan 9:24)[13]

3) The righteousness of your father[14] will not be wiped out, as an exchange for sins it shall be planted. In a day of trouble it will be remembered to you (by God) to cancel (להשבית) [the debt owed for] your sin just as heat melts ice. (Sir 3:14–15)

4) And there will be none to deliver Israel because they had spurned my statutes and abhorred my Torah. Therefore I have hidden my face from [them until] they bring to completion (ישלימו) [the debt owed for their] iniquity.[15] (4Q389 1 ii ₃₋₅)

C. Accumulating Credits through Almsgiving

The idiom of sin as a debt allows for a striking new idea to emerge in Israelite religion: the ability to reduce or even eliminate one's culpability by accumulating "merits." This is illustrated quite well in rabbinic literature. Consider this anonymous statement from the Babylonian Talmud:

> Happy are the righteous! Not only do they acquire merit for themselves (זכין לעצמן), but they also acquire merit for their children and their children's children to the end of all generations. . . . Woe to the wicked! Not only do they take on debt (חבין לעצמן) for themselves, but they bequeath this debt to their children and their children's children to the end of all generations. (*b. Yoma* 87a)[16]

But one need not wait until Talmudic times to see this concept at work. One can witness the notion of the accumulation of credits already in Dan 4:24. In this text, Daniel gives King Nebuchadnezzar this piece of advice: "Redeem your sins by almsgiving and your iniquities by generosity to the

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[13] I have modified the translation of the NJPS. In the Hebrew להתם is the *qere* while the *kethib* is לחתם. Commentators are unanimous that the *qere* is to be preferred. It should be noted that in Rabbinic Aramaic, the root כלי can be used in financial contexts. Compare *b. Giṭṭin* 42b, "the capital (קרנא) has been used up (כליא)."

[14] I follow the suggestion of Menahem Kister ("Romans 5:12–21 against the Background of Torah-Theology and Hebrew Usage," *HTR* 100 [2007]: 394–95) that the phrase צדקת אב (see below) is best understood as the righteousness that has accrued as a result of a father's virtuous acts. I will return to this text and Kister's interpretation of it in my discussion below.

[15] This root (שלם) is regularly used in both Rabbinic Hebrew and Aramaic (in the D and Dt stems) to indicate payment of a bill.

[16] I have followed the translation (with a few small changes) provided by Kister, "Romans 5:12–21."

poor." According to the logic of this sentence, Nebuchadnezzar is imag-
ined to be a debt-slave who must come up with sufficient currency to
be freed; hence the injunction to "redeem" [your sins]. The Aramaic verb
פרק normally translates the Hebrew term גאל in contexts that pertain
to the institution of redemption, such as Leviticus 25. The way in which
Nebuchadnezzar is to raise the needed currency is through the activity of
providing alms for the poor.

At first glance, this appears surprising. How can one raise money by
giving it away? But according to both Tobit and Ben Sira, two books that
are roughly contemporary with Daniel, the giving of alms allows one to
lay up a treasure in heaven. Ben Sira puts the matter this way: "Lay up
your treasure according to the commandments of the Most High, and it
will profit you more than gold. Store up almsgiving in your treasury, and it
will rescue you from all affliction" (29:11–12). It would seem that Daniel has
advised the king of Babylon to give alms to the poor so that the funds can
accrue in a divine treasury and be used to offset what he has accumulated
in debts. If I am correct here, Daniel anticipates the model we cited above
from the Babylonian Talmud: the balancing of debits against credits as
part of the mechanics of how divine justice is meted out to sinners.

As Menaham Kister has recently proposed, we find a similar under-
standing in Sir 3:14–15, which he translates: "The righteousness of your
father (צדקת אב) will not be wiped out. . . . In a day of trouble it will be
remembered to you (by God) to cancel (להשבית) your sins as heat melts
ice." The crux here has been how to understand the phrase, "the righ-
teousness of your father." It is commonly thought to mean "the concrete
acts of kindness shown toward one's father," with the presumption that
those deeds are stored in a heavenly treasury that may eventually be used
to pay down (להשבית—"bring to an end") a debt that one owes. Yet as
Kister notes, we should compare this verse to a similar passage in 44:13
that reads: "Forever will their memory abide, and their merits (צדקתם)
will not be wiped out." In both of these passages the same concern is
expressed—that merits not be wiped out. Because the genitive construc-
tion in 44:13 ("their merits" [צדקתם]) is clearly subjective, it is quite likely
that this is the case in 3:14 as well, "the merits of your father will not be
wiped out (תמחה)."[17] Kister concludes:

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[17] Kister proposes that the idea expressed by Ben Sira is an explicit reversal of Ps 109:14,
"may the sin of his father be remembered before God, and the iniquity of his mother not
be wiped out."

Indeed, it is one of the earliest formulations of the concept of the "treasure of merits" (explicitly mentioned in Sir 3:4), of the view that "merits offset demerits" (see especially Sir 3:3, 15), and probably also of the notion of the "transfer of merits" from ancestors to their descendants.[18]

One may beneficially compare this verse in Ben Sira to the Talmudic text from *b. Yoma* 87a that I cited above. There we saw a clear exposition of how one's merits can be passed along from one generation to another so as to pay down the debts owed by one's sins. In this case, it is important to emphasize, the completion of the forgiveness cycle is marked by a verb that indicates a termination in payment, להשבית (see the discussion above of verbs like this).

D. How Does Almsgiving Purge Sins?

With this in mind, I would like to turn to another set of texts in the book of Tobit that speak to a similar issue. This book is distinguished by its extraordinary interest in almsgiving. Twice, Tobit assembles his family to give them his final set of instructions about how to live their lives. He does this first in chapter four, when he mistakenly believes that death is just around the corner and that he will die long before he has reached a ripe old age. There he declares that "almsgiving delivers from death and keeps you from going into the Darkness. Indeed, almsgiving, for all who practice it, is an excellent offering in the presence of the Most High" (4:10–11).[19] The second such scene occurs in chapter fourteen when Tobit is truly on his deathbed; and he calls his sons and grandsons together and gives the same sort of advice (14:8–9). But for our purposes the most important text is placed in the mouth of Raphael just prior to the moment when he reveals his identity (12:6–10). In this speech Raphael advises Tobit to give fulsome praise to the God of Israel in light of all that has been done on his behalf. Raphael declares that, unlike servants of a human king, who must learn to keep the affairs of the royal household concealed, just the opposite pertains to the King of Kings. What he has done for his servants should be declared to any and all who will hear it. In chapter 13, Tobit follows this advice and offers a long song of thanksgiving to his God. In this song Tobit compares his plight to that of the people Israel. The logic can be boiled down to this: just as God has redeemed me from my sorry plight

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[18] Kister, "Romans 5:12–21," 394–95.
[19] The translation is from the NRSV.

so he will redeem the people he so dearly loves. All Israel needs to do is turn back from its sins so that God can look with favor upon them (13:6). With this in mind we can appreciate what Raphael says just one chapter earlier. He urges Tobit to combine prayer and fasting with the giving of alms, a standard trio appropriate to anyone repenting from sin. But of these three, pride of place goes to alms, because: "it is better to give alms than to lay up gold. For almsgiving saves one from death; it *purges away* (ἀποκαθαριεῖ) all sin" (12:8–9).[20]

I would like to pause for a moment to consider the logic of this piece of advice. According to Raphael, almsgiving is better than laying up gold because it funds a heavenly treasury rather than an earthly one. But not only that: as was already stated by Tobit in chapter four, almsgiving can save one from death (a citation from Prov 11:4) as well as "purge away all sin" (ἀποκαθαριεῖ πᾶσαν ἁμαρτίαν). For all commentators the interpretation of this metaphor seems to be crystal clear. The writer of Tobit has conceived of sin as a "stain" that must be "cleansed" from the body. The comparison of sin to a stain is quite common in the Bible. Yet, if this is what our writer has intended then the metaphor does not do justice to the immediate literary context. For giving alms, as Raphael clearly states, allows one to accumulate a proper treasury in heaven as opposed to simply hoarding gold on earth. And if a treasury is the defining feature of almsgiving, in what way can it be used to wash away the stain of sin? Biblical writers do not normally mix metaphors in this way. Indeed, as Baruch Schwartz has so elegantly shown, many texts have been mercilessly mangled because interpreters have not taken the imagery of the underlying metaphor with sufficient seriousness.[21] What I would like to suggest is that the expression "to purge" would be better rendered "to clear" in the sense of "to cancel [an obligation]." As such it could be nicely juxtaposed against the four texts we cited earlier (Lam 4:22 [תם], Dan 9:24 כלא, התם], Sir 3:14 [השבית], 4Q389 [השלים]).

Crucial to my argument is the way in which terms for "cleansing" evolve in the postbiblical period. The root מרק, for example (which derives from Aramaic but comes into Hebrew), originally meant to "cleanse or purge" an object from impurities. Indeed it has that meaning in Biblical Hebrew (see Lev 6:21). But as Kutscher and others have long noted, it is quite

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[20] Translation from the NRSV with a modification marked by italics.
[21] See n. 5 above.

common for terms that originally carried the sense of cleansing a soiled item to develop a more technical sense of "cleansing" a purchased article from all prior claims.[22] This amounts to assuring the buyer in a "defension clause" that no outstanding debts will be passed along as part of the financial transaction.[23] The item has been purchased free and clear of all external obligations. Though this usage derives ultimately from Akkadian, it became deeply embedded in Aramaic in the sixth century and eventually influenced both Hebrew and Greek usage.

As Jonas Greenfield has shown, the durability of this idea in Aramaic contexts is quite impressive. Beginning in the sixth century and continuing into the Gaonic period we can see a variety of different terms for cleansing that develop the technical sense of clearing a sale from claims. Greenfield outlined the data as follows:[24]

a)	Bauer–Meissner	515 BCE	נקה
b)	Kraeling	437 BCE	פצל
c)	Samaria	450 BCE	מרק
d)	Naḥal Ḥever	99 CE	צפא

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[22] E.Y. Kutscher, "On the Terminology of Documents in Talmudic and Gaonic Literature," *Tarbiz* 17 (1946): 125–27; 19 (1948): 53–59, 125–28 (in Hebrew); reprinted as "Terms of Legal Documents in the Talmud and in Gaonic Literature," in idem, *Hebrew and Aramaic Studies* (ed. Z. Ben-Ḥayyim, A. Dotan and G.B. Zarfati, with M. Bar-Asher; Jerusalem: The Hebrew University Magnes Press, 1977), 417–30.

[23] R. Yaron puts the matter thus: "In a defension clause, the primary obligation of the seller is to appear in court and defend the claim brought against the purchaser, 'to clean' the object sold from adverse claim." See his article, "On Defension Clauses," in *BO* 15 (1958): 15–22.

[24] J.C. Greenfield, "The 'Defension Clause' in Some Documents from Naḥal Ḥever and Naḥal Se'elim," *RevQ* 15 (1992): 467–71; the table is on p. 468. The sources listed are as follows: H. Bauer and B. Meissner, "Eine aramäischer Pachvertrag aus dem 7. Jahre Darius I," in *Sitzungsberichte der preussichen Akademie der Wissenschaften* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1936), 414–24 (text: 415, l. 10); E.G.H. Kraeling, *The Brooklyn Museum Aramaic Papyri: New Documents of the Fifth Century B.C. from the Jewish Colony at Elephantine* (New Haven: Yale University Press; London: Oxford University Press, 1953); F.M. Cross, "Samaria Papyrus I: An Aramaic Slave Conveyance from the Wadi ed-Daliyeh," *ErIsr* 18 (1985): 8*–17*, (16* n. 39). For Naḥal Ḥever: N. Lewis, "Greek Papyri," in *The Documents from the Bar Kochba Period in the Cave of Letters* (ed. N. Lewis, Y. Yadin and J.C. Greenfield; JDS 2; Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1989), 1–133 (no. 145, l. 42). For Murabbaʿat, see J.T. Milik, "26. Acte de vente, en araméen," in *Les grottes de Murabbaʿat* (ed. P. Benoit, J.T. Milik and R. de Vaux; DJD 2; Oxford: Clarendon, 1961), 137–38 (137). For Perg. Dura: C.B. Welles, R.O. Fink, and J.F. Gilliam, *The Excavations at Dura-Europos: Final Report, Vol 5: The Parchments and Papyri* (Papyrology on Microfiche Series 1.62; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), 146 (Text 28, l. 14); and J.A. Goldstein, "The Syriac Bill of Sale from Dura-Europos," *JNES* 25 (1966): 1–16. For Saʿadya, see S. Assaf, *Rav Saʿadya Gaon* (Jerusalem: Meḳitse nirdamim, 1941; 2d ed.: 1963), 78 (in Hebrew).

e) Murabba'at   134 CE   מרק
f) Perg. Dura   234 CE   מרק and דכי
g) *b. Baba Meṣi'a 15a* 350 CE   מרק and דכי, שפי
h) Sa'adya Gaon   920 CE   מרק and דכי, ברי, שפי

What is also striking about this linguistic transformation is that it has a
rather considerable effect on Greek usage as well. As Naphtali Lewis noted
in his work on the Greek papyri from Naḥal Ḥever, the verb καθαροποιέω is
regularly used to denote the clearing of claims in a legal contract.[25] In one
of the texts from this collection we have a bilingual section so that we can
compare the Aramaic and Greek verbs. In that case καθαροποιέω translates
the Aramaic צפא. We find a similar use of καθαροποιέω in P. *Avroman*,
from first century BCE eastern Mesopotamia, as well as in examples from
Dura Europas a few centuries later. These papyri must have been under
the influence of Aramaic.[26]

   As a result of this survey of terms for cleansing in Second Temple
Aramaic, Hebrew, and Greek that has been influenced by Semitic usage,
I would suggest that we revisit Raphael's advice in Tobit 12:8–9. Given that
almsgiving funds a treasury in heaven, it would seem to me to be more
sensible to translate the clause αὐτὴ ἀποκαθαριεῖ πᾶσαν ἁμαρτίαν, "[alms-
giving] pays off the debt accumulated through sin." This understanding
take full cognizance of what Raphael believes to be true about almsgiving
and also fits in quite well with how terms for cleansing function in con-
temporary Aramaic.

   Let me conclude with two other passages that are worth a second look
in light the linguistic development we have been tracing. First of all, in
Sir 23:10 we read that "a person who always swears and utters the Name
will never be cleansed from sin."[27] The Greek phrase ἀπὸ ἁμαρτίας οὐ μὴ

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[25] Lewis, "Greek Papyri," 145, l. 42. See also his discussion on p. 16.
[26] Eventually the Greek papyri found in Egypt develop a meaning for the stem καθαρός
that directly parallels the Aramaic evidence. In a search of a database of these papyri
(http://scriptorium.lib.duke.edu/papyrus/), I found eighty-one occurrences of καθαρός plus
ὀφείλημα, "to be free of debt"; there are even more examples of καθαρός in combination
with other terms that denote various forms of governmental imposts. I am not sufficiently
skilled in these documents to know whether all these usages can be traced back to Ara-
maic, but a number of scholars have suggested precisely this. After all, this sort of usage
is native to Aramaic and traceable to Aramaic documents that circulated in Egypt from
the fifth century forward. And strikingly there is no usage of καθαρός in this fashion in any
classical Greek source.
[27] On this verse see the recent discussion of A. Di Lella, "Ben Sira's Doctrine on the
Discipline of the Tongue: An Intertextual and Synchronic Analysis," in *The Wisdom of Ben*

καθαρισθῇ is translated in the Syriac as: *men ḥawbâ lāʾ zākēʾ*—"will not be not cleared from [his] debt." It would seem, then, that in the eyes of our Syriac translator, the meaning of this passage would be similar to that of the texts we saw above (Lam 4:22; Dan 9:24; Sir 3:15) wherein the forgiveness of sins was marked semantically as the completion of a term of penalty.

A second text comes from Jeremiah 44. This chapter, which is most likely a late redactional addition to the book, opens with a castigation of the Israelites who have settled in Egypt, for the idolatrous practices they are engaged in there (44:7–8). Because Jeremiah believes that it was precisely acts such as these that led to the exile in the first place, he says: "Have you forgotten the evil deeds of your fathers, the evil deeds of the kings of Judah . . . which have not yet been cleared (לֹא דֻכְּאוּ)?" (44:9). The last clause has been a *crux interpretum* for some time and has normally been understood as an independent clause following the indictment of Israel for having forgotten the evil deeds of her ancestors as well as her current sins: "They have not been contrite." Yet as Ronnie Goldstein has observed, such an understanding fits neither the context of the clause nor its grammar.[28] It would be far easier to understand the verb דכא as a loan word from Aramaic meaning "to cleanse, clear [from sin]." Strikingly this is the way that both Aquila and Symmachus have understood the term, as well as the Peshiṭta. Moreover, this usage of דכא is certainly dependent, as Goldstein suggests, on the Akkadian term *zakû*, which has the clear legal meaning of "to clear [from an obligation]."[29] The legal/financial sense of the term would also seem to be demanded by the context of the idiom. It is striking that forgiveness in this passage is imagined as requiring a long period of time to be accomplished. In this sense, the idiom expresses an idea very similar to Isa 40:2 or Dan 9:24—a long period of time is required for the debt of sin to be paid off. It is very easy to see why many years would be required "to cleanse" the nation from the *debt*

Sira: Studies on Tradition, Redaction and Theology (ed. A. Passaro and G. Belia; DCLS 1; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2008), 233–52, esp. 238–45. In this article, he makes the observation that our verse must depend on Exod 20:7, where the LXX translates the Hebrew verb נקה with καθαρίζω.

[28] R. Goldstein, "The Life of a Prophet: The Traditions about Jeremiah" (Ph.D. diss., The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2006), 108–9 (in Hebrew). I would like to thank Dr. Goldstein for alerting me to this passage in Jeremiah and to his discussion of the same in his dissertation.

[29] The Akkadian root can have this meaning in both the G and D stems.

of its sin; it is not as easy to see why the same would be true of cleansing oneself from the *stain* of one's sin.[30] The imagery of indebtedness lends itself quite naturally to a situation in which many years would be required to be released from its obligation, an idea that emerges precisely in the postexilic period.[31]

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[30] Though I would concede that some usages of purification language do require one to think of the process as requiring a fair amount of time. Compare Ps 12:7 where silver is said to undergo a purification process of seven stages. If we transfer this image to that of sin, it is possible to imagine a similar period of time required in order to cleanse an individual of his or her impurities.

[31] If Ronnie Goldstein is correct that Joshua 22 is a very late text ("Joshua 22:9–34—A Priestly Narrative from the Post-Exilic Period," *Shnaton* 13 [2002]: 43–81 [in Hebrew]), most likely deriving from the Persian period, then yet another usage of the idiom of purification from sin may be better parsed along the grid we have suggested—that is, as being cleansed from a legal or financial obligation. The text in question occurs in a portion of the chapter that addresses the legacy of what threatens to be an act of tremendous apostasy—the building of a new altar on the eastern side of the Jordan. In order to avoid such a thing, a delegation is sent to persuade the eastern tribes to desist from this act. They are addressed as follows: "What is this treachery that you have committed against the God of Israel in turning away today from following the Lord, by building yourselves an altar today in rebellion against the Lord? Have we not had enough of the sin of Peor from which even yet *we have not cleansed ourselves* (הטהרנו), and for which a plague came upon the congregation of the Lord that you must turn away today from following the Lord!" (Josh 22:16–18). What is key here is the notion of the lingering effects of a prior sin (cf. Numbers 25 for the story about the worship of Baal of Peor) upon the current generation. According to the author of this text, there has not been a sufficient interval of time "to purify" (טהר) the nation from the sin it had contracted in the past. Since this is the very same idea and metaphor found in Jeremiah and Tobit, one is tempted to argue that the idea of being "cleansed [from sin]" is legal/financial in meaning.