

Forgiveness in the intertestamental period

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The article suggests answers to the following questions: what are the characteristics of God's forgiveness in the intertestamental literature and what connection do these characteristics have with the Old Testament? Important passages in the late Second Temple period that expose the characteristics of God's forgiveness, such as certain Qumran texts (1QH 12:35–37, 1QH 13:2 and the Damascus Document 14:18–19), the writings of Philo and Josephus, the Apocrypha and the Pseudepigrapha, are investigated for this purpose.

Introduction

The characteristics of God's forgiveness are revealed within three concepts: the idea of God's sovereign grace; the idea of the substitutionary, vicarious and redemptive death that sacrificial blood signifies; and the idea of a responsible obligation to God's law. According to the Jewish worldview of the Old Testament, God's forgiveness always requires the sacrificial shedding of blood. The sacrifice symbolises God's sovereign grace that is granted through redemptive offering. Usually, the sacrifice that brought God's forgiveness was offered in the Tent of Meeting or in the Temple. The existence of these concepts should be explored in representative documents from the Second Temple period in order to investigate the continuity of the characteristics of God's forgiveness with the Old Testament.

The specific goal of this article is to identify the characteristics of God's forgiveness in the intertestamental literature and to compare the idea considered by the Jewish literature of the Second Temple period with the idea of the Old Testament. In order to answer these questions, the documents of the Later Second Temple period, such as the Dead Sea Scrolls, Philo, Josephus, the Apocrypha and the Pseudepigrapha, will be examined. Through this investigation, this article will determine whether the idea of forgiveness found in these documents demonstrates continuity with the idea of forgiveness portrayed in the Jewish worldview of the Old Testament.

Qumran texts

Because the Qumran community was an expression of Second Temple Judaism, the Dead Sea Scrolls reflect the belief system of some segments of early Judaism. Therefore, we may ask how the theme of God's forgiveness is revealed in the Dead Sea Scrolls. What is the basis of God's forgiveness? These questions should be answered by looking at some of the representative documents of the Dead Sea Scrolls that describe the theme of God's forgiveness.

1QH^a (*Hodayot*) 12:35–37; 13:2

The *Hodayot*, as the *Noncanonical Psalms*, have the formula 'I give thanks to You, O Lord'; E. Sukenik named these poetic texts the *Hodayot*. The name comes from the Hebrew related to the verb 'to give noun thanks'. The *Hodayot* consist of 1QH, 1Q35 and 4Q427–432 (Vanderkam & Flint 2002:235). The *Hodayot* are representative documents that describe God's forgiveness in several places. The *Hodayot* are divided into two types: the Psalms of the Teacher and the Psalms of the Community, and may be dated to the 2nd century B.C. and the 1st century A.D. (Mansor 1961:7); 1QH 12:35–37 and 1QH 13:2 belong to the Psalms of the Teacher (Vanderkam & Flint 2002:235). The 'I' in 1QH 12:35–37 and 13:2 is the author, probably the Teacher of Righteousness himself (Mansor 1961:44). The author wrote the *Hodayot* to express his gratitude towards God for delivering him from suffering and persecution (Hyatt 1956:277). A translation of the passage is as follows:

12: 35: ... and the scoundrels against your word. I said in my transgression, I am abandoned by your covenant. But when I remembered the power of your hand together with 36: the abundance of your mercies, I stood upright and firm and my spirit grew strong to stand against affliction. For [I] rest 37: in your mercies and the abundance of your compassion. For you atone for iniquity and purify man from guilt by your righteousness.

13:2: Your forgiveness and the abundance [of your mercies---]. (Wise, Abegg & Cook 1996:97)

The passage starts with the author's confession of his sinful nature. He considers himself a sinner in God's word [*dbr*] and covenant [*bryt*], and he expresses his unworthiness and sinfulness in relationship to God. He recognises that he needs God's mercy for his salvation. This fact is revealed in the continuing text.

The expression, 'remembering the power of your hand together with the abundance of your mercies', shows that the author depends on God's mercy and sovereignty for his salvation. In the subsequent expression, 'I stood upright and firm and my spirit grew strong to stand against affliction', the author expresses his gratitude to God for delivering him from suffering and persecution. In the last part of line 36 and the first part of line 37, the author again reveals his dependence on God through the Hebrew word [*š'n*], signifying 'rest', as he confesses the necessity of God's mercies [*hsd*] and compassion [*rhmy*] for his salvation. Finally, he describes how God's atonement [*kfr*] is given to man on the basis of divine mercy and compassion, and he asserts that man is purified from guilt [*šmh*] by God's righteousness [*sdqh*].

In 13:2, the Hebrew word *slyhh* indicates God's forgiveness. The passage that includes this word is directly connected to 1QH 12:35–37. It is possible that these verses mentioning forgiveness, speak of the author's mental attitude toward forgiveness. Since the Hebrew word *slyhh* is connected with the word *hmōn* that means the abundance of God's mercies by the coordinate conjunction *w*, God's forgiveness [*slyhh*] is here spoken of in relationship to the same concept of the abundance of God's mercies. The Hebrew word *slyhh* is also combined with the word *hmōn* in other places such as 1QH 14:9 and 17:34.

The conclusion we may draw from these Qumran texts is that God's forgiveness is here understood in relationship to God's mercy and compassion; receiving God's forgiveness means receiving God's mercy and compassion. God's forgiveness in 1QH is not seen as being caused by man's works, but by God's absolute sovereignty. The author's view of forgiveness in the *Hodayot* is seen through his emphasis on man's frailty and sinfulness, and his confession of the utter dependence of man upon God (Hyatt 1956:279–281). In other words, in 1QH God's forgiveness is conceived of in terms of God's election, and is understood as God's gift to man (Garnet 1977:56–57). Moreover, God alone constitutes righteousness and humans cannot obtain righteousness unless God grants it (Schiffman & VanderKam 2000:781). Garnet concludes that atonement in the sense of a vicarious offering is totally absent in the Psalms of the Teacher. God forgives sin in the sense of the putting away of wrath, and the Teacher's suffering becomes a source of salvation. However, there is no evidence that his suffering has the objective value of being a ransom or expiation (Garnet 1977:39, 119).

It seems that the belief system regarding God's forgiveness in 1QH has both continuity and discontinuity with the understanding of forgiveness seen in the Jewish worldview of the Old Testament. The worldview of the Old Testament

included the idea that God's sovereign grace was administered through redemptive death, but still emphasised human's responsibility and obligation to obey God's covenantal laws. These Qumran texts' treatment of forgiveness differs in the absence of the redemptive idea of the sacrificial shedding of blood.

Damascus Document 14:18–19

The Damascus Document consists of a list of regulations for the life of the community. Solomon Schechter started working with a text called the Damascus Document from a geniza in Cairo. He identified a full copy and a smaller one, and called them CD (referring to Cairo Damascus) (Vanderkam & Flint 2002:215, 448). The CD can be divided into two principal parts, namely the Exhortation and the Laws (Wise, Abegg & Cook 1996:49). The Exhortation in the CD functions as the introduction to the Laws (Broshi 1992:52). Concerning the dating of CD, Schechter presumes the text to be from the 1st century B.C.E., but other scholars, such as Rabinowitz, date it to the 2nd century B.C.E. (175–152) (Rabinowitz 1953:175–185). CD 14:18–19 is part of the Law section. The Law section is divided into two groups of rules: the rules for those living in cities and the rules for those living in camps. The passage under discussion belongs to the second group. The main section of the Laws deals with the rules applying to Israel as a whole. CD 14:18–19 specifically deals with punishments for infractions of these rules (Wise, Abegg & Cook 1996:61, 72). A translation of the passage is given as:

And this is the exposition of the regulation by which [they shall be governed in the age of wickedness until the appearance of the Messiah of Aaron and Israel, so that their iniquity may be atoned for. Cereal [offering and sin offering ...]. (p. 72)

This passage includes two references to a messianic figure and his ministry. In order to interpret this passage, the issue that should first be considered is the matter of the restoration of the first part of line 19. Because CD contains three previous examples of the same expression, the incomplete expression in this passage is restored to read: '[they shall be governed in the age of wickedness until the appearance of the messiah of Aaron and Israel]'. The reading of *mšyh* [*messiah*] in line 19 was restored by Schechter who first published CD. This reading has been accepted by subsequent commentators (Baumgarten 1999:537). If this is the correct reading, can the messiah, referred to as the messiah of Aaron and Israel, atone for the Israelites' iniquity? How then does he atone for their iniquity? To answer the first question, it is important to recognise that the other passages in CD (2:4–5, 3:18, 4:6, 4:9, 4:10 and 20:34) do not correspond with this rendition. In all other passages where the word *kpr* is used, the subject of atonement is God. On the other hand, the subject of the aforementioned passage that deals with eschatological punishment through messiah is the messiah of Aaron and Israel. A subject other than the messiah is improbable.

It seems that the Qumran community has two conceptions of the messiah. One of them is that the messiah will come from the shoot or branch of David (e.g. 1QSa 2:11–22;

4Q174, 3:11–13; 4Q252, 5:1–5). The other one is that the messiah will be the interpreter of the Law (e.g. 4Q174, 3:12). The Damascus Document mentions the interpreter of the Law, a title given to the messianic priest. As seen in large Qumran texts (the Commentary on Habakkuk, the Rule of the Community and the Rule of Congregation), the Qumran community anticipates the appearance of two messiahs. The Qumran messiah has different functions according to his different names, such as Judah, who indicates the Teacher of Righteousness, and *Menahem*, who indicates the suffering servant of the Dead Sea Scrolls. The concept of the messiah in the Qumran community differs from the concept of the messiah revealed through Jesus' teaching in the Gospel. The coming of Melchizedek is also connected to messianic expectations in Qumran texts (Vanderkam & Flint 2002:264–273).

CD reflects these conceptions. In particular, the titles 'Interpreter of the Law' in CD 6:7, 7:18 and 'Prince of the Congregation' in CD 7:17, 7:20 are used as messianic expressions. CD 14:19 also seems to refer to two kinds of messiahs. However, since the subsequent verb is singular, it is difficult to understand what kind of messiah is being referred to by the designation 'Messiah of Aaron and Israel'. Even though this text is difficult to interpret, mention of the messiah's atoning work later in the passage suggests that the messiah being written about is the priestly one (Vanderkam & Flint 2002:228).

The next issue to be examined in this passage is how the messiah atones the community's iniquity. In order to answer this question, the relationship between the messiah and the prescribed ritual indicated by 'sin offering' and 'offering' [mnhh – vht't] must be closely examined first. Baumgarten examined the relationship between the two words through a comparative study of the parallel text, 4Q266 f10 I 12–13, and he concluded that CD 14:19 should be understood according to the following structure: [vykhfr 'vnm mmmhh] '... and he (the messiah) will atone for their sin better than offering and sin offering'. The basis of his insistence is the fact that 1QS 9:2–4 looks forward to the time when the *Yahad* of Holiness shall establish eternal truth, atone for the guilt of transgressions and the rebellion of sin and as good will for the earth better than the flesh of burnt-offering and the fat of sacrifice (Baumgarten 1999:540–542). When CD 14:19 is interpreted according to the belief system of 1QS 9:2–4, the relationship between the messiah and the ritual prescribed later is clearly understood. In CD 14:19, the messiah of Aaron and Israel does not atone for sin through any prescribed ritual, but at his future coming, when he takes his place as rightful head of the eschatological community, he will be the divinely anointed redeemer who will grant forgiveness of sin. At the conclusion of his article, 'Messianic forgiveness of sin in CD 14:19', Baumgarten (1999) adds that:

... the Messiah of Aaron and Israel, that is of the total eschatological community, would atone for any sins resulting from the previously imperfect knowledge of the Law through his illuminational presence as the embodiment of divine good will for the earth. (pp. 542–544)

In conclusion, CD 14:19 anticipates the coming of two kinds of messiah represented in the eschatological worldview of the Qumran community. The forgiveness of sin is seen as depending on the priestly messiah's inherent authority. Since the messiah will come to be the head of the eschatological community, initiation into that holy community, called *Yahad*, is considered by the Qumran community to be the sacrifice God accepts. Becoming a member of the community through repentance, leads to one's inclusion in the future declaration of forgiveness. Community members consider the individual's initiation here as an act of covenantal faithfulness. This covenantal faithfulness was conceived as ushering in God's future declaration of forgiveness. The belief system of the Qumran community regarding forgiveness reveals some differences from the Jewish worldview of the Old Testament. Whilst in the Old Testament, forgiveness is represented as an act of God's sovereign grace administered through a redemptive death, forgiveness in the Qumran community is focused on covenantal faithfulness, typified by participation in the holy community as it awaits God's future forgiveness.

The writings of Philo

Philo (*Judaeus*) of Alexandria (ca. 20 B.C.E. – 50 C.E.) was one of the prominent Jewish philosophers in the Hellenistic world. He was a contemporary of Jesus of Nazareth. He tried to harmonise the philosophy of Hellenism with the belief system of Judaism. Thus, his writings provide most important witness to the religious culture of Hellenistic Judaism (Evans 1992:81; Surburg 1975:154–155; Williamson 1989:1). Even though Philo, as part of the Diaspora, lived in Alexandria isolated from Palestinian rabbinic Judaism, his works reflect the belief system of early Judaism concerning God's forgiveness. According to Philo, God's forgiveness is deeply related to sacrifice. The one who offers the sacrifice must closely follow certain purification rituals; for example, in order to acquire God's forgiveness, Philo, in *De Plantatione* 162, suggests the following steps (Yonge 1993:205):

1. men must offer up prayers
2. the instituted sacrifice must be given
3. the deity must be propitiated
4. there must be a purification of their bodies and souls, the former with baths, and the latter with the water of laws and right instruction.

To Philo, purification and sacrifice are necessary conditions for the forgiveness of sins. Concerning the meaning of ritual purification and sacrifice for sin, Laporte notes that Philo understands ritual purification as the necessary preparation to participate in a sacrifice. The ritualistic purification of the body is the means by which the soul is cleansed from passions and sins. Philo takes these rituals very seriously, viewing them as God-given remedies to sin (Laporte 1989:34–35).

An example of Philo's thoughts on the matter is revealed in *Special Laws* I 257–258. The law demands that a person who brings a sacrifice shall be pure, both in body and soul – pure in soul from all passions, diseases and vices, which can be

displayed either in word or deed, and pure in body from all such things as a body is usually defiled by (p. 258). The law has appointed a burning purification for both body and soul: for the soul, by means of the animals that are duly fit for sacrifice, and for the body, by ablutions and sprinkling (Yonge 1993:558).

Here Philo states that sacrifice is demanded for the soul's purification, and that ablution and sprinkling are needed for the purification of the body. Toews (2001:57–58), in his thesis, calls Philo's formula of purification Philonic dualism. In the ideal framework of dualism, Philo emphasises the purification of the soul and the body through sacrifice, ablution and sprinkling. Sacrifice also appears here to be a means by which the soul is purified. The main purpose of sacrifice is to obtain purification. Philo gives a tangible outline of the purpose of sacrifice in *Special Laws* I 195–197:

If any one were to wish to examine minutely the causes for which it seemed good to the first men to betake themselves at the same time to sacrifices to show their gratitude, and also to supplication, he will find two most especial reasons for this conduct. Firstly, that it conduces to the honour of God ... Secondly, for the benefits which have been poured upon the sacrifice themselves ... And the benefit they derive is also twofold, being both an admission to a share of good things and a deliverance from evils. (196) Therefore the law has assigned the whole burnt offering as a sacrifice adequate to that honour which is suited to God, ... the law has distinguished also, appointing it to be a sacrifice for the participation in blessing which mankind has enjoined, and calling it a thank-offering for their preservation. And for the deliverance from evils it has allotted the sacrifice called a sin-offering ... (Philo in Yonge 1993:552)

In this passage, which analyses the Levitical sacrificial system, Philo understands that the main cause (motive) of sacrifice is to show the participant's gratitude and supplication, and that the two key reasons for offering a sacrifice are to honour God and to receive the benefits of participation. The benefits of participation are twofold: a special blessing one receives and deliverance from evil. In this passage Philo distinguishes three sacrifices:

1. the burnt-offering
2. the thank-offering
3. the sin-offering.

According to him, the burnt-offering is offered for the honour of God, the thank-offering is brought for obtaining blessings, and the sin-offering is offered for obtaining release from evil.

Philo considers sacrifice as the means by which the worshiper receives purification of his soul and mind. The purification of soul and mind is a renewal of mind, meaning self-knowledge. The important aspect of self-knowledge is purification (Daly 1978:403–404). The steps of purification are well revealed in *On Dreams* II 299. According to its prescription, the soul who has sinned must first confess its error, second, reproach itself, third, come to the altar as a suppliant, and finally, entreat God with prayers, supplication, and sacrifice. The final step of the purification ritual is to actually obtain pardon (Daly 1978:405). Here sacrifice is not viewed as the entire

prerequisite for atonement, but as one important step for purifying a soul polluted by moral sin.

In conclusion, in Philo's work, the connotation of atoning sacrifice that is so strongly present in the Jewish worldview of the Old Testament is here emphasised considerably less. According to him, sacrifice is only one part of ritual purification. Ritual purification, signified by 'repentance (prayer), return to righteousness, and supplication', obtains from God the forgiveness of sins, with or without sacrificial expiation (Laporte 1989:42). This implies that Hellenistic Judaism, as represented by Philo, tended to see the sacrificial ritual of shedding blood as less important (Daly 1978:97). The position of Philo essentially has some relationship to the position of mainstream Judaism that also attributes atoning power to ethical achievement: 'obedience to the will of God (the Law), fasting, study of the Torah, suffering and repentance' (Daly 1978:95–100; Buchler 1928:170–75). Yet, Philo's view that one can obtain God's forgiveness without sacrificial atonement, shows a difference from the view of the Old Testament and the rabbinic saying that 'without blood there is no forgiveness' in the Babylonian Talmud (*Zebahim* 6a; *Yoma* 5a; *Menahot* 93b) (Daly 1978:96).

The writings of Josephus

Josephus' works hold value for researching the theme of God's forgiveness because his works reflect the worldview of 1st century Judaism. His first work is *The Jewish War* (7 volumes) written during the 1970s. The book contains the whole history of the Jewish revolt against Rome (A.D. 66–74). His second major work is *The Jewish Antiquities* (12 volumes) written in the 1980s and 1990s. This work discusses the history of the Jewish people from their beginnings until the outbreak of the war in A.D. 66. His other works are his *Autobiography* that describes the account of his period as leader in Galilee in 66–67. *Vita* is a supplement to *The Jewish Antiquities*, and *Against Apion* (2 volumes), which was written in order to defend Judaism and the Jewish people against attacks made by the Alexandrian author Apion (Evans 1992:81–87; Surburg 1975:164–69; Bilde 1988:22). Josephus views forgiveness in consideration of the causes of the 'Jewish war'. According to him, this war, caused by the Jewish revolt against Rome, led to the eventual fall of Jerusalem and the burning of the Temple. The event was a tragedy for Josephus and the Jewish people and was recognised as God's punishment. Josephus stresses the transgressing of God's law as the cause of war in *The Jewish War* 2:454–456, 4:314–318 and 4:383–388, and he believes that if the Jews had fully kept the law, the war caused by dissension amongst the Jewish people would never have broken out. His view on this matter is clearly revealed in *Jewish War* 5:19:

O most wretched city, what misery so great as this did you suffer from the Romans, when they came to purify you from your internal pollutions! For you could no longer be a place fit for God, nor could you long continue in being, after you had been a sepulchre for the bodies of your own people, and had made the holy house itself a burying place in this civil war of yours. Yet may you again grow better, if perchance you will hereafter appease the anger of that God who is the author of your destruction.

Here Rome is seen as the tool by which God chastises and purifies his disobedient and polluted people. In order to appease God's anger, the Jewish people should become a good place in which God can abide. This can be established by the observance of God's law (Bilde 1988:72–75). As other necessary steps to obtaining forgiveness, Josephus suggests confession and repentance:

However, there is a place left for your preservation, if you be willing to accept it; and God is easily reconciled to those who confess their faults, and repent of them. (Josephus in *Jewish War* 5:415)

Through these key passages, Josephus demonstrates that when the Jewish people repent, confess their sins, abide by God's law, and place their trust in God, forgiveness will be granted, and the tragic fall of Jerusalem and the Temple will be ended (Bilde 1988:186–187).

The emphasis on abiding by God's law is also revealed in *Jewish Antiquities* 1.14:

The reward of felicity is proposed by God; but then it is to those who follow his will, and do not venture to break his excellent laws ... and that so far as men any way apostatize from the accurate observation of them, what was practical before becomes impracticable; and whatever they set about as a good thing, is converted into an incurable calamity ... (*Jewish Antiquities* 1.14)

In this excerpt, living united to God's *will* and laws is emphasised. Upon seeing his people live according to his laws, God will reward his felicity to the Israelites.

As observed, Josephus' understanding of God's forgiveness seems to be in agreement with other contemporary Jewish thought. Even though Josephus' works, such as *The Jewish War* and *Jewish Antiquities*, were written from a political and historical viewpoint, his history of the Jewish people does not follow the biblical text exactly or literally. His works were written to express the Jewish people's beliefs at the time, as revealed in the introduction of *Jewish Antiquities* 1.5:

Now I have undertaken the present work, as thinking it will appear to all the Greeks worthy of their study; for it will contain all our antiquities, and the constitution of our government, as interpreted out of the Hebrew Scriptures.

If this is the case, the facts revealed in the aforementioned passage could represent the crux of Josephus' beliefs on God's forgiveness. His belief system stems from that of his own people. In Josephus, as in Philo, God's forgiveness is revealed in terms of repenting, confessing sins, abiding by God's law, and trusting in God's sovereignty.

Apocrypha

Jewish Apocrypha also represent the beliefs of Second Temple Judaism concerning the theme of forgiveness. Ben Sirach has many references about God's forgiveness. In 2:11, 28:2, the Greek verb *aphiemi* represents God's forgiveness, and in 5:6; 16:11; 17:29; 18:12, 20, the Greek words *exhilasmos* and *exhilaskomai* have to do with atonement and expiation that relate to God's forgiveness. The book successfully reflects the mechanism of God's forgiveness at the time.

Regarding the approximate date of the Ben Sirach, there are two main indications: (1) the panegyric on the High Priest Simeon, the son of Jochanan, and (2) the statement of the writer's grandson in the prologue that he himself arrived in Egypt in the thirty-eighth year of the reign of King Euergetes. On the basis of these facts, the Book of Ben Sirach may be dated between 200 and 175 B.C. (Skehan & Di Lella 1986:8; Charles 1913:293). In the phrases of Ben Sirach 2:11, 5:6 and 16:11, where the word 'forgiveness' is used, forgiveness appears in terms of supplication based on God's mercy. This forgiveness is mentioned in relation to God's character without any reference either to human ethical achievement or to divine activity. References to Ben Sirach 17:24–29 and 18:20 prove the point:

Yet to those who repent he grants a return, and he encourages those whose endurance is failing. Turn to the Lord and forsake your sins; pray in his presence and lessen your offences. Return to the Most High and turn away from iniquity, and hate abominations intensely. Who will sing praises to the Most High in Hades, as do those who are alive and give thanks? From the dead, as from one who does not exist, thanksgiving has ceased; he who is alive and well sings the Lord's praises. How great is the mercy of the Lord, and his forgiveness for those who turn to him!

Before judgment, examine yourself, and in the hour of visitation you will find forgiveness (Ben Sirach 18:20 [RSV]).

Ben Sirach starts his poem with a prophetic call to repentance. God's forgiveness is motivated by human repentant behaviour. In 17:24–25, returning to the Lord with repentance causes God's forgiveness; praying and turning away from iniquity are synonymous with repentance (Skehan & Lella 1986:284). In Ben Sirach 18:20, examining oneself also appears as an important element for obtaining God's forgiveness at the final judgment.

In relation to sacrifice practiced to obtain God's forgiveness, an important point is made in Ben Sirach 35:1–5:

He who keeps the law makes many offerings; he who heeds the commandments sacrifices a peace offering. He who returns a kindness offers fine flour, and he who gives alms sacrifices a thank offering. To keep from wickedness is pleasing to the Lord, and to forsake unrighteousness is atonement. Do not appear before the Lord empty-handed, for all these things are to be done because of the commandment.

In this passage, keeping the law, kindness, alms and keeping from wickedness and unrighteousness are equivalents of various liturgical offerings (Mackenzie 1983:134). These things are regarded as effective and reliable substitutes for sacrifice and are presented as even more important than sacrifice (Snaith 1974:170). To Ben Sirach, the fulfilment of the law takes precedence over ritualistic ceremony and has value to the sacrificial cult insofar as it is required by the fulfilment of the law (Collins 1997:90). Ben Sirach admits observance of all the prescribed rituals, but considers sacrifice as part of fulfilment of the law (Snaith 1974:170). These facts prove that for Ben Sirach, the methods of atonement are both sacrificial cult and fulfilment of the law, summarised as observance of the law, kindness, alms, and keeping from wickedness and

unrighteousness. Ben Sirach in his poem demonstrates that both methods are effective to obtain God's forgiveness. This idea also appears in other passages, such as 3:3, 15; 3:30 and 45:16. Individuals can seek God's forgiveness by sacrifice and good works and can appeal to the mercy of God (Collins 1997: 91).

In conclusion, the system of God's forgiveness in Ben Sirach is almost the same as that of the Jewish literature in the intertestamental period, such as the Qumran texts and the works of Philo and Josephus. In Ben Sirach, as in this other literature, the 'specific gravity' of atoning sacrifice in order to receive God's forgiveness is weak. The fulfilment of the law, signified by repentance, alms, praying, turning away from iniquity and honouring parents, appears as the main mechanism for realising God's forgiveness. Sacrificial offering for atonement is only referred to as one of more methods of obtaining God's forgiveness.

Pseudepigrapha

The characteristic of God's forgiveness in the Pseudepigrapha has similar characteristics as the other Jewish literature mentioned earlier. In 1 Enoch 12:5 and 13:4, forgiveness is used in terms of blame against the Watchers of heaven and Azazel who have left the high heaven. But God's forgiveness usually appears with the concept of God's mercy, for example, in 1 Enoch 1:8; 5:6 and Jubilees 23:31; 31:25 and 45:3. God's mercy is granted to the righteous man who follows God's law.

In the Psalms of Solomon, the idea of God's forgiveness usually appears in connection with chastening. God's mercy after God's chastening in 7:8–10, cleansing from sin through chastening in 10:1, blotting out man's sin by chastening in 13:9 and returning to God as a result of God's chastening in 16:11 all allude to the idea of God's forgiveness. The Psalms of Solomon 3:8–10 says:

The righteous continually searches his house to remove utterly (all) iniquity (done) by him in error. He makes atonement for (the sin of) ignorance by fasting and afflicting his soul, and the Lord counts guiltless every pious man and his house. (Charles 1913:635)

Fasting and afflicting the soul is revealed here as means of a righteous one's atonement. Individual repentance also appears as means of receiving God's forgiveness in 9:12–15:

He cleanses from sins a soul when it makes confession, when it makes acknowledgement; for shame is upon us and upon our faces on account of all these things. And to whom does He forgive sins, except to them that have sinned? Thou blesses the righteous, and dost not reprove them for the sins that they have committed; and Thy goodness is upon them that sin, when they repent (Charles 1913:642).

In the Fragments of a Zadokite Work, repentance and confession appear as main methods to get God's forgiveness in 2:3 and 9:54. In 5:5 and 6:4, 6, God's forgiveness is granted to the faithful in accordance with the covenant that God

established with Israel's forefathers. The almsgiving as formulated in 18:8–9, '(The Messiah from) Aaron and Israel. And He will pardon our sins in money', functions as a method of receiving God's forgiveness.

In contrast with these texts, the fourth book of Maccabees, which derives from the 1st century C.E., represents a different perspective on the topic of God's forgiveness. In the previous literature, such as the scrolls from Qumran, Philo, Josephus, the Apocrypha and the Pseudepigrapha, ethical achievement in the sight of God appear to be the means by which one obtains forgiveness. The authors' faithful communities appear to have believed that good deeds and faithfulness would grant them God's forgiveness. However, 4 Maccabees looks at God's forgiveness through the lens of a martyr's atoning death. A representative example is 4 Maccabees 6:26–29:

But when the fire already reached to his bones and he was about to give up the ghost, he lifted up his eyes to God and said, 'Thou, O God, knowest that though I might save myself I am dying by fiery torments for thy Law. Be merciful unto thy people, and let our punishment be a satisfaction in their behalf. Make my blood their purification, and take my soul to ransom their souls' (Charles 1913:674).

In this passage, called 'the prayer of Eleazar', a martyr offers his life as a sacrifice and supplicates God to make his blood a vicarious atonement for his people. The idea of atonement through martyrdom is revealed here in the form of an intercessory prayer enunciated by the martyr before his death (Daly 1978:126). According to O'Hagan, the martyr in 4 Maccabees is seen as a witness, champion and paradigm of consummate virtue before men, and carries out the functions of interceding, atoning, and being sacrificed before God (O'Hagan 1974:95). The martyr's intention to atone for his people through his death is shown most clearly in 4 Maccabees 17:20–22:

And these men, therefore, having sanctified themselves for God's sake, not only have received this honour, but also the honour that through them the enemy had no more power over our people, and the tyrant suffered punishment, and our country was purified, they having as it were become a ransom for our nation's sin; and through the blood of these righteous men and the propitiation of their death, the divine Providence delivered Israel that before was evil entreated. (Charles 1913:683)

Here the martyrs are referred to as the righteous men. These martyrs die as a ransom for the nation's sins. Owing to their blood, God's wrath is propitiated, and God's divine providence saves Israel from its sins. The most significant point in this passage is that the death of the righteous has the atoning power to save the nation.

In conclusion, 4 Maccabees, which reflects the thought-world of late Judaism, approaches God's forgiveness through the perspective of a righteous man's suffering and death. The righteous man gives up his life as an act of faithfulness to God's Law. The innocent man's blood brings vicarious atonement for the sins of his nation.

Conclusion

A growing tendency in the intertestamental literature to spiritualise Old Testament sacrifice meant that the literature of Second Temple Judaism presented a development in the understanding of God's forgiveness. In 1QH (*Hodayot*) receiving God's forgiveness means receiving God's mercy and compassion. That is, God's forgiveness is conceived in terms of God's election. In the Damascus Document, God's forgiveness is deeply connected to the covenantal faithfulness of participants in the holy community. According to Philo, God's forgiveness depends on ritual purification, indicating an emphasis on ethical achievement, such as repentance, prayer, a return to righteousness, and supplication of the deity. Josephus also believed that God's forgiveness is granted through acts of covenantal faithfulness, such as repenting, confessing sins, abiding by God's law, and trusting in God's sovereignty. The most obvious difference between these texts and those of the Old Testament is the lack of emphasis placed on the idea of substitutive, vicarious and redemptive death.

In 4 Maccabees God's forgiveness is uniquely approached through the perspective of a righteous man's suffering and death. However, the idea of redemptive death embodied here is slightly different to the Jewish worldview of the Old Testament. The redemptive emphasis of the Old Testament indicates the fact that the forgiveness given to the receiver is granted by God's sovereign grace acting upon the redemptive offering, whilst the forgiveness granted in 4 Maccabees is based upon the merit of the individual's self-sacrifice. The redemptive idea in 4 Maccabees may be conceived within the broader idea of covenantal faithfulness to God's law. Thus, the approach of 4 Maccabees to God's forgiveness is distinguished from that of the Old Testament and other intertestamental literature examined earlier.

Finally, the main characteristics of God's forgiveness in the intertestamental literature focus on the covenantal faithfulness to God's law. The most Jewish groups of the Second Temple period were trying to receive God's forgiveness through the covenantal faithfulness to God's law. These characteristics reveal some discontinuity with the Old Testament.

The question remains to what extent the various writings relegate blood offerings because of their contextual situation, that is, Diaspora versus Palestinian; and resistance to the current temple establishment, that is, a corrupt priesthood. It might be that the blood sacrifices were not abandoned in principle, but that this tendency developed as a temporary or contextual measure.

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Competing interests

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Authors' contributions

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