NEW INTERNATIONAL DICTIONARY OF NEW TESTAMENT THEOLOGY AND EXEGESIS

PRIMER

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Revision Editor
1. INTRODUCTION: Why Is a Dictionary a Mixed Blessing?

by Moisés Silva, Revision Editor of *NIDNTTE*  
*The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis*

Dictionaries can be a mixed blessing. They are essential resources for the study of the vocabulary, but they also may reinforce our tendency to view words as isolated entities.

With very few exceptions (e.g., “Yes,” “Hello,” “Thanks”), individual words do not occur by themselves in normal conversation or writing. Normally, we express and communicate our thoughts (1) by combining words to form sentences, and we accomplish that feat (2) by choosing particular words out of a group of vocabulary items that are related in meaning.

When seeking to understand a NT Greek word, therefore, we should not treat it as having meaning all on its own, independently of other vocabulary items. Rather, we should familiarize ourselves with the network of relationships of which that word is a part.

Take this sentence: *Mary was wearing a beautiful suit yesterday.* The noun *suit* has various meanings, such as “a legal appeal to a court for justice,” “a group of playing cards that bear the same symbol,” etc. In our sentence, however, the meaning is clearly “an ensemble of matching garments,” and we know that because here the word is combined with the adjective *beautiful* and, especially, with the verb *wear(ing).* (We may think of the whole sentence as the immediate context; the broader context of the conversation would have been of further help in eliminating alternative meanings.) Linguists use the term *syntagmatic* to describe such combinatory relationships of words.
In addition, the meaning of *suit* here is partially determined by its contrast with other nouns that could have been used in the same slot, such as *dress, gown, blouse, skirt*, etc. This type of relationship among words of similar meaning is usually labeled *paradigmatic*, and the words in such a group are said to be “in opposition” to each other and as being part of the same *semantic field* or *semantic domain*. How can we familiarize ourselves with the network of relationships (syntagmatic and paradigmatic) of which that word is a part?

Here is where *NIDNTTE* comes in.

Most one-way bilingual dictionaries (e.g., those that cover French words for English speakers) simply give translation equivalents, that is, they list the various terms in the user’s native language that can render a particular foreign term. This approach unwittingly strengthens the user’s assumption that words exist as independent objects. The better, larger dictionaries are careful to identify the contexts in which particular meanings are used, and they often include significant syntagmatic information (e.g., idioms where the term takes on a special meaning). Occasionally, they may include a brief discussion of synonyms, which help the user appreciate the shades of meaning that distinguish similar terms.

**Students of the Greek NT are fortunate to have superior reference works:**

1) **BDAG** (Bauer-Danker-Arndt-Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*), which carefully delineates the various uses of each Greek term with attention to syntagmatic combinations;

2) the Louw-Nida *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains*, which groups Greek terms that are similar in meaning and focuses on their paradigmatic distinctions;

3) in addition, we have such works as *TDNT* (Kittel-Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*), which provides extensive information on extrabiblical usage as well as lengthy discussions of the concepts and theology involved;

4) finally, we are able to consult high-quality exegetical commentaries as well as publications that deal with the distinctive theological message of individual biblical authors.

**One can say that *NIDNTTE* serves as a one-stop resource that supplements those reference works** (it certainly does not replace them!) **in the following ways:**

- a) it deals with virtually all the cognates of each term in the same article;
- b) it summarizes extrabiblical material, both linguistic and conceptual;
- c) it provides a discussion of NT usage that functions as an alternate presentation to that found in BDAG;
d) it facilitates the study of semantically related terms through a nearly exhaustive list of semantic groups, extensive cross-referencing, and selective analyses of synonyms;
e) it includes concise exegetical-theological treatments of the most important OT and NT passages. In this way, both syntagmatic and paradigmatic concerns are covered comprehensively, and the user is thus consistently reminded not to treat individual words in isolation.

As an example, let’s suppose you are preparing an exegetical paper on Hebrews 3:1-6.

An Exegetical Tour of Hebrews 3:1-16

Hebrews 3:1-6 contains a large number of terms that receive treatment in *NIDNTTE*. Among them, there may be one or more terms that you wish to study in detail.

Let us say that you are intrigued by the fact that the author of Hebrews addresses his recipients here as ἀδελφοὶ ἅγιοι. It is natural that he would regard them as his brothers and sisters, but why does he use the adjective ἅγιος to describe them? Even though you know that this word is usually rendered “holy,” you may feel the need to dig deeper. If you spend a modest amount of time in *NIDNTTE*, you will come away having grasped a number of important factors.

The *NIDNTTE* article on this term includes discussion of ἅγιος and four cognates:

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**Ἅγιος**


Ἅγιος G41 (bagios), holy, sacred, subst. neut. holy thing, sanctuary; ἅγιαζω G39 (bagiazō), to make holy, consecrate, sanctify; ἁγιασμός G40 (bagiasmos), holiness, consecration, sanctification; ἁγιότης G42 (bagiotēs), holiness; ἁγιωσύνη G43 (bagiosyne), holiness

Concept: Holy; Temple

GL From the perspective of the history of religions, “(the) holy” initially designated the elemental forces of nature (mana) and taboo, then more generally
The heading for the article identifies the concept associated with this word group, namely, “Holy” (it mentions also “Temple” because the substantive neuter can mean “sanctuary”). At this point it would be helpful to look up “Holy” in the List of Concepts (at the beginning of the volume), which shows six words included under this category.

In the List of Concepts you will also find cross-references to other concepts that are more loosely associated with it (e.g., “Defilement,” “Godliness,” etc.), each of which lists additional vocabulary items. Surveying briefly the larger network of associations exposes you to broader semantic contexts and sharpens your ability to discriminate among the relevant terms.

The first section of the ἅγιος (“holy”) article, labeled GL (for “General [Greek] Literature”) gives a brief description of the cultural background, some comments on the etymology, and a few references that illustrate the extrabiblical usage of ἅγιος. Here you find out that the adjective does not occur frequently in classical literature and that it is mostly applied to things (such as temples and oaths) rather than to people.

The section JL (“Jewish Literature”) first provides statistical information, showing that the word group is far more frequent in the LXX (almost always rendering Hebrew קדושׁ and its derivatives) than it is in extrabiblical writings. There follows a biblical-theological treatment of the concept of holiness in the various parts of the Hebrew canon, as well as brief but valuable information from later Jewish writings, including Qumran.

The main section, NT (“New Testament”), also begins with statistical data on the whole word group. Then, after an introductory paragraph, the article discusses these terms—and the theological concepts to which they refer—respectively in

a) the Synoptic Gospels (with an extended exegetical discussion of the first petition in the Lord’s Prayer);

b) Paul (including brief comments on the Pauline view of sanctification);

c) the General Epistles (which focuses on the fact that “Hebrews presents a highly specialized aspect of holiness”);


Finally, this is one of the selected articles that include a discussion of the relevant semantic field, pointing out how ἅγιος differs from its synonyms (especially ἱερός), but also calling attention to its antonyms. Referring to the articles on these related terms would enhance your appreciation for the significance of ἅγιος itself. (The article then provides an up-to-date bibliography.)
Takeaways

1) The common emphasis on “separation” as the supposed etymology of the Hebrew equivalent is not a satisfactory way of dealing with this concept.
2) You would appreciate anew that in the NT, generally speaking, the notion of holiness is associated primarily with the Holy Spirit.
3) More particularly, you would have learned that in the letter to the Hebrews this concept is tightly interwoven with the theme of the priesthood of Christ, through whose sacrifice we have been made holy. Thus, by calling his recipients ἅγιοι, the author of this letter reminds them that they need not—indeed, they must not—go back to the Levitical law.

These and various other specific “results” are important enough, but just as significant is the attendant enrichment to your broader understanding of the Greek vocabulary as it is employed by the NT writers to express theological concepts. Consistent use of *NIDNTTE* can help you develop both the skills and the frame of mind that will equip you to interpret the NT responsibly.

2. HOW CAN A PASTOR USE *NIDNTTE*?

by Verlyn Verbrugge, Senior Editor-at-Large for Biblical and Theological Books, Zondervan

My goal is to shape people’s lives, not by “5 easy steps to achieving (fill in the blank),” but by the same way people in Bible times grasped the life-changing concepts of God’s Word.

I recently preached on 1 Timothy 2:5–6, and *NIDNTTE* has some marvelous exegetical insights on the rich theology of this passage. I want to share some discoveries that can help people understand the richness and relevance of the passage.
I began at the index volume (5:198) to get a listing of all the places where these two verses are quoted. Then I looked up the appropriate pages and examined three key words that stand out in these two verses.¹

εἷς (“one”) – Discussion in *NIDNTTE* 2:122–26

The section on Jewish Literature (including the Old Testament) contains some powerful reflections on Christology.

In the section on Jewish Literature (including the Old Testament), the article on εἷς cites part of the Shema: “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one” (Deut. 6:4). The entire nation of Israel confessed the Shema regularly and believed it firmly, so that by the time of the New Testament, “‘the One’ became a surrogate [name] for God” (2:123).

This is reflected in Paul’s phrase in 1 Timothy 2:5, that “there is one God” or even, as it may be translated, “God is one” (2:124). The word εἷς is repeated in the verse with the word μεσίτης (“mediator”; see discussion below), with the result that “divine oneness [is attributed] to Jesus Christ” (2:124). Jesus too is God. Then, in a section of the entry εἷς entitled “Theological Reflection,” we read:

Unity in the NT is always seen from the standpoint of Christ... The decisive advance in the NT, caused by God himself, is basing the unity and uniqueness of God on the unique revelation through the one man Jesus Christ (1 Tim 2:5–6 [cited, 2:125]).

The next paragraph contains a significant quote by N. T. Wright, who, in dealing with a similar passage in 1 Cor 8:4–6, asserts that there “we find a statement of the highest possible christology—that is, of Jesus placed within the very monotheistic confession itself” (2:125).

We can conclude from this that according to New Testament theology, Jesus, the Son of God and incarnate human being, is the very revelation of the one God of the Old Testament Scriptures.

There can be no higher Christology than that.

¹ Bear in mind that it is important not just to read the specific sentences where 1 Timothy 2:5 and 6 are referred to; you need to read the entire article to get a feel for the history of the word and how the richness of each word develops over time from Classical Greek through the Old Testament (especially the LXX) and on into the New Testament. εἷς (“one”) – Discussion in *NIDNTTE* 2:122–26
μεσίτης (“mediator”) – Discussion in NIDNTTE 3:284–88

The story of “mediator” is a story of transformation: how the right of vengeance becomes the right of forgiveness

The specific word μεσίτης is a Hellenistic word that first appears in Polybius. It derives from the word μέσος, “middle.” “It refers to someone who stands between (in the middle of) two parties to negotiate agreement or effect reconciliation” (3:284).

The NIDNTTE article has a marvelous detailed analysis and discussion of Job 9:33, because it forms an important background for the uses of μεσίτης in the New Testament. There is an interesting use of the word μεσίτης in the translated Hebrew of Job 9:33, which aided the translators of the NIV to translate this Old Testament verse: “If only there were someone to mediate between us.” But as NIDNTTE points out, “the concept of mediator as known in Greek culture is not found in the OT world” (3:325). True, Moses was an intermediary between God and the people at Mount Sinai, but he did not negotiate the terms of the covenant. God was the one who established his covenant, and he set it out on his terms.

In the six uses of μεσίτης in the New Testament, it is interesting to note that 1Timothy 2:5 is the only passage that expresses “the thought that Jesus is the mediator between God and human beings” (3:286). One of the most important elements of Jesus role as μεσίτης is that he “is himself ἄνθρωπος G476), ‘a man, a human being,’” like those for whom he serves as intermediary. The article goes on to discuss the other five uses of μεσίτης in the New Testament, and these uses are helpful for comparison. Hebrews, for example, uses μεσίτης three times (Heb 8:6; 9:15; 12:24), and each time it carries the notion of guarantee of the new covenant. “In his dual role of ever-present high priest and eternal sacrifice, this mediator/guarantor has by his own blood transformed the right of vengeance (Abel) into the right of forgiveness (Heb 12:24)” (3:287).

Moreover, in his dual role of ever-present high priest and eternal sacrifice, this mediator/guarantor has by his own blood transformed the right of vengeance (Abel) into the right of forgiveness (12:24).

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2 Though there are classical parallels that carry the thought of a negotiator.
3 Already in the Hellenistic period, a μεσίτης could arbitrate in a legal dispute to make a trial before a judge unnecessary.
4 Note that the NRSV uses “umpire” here rather than “someone to mediate,” a phrase that doesn’t resonate as readily.
ἀντίλυτρον ("ransom") – Discussion in NIDNTTE 3:179–87

Jesus is not only the μεσίτης, but he is also the ἀντίλυτρον ὑπὲρ παντῶν ("a ransom for all people").5

One interesting item that stands out is that ἀντίλυτρον occurs only once in the entire New Testament (1 Tim 2:6), and as far as we know, it never occurs in the Greek language before this verse. However, as NIDNTTE points out, in Mark 10:45 Jesus called himself a λύτρον ἀντὶ πολλῶν ("a ransom for many"). This text, along with its parallel in Matthew 20:28, are the only occurrences of λύτρον in the New Testament.

In other words, Jesus’ words in Matthew 20:28/Mark 10:45 most likely serve as the source of Paul’s word about Jesus as a ransom for all people.6 NIDNTTE quotes D. Guthrie on Paul’s use of these two prepositions:

The addition of the preposition anti, ‘instead of,’ is significant in view of the preposition huper, ‘on behalf of,’ used after it. Christ is conceived of as an ‘exchange price’ on behalf of and in the place of all, on the grounds of which freedom may be granted" (The Pastoral Epistles [1957], 72).

At the very heart of the gospel that Paul preached is the notion that Christ by his death of the cross is a ransom, an “exchange price,” through which we become reconciled to God.

This notion may not be popular today in some circles, but the interpretation of these words and the uniqueness of both μεσίτης and λύτρον ἀντὶ ἀντίλυτρον in the New Testament tell a different story.7

Conclusion
This is why I use sources like NIDNTTE when I prepare for sermons: it helps me understand the precise meaning of a biblical word in the context of a passage in which it occurs. That helps me to craft a message that is clear and understandable for my listeners. In this case, I wanted them to understand that Jesus is the only go-between (mediator) between us and God, and Christ “achieved” this status by paying the “ransom price” on the cross.

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5 The word ἀντίλυτρον is discussed under the verb λυτρόω. You can find where this discussion is located either by using the Scripture index, as I have done, or by looking up ἀντίλυτρον in the Greek word index in the index volume.
6 Though Paul uses the word ὑπὲρ rather than ἀντὶ; in 1:334 there is a discussion and comparison of these two words.
7 Note too that in the last paragraph on 3:184 there is a discussion of how we should understand the “all” in 1 Tim 2:6.
3. **NIDNTT** vs. **NIDNTTE**: How does the revised edition compare?

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<tr>
<th><strong>Original NIDNTT</strong></th>
<th><strong>Revised NIDNTTE</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>3 volumes + index volume</td>
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<td>Published in 1975-1978</td>
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<td>Greek words were difficult to find because they were</td>
<td>Greek words are easier to find because they’re alphabetized according to the Greek.</td>
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<td>discussed under English word entries.</td>
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<td>synonyms and idioms.</td>
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<td>Multiple writers contributed to word discussions.</td>
<td>Each of Silva’s articles stands on its own as a well-written, theologically</td>
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<td>Content was not always well-coordinated and word</td>
<td>consistent essay.</td>
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<td>nuances were seldom compared.</td>
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<td>Lacked a consistently evangelical perspective. Reprints</td>
<td>Silva applies greater consistency and integrates only the best content from the</td>
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<td>included some theological “Correction” sections.</td>
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<td>Lacked some theologically significant words. Greek</td>
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<td>prepositions were discussed in an appendix.</td>
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<td>Some contributors lacked the linguistic sensitivity</td>
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<td>required to probe different word meanings.</td>
<td>skilled linguist and scholar of the biblical languages</td>
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<td>inconsistent, sometimes inaccurate.</td>
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<td>Silva traces the history and meaning of Hebrew words with accuracy.</td>
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<td>Similarly, Jewish literature — whether written in Greek</td>
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<td>All bibliographies have been carefully scrutinized and updated by Silva, who has</td>
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4. JERUSALEM & LOVE: Two Excerpts from NIDNTTE

(1) Jerusalem

‘Ἰεροουσαλήμ G2647 (lerousalēm) and ‘Ιεροσολύμα G2642 (Hierosolyma), Jerusalem; ‘Ιεροσολυμίτης G2643 (lerosolymitēs), an inhabitant of Jerusalem

Concept: Name, Proper

General Literature

Aside from some fragmentary quotations (e.g., Clearchus, cited by Jos. C. Ap. 1.179), the earliest occurrence of this name is in Polyb. (16.39.4). Both he and other secular writers use the hellenized form ‘Ἰεροσόλυμα, usually perceived as a pl. that could be declined (thus gen. ‘Ιεροοσολύμων, dat. ‘Ιεροοσολύμοις). The presence of the rough breathing no doubt reflects a popular association of the name with the ἱερός G2641 word group (cf. BDF §§39.1; 56.1). This connection was later exploited by Jewish authors who identified Jerusalem as the “holy city.” Some Gk. writers, however, evidently (and quite wrongly) linked the name with ἱεροσυλέω G2644, “to rob temples, commit sacrilege.” Indeed, Lysimachus of Alexandria argued that the orig. name of the city was ‘Ἰερόσυλα because the Hebrews under Moses, on their way to Judea, “plundered the temples and set them on fire... At a later time, when they became more powerful, they changed the name to avoid reproach, and they called the city Hierosolyma and themselves Hierosolymites” (quoted by Jos. C. Ap. 1.310– 11).

“Some Greek writers... evidently linked the name [Jerusalem] with...“to rob temples, commit sacrilege”

Jewish Literature

1. In the LXX the form ‘Ιεροσόλυμα occurs c. 45x, but it is confined to a half dozen Apoc. books (1 Esdras, Tobit [in codd. A and B], 1– 4 Maccabees [esp. 2 Maccabees]). Far more common, occurring c. 850x (over 150x in Apoc., incl. a dozen times in Tobit [cod. S]), is the indeclinable form ‘Ἰερουσαλήμ, a more accurate transliteration of Heb. יְרוּשָׁלָם H3731 (a so- called perpetual Qere; the Ketib prob. indicates the pronunciation יְרוּשָלֵם [cf. Aram. יְרוּשֹׁלֶם H10332]). This name is esp. freq. in 2 Chronicles (125x), Jeremiah (89x), 1 Esdras (66x, alongside 5 instances of ‘Ιεροοσόλυμα), and 2 Kings (62x). The gentilic ‘Ιεροοσολυμίτης occurs for the first time in the Apoc. (4 Macc 4:22; 18:5; Sir 50:27).

Jerusalem was the name of the orig. Canaanite city-state; it occurs already in the Egyptian Exegation Texts (c. 1900– 1800) in the form (U)rušalimum, and its initial bib. designation is Salem (Gen 14:18; cf. Ps 76:2 [understood as “peace”in LXX 75:3]).

“Jerusalem was the name of the orig. Canaanite city-state”
When the Israelites conquered Canaan they simply took over the name (cf. Josh 10:1). The Heb. name was prob. understood to mean “Foundation of Peace,” but for the Canaanites it may have meant “Foundation of Shalem,” i.e., a god who, acc. to Ugaritic texts, embodied the twilight. His sanctuary would have been in this settlement, which orig. was situated on the hill Zion. In later history Jerusalem remained the name of the whole of the expanding settlement. But it was also called the City of David. Sometimes, therefore, Zion, Jerusalem, and the City of David are synonymous (e.g., 2 Sam 5:6– 7; 1 Kgs 8:1).

2. Lying at the southern tip of Benjamin’s territory, Jerusalem was an ideal capital for King David. Since he had captured it with an army of mercenaries, it remained independent (cf. 2 Sam 5:6– 10). Many, however, see the bringing of the ark of the covenant into the temple in Jerusalem (ch. 6) as the decisive act for the further significance of the city (cf. M. Noth, *The Laws in the Pentateuch and Other Studies* [1966], 29ff., 132– 44, 250– 54). This act gave to Jerusalem the role of the old central sanctuary, and thus the city would achieve great importance in Israel’s hopes for the future. Only the orig. transfer of the ark could explain why Jerusalem, a Canaanite city, with its peculiar independent position as seat of the Davidic dynasty, should become the cultic center of Israel. Even after the northern kingdom’s break with the south, Jerusalem retained its central theological significance for both kingdoms (1 Kgs 12:27– 28). Yahweh of hosts, previously described as being enthroned above the ark (2 Sam 6:2), was now the one “who dwells on Mount Zion” (Isa 8:18), and thus the site could be referred to as “the mountain of the Lord” (2:3; Mic 4:2).

Others doubt that after its transfer the ark played an essential role (cf. G. Fohrer in *TDNT* 7:302ff.). In any case, Jerusalem, as the royal capital of the united kingdom, was the center of the nation and honored as such. But it was also the temple city of the centralized cult and thus a spiritual and religious center, much visited even after the dissolution of the political unity. The holy city (Isa 48:2; 52:1) became more and more the focus of theocratic hopes. Historical experiences, but also theological reflection, strengthened and extended the idea of the inviolability and indestructibility of the temple city (cf. 2 Kgs 18– 19; 2 Chr 32; Isa 36– 37; Jer 7:4). During the exile, in part., it was the embodiment of every longing (Ps 137 [136]). From here it was only a short step to join the name of the city with eschat. expectations (Jer 31:38– 40 [38:38– 40]). It was expected that Jerusalem would become the focus for the whole world, to which all the Gentiles would stream (Jer 3:17), and which would then be called “a house of prayer for all nations” (Isa 56:7). In all this complex of ideas the names Jerusalem and Zion are freq. used together.

3. When the prophets came to speak about the conditions they themselves could observe in Jerusalem, however, a different picture was revealed. Jerusalem had fallen
away from God and become a prostitute. The worship of idols and disregard of God’s commandments were rife in the city. The kings and the citizens along with them were going their own political ways, unconcerned about the will of God. Hence, the prophets announced to the city the judgment of God (e.g., Isa 32:9–14; Jer 6:22–30), judgment that could not be prevented because the corrupt people would not turn and repent (Jer 4:3–4). Foreign peoples and kings would carry out the judgment, which would result in a cleansed and purified Jerusalem (Isa 40). It was Yahweh’s intention to do good to Jerusalem once again (Zech 8:15), and at the end of the age the city “will be holy; never gain will foreigners invade her” (Joel 3:17 [4:17]). The eschat. Jerusalem was always thought of, however, only as an improved, renewed earthly city, not as supernatural and heavenly. Therefore the nations could go on pilgrimage to it and accept a new way of life (Isa 2:2–4) by turning to Yahweh (Jer 3:17). From Jerusalem streams of blessing would pour out into the world (Ezek 47:1–12). From this sanctified city Yahweh would reign over the whole world (Isa 24:23). Jerusalem would be his throne (Jer 3:17).

4. The use of the names in early Jud. does not differ from that of the OT. Jerusalem/Zion was the beloved city, toward which the people turned their face, in whatever part of the world, during the daily times of prayer. The typical Jew went there on pilgrimage, whenever poss. at the great festivals, and wished to die and be buried there. Huge sums of money flowed to Jerusalem from the dispersion in the form of temple tax, with the help of which the sacrificial ritual was maintained.

More important was the development of eschat. ideas. Alongside the concept that the earthly city would be the scene of Yahweh’s victory (2 Esd 13:25–38; Sib. Or. 3.663–704), apocalyptic lit. gave expression to a belief in the heavenly, preexistent Jerusalem (2 Bar. 4.2–7), descending to earth at the end of the age (2 Esd 10:27, 54; 13:36). According to another conception, it remains in heaven as the place in which the righteous will eventually dwell (2 En. 55.2). The new Zion/Jerusalem will be of unimaginable beauty (Tob 13:16–17), inhabited by vast multitudes (Sib. Or. 5.251–68), ruled over by God himself (3.787).

New Testament
1. The name Jerusalem is used c. 140x by the NT writers. The form Ἰερούσαλήμ occurs c. 77x, but 64 of the occurrences are found in Luke-Acts (otherwise 7x in Paul and 1–3x each in Matthew, Hebrews, and Revelation). The hellenized form Ἱεροσολύμα occurs c. 62x, mainly in Acts (22x; otherwise 10–12x each in Matthew, Mark, and John; 4x in Luke; 3x in Galatians). There is much variation in the mss., however, and in any case the reason for the choice of one form over the other cannot be determined (cf. BDAG s.v.). The name is absent from the Pastoral and Catholic Epistles.

2. A significant contrast emerges between the Synoptics and John regarding Jesus’ visits to Jerusalem during his ministry. The former mention only one such visit in connection with the passion. John, on the other hand, records that Jesus traveled from

“The earthly city would be the scene of Yahweh’s victory”
Galilee to Jerusalem on other occasions to attend Jewish festivals (2:13; 5:1; 7:10). Important deeds and miracles took place at these times, serving to reveal Jesus’ glory. In the Synoptics and Acts the city of Jerusalem often denotes simply the place where something happens (Matt 2:1 et al.), but theologically significant ideas are sometimes linked with the use of the geographical name, and these deserve special attention.

**(a)** To the theocratically minded Jewish people Jerusalem was God’s choice as focus of the world. This conception means that it is not human beings but Yahweh alone who rules. Jerusalem is “the city of the great King” (Matt 5:35, alluding to Ps 48:2 [47:3]), where the temple stands in which the true and only valid sacrificial service can be maintained. Therefore, people go to “the holy city” (cf. Matt 4:5; 27:53) because it is there that the house of God is situated (cf. Luke 2:22, 46, 49), which is indissolubly linked to the theocratic institution of the priesthood. Because Jerusalem has this theocratic significance, it plays a decisive role in the events of the passion. Jesus had to go to Jerusalem in order to fulfill his mission there at the center of the world of OT Jewish faith (Matt 16:21; Luke 9:31). There he confronted both the priests as functionaries of the cult (cf. Luke 19:45– 48) and the scribes as keepers of the Mosaic tradition (Matt 23). Therefore, it was not an insignificant matter where Jesus suffered, died, was buried, and rose again. His sacrifice made sense and was effective only in Jerusalem (Mark 10:33– 34), yet this sacrifice was rejected by the leaders in the city while accepted by God, as the accounts of the resurrection testify (cf. also Mark 8:31). From the theological point of view, then, Jerusalem is the setting in which the institutions of Jud. are taken up in Jesus’ ministry (11:15– 18) and are judged by God himself in the crucifixion.

**(b)** Jerusalem is esp. important in the theology of Luke, whose gospel begins and ends with ref. to events that took place in the temple (Luke 1:5– 25; 24:53), with numerous and significant allusions to the city throughout the book (e.g., 2:22, 38; 9:31, 51; 13:33– 34; 18:31; 23:38; 24:47). Luke’s point seems clear: “The promise given to the ancient people of God is fulfilled in the history of Jesus and his Church. The true Israel assembles in the holy place” (E. Lohse in *TDNT* 7:331). Acts goes further in this direction, for here Jerusalem serves as the place that “links the history of Jesus with the beginning of that of the community” (ibid., 335, with ref. to Acts 10:39; 13:27, 31). Hence, Jesus’ disciples, to whom he had appeared after his resurrection, remained at his express command in Jerusalem (Luke 24:49, 52) to wait for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4; 2:1– 4). In accordance with their commission, they proclaimed the divine events to all peoples beginning from Jerusalem (Luke 24:47; Acts 5:20– 21). They offered praise to God in the temple as the true daily sacrifice (Luke 24:53; Acts 2:46; 3:1; 5:25, 42). The city remains the focus of the world, the city of God’s people: the so- called Apostolic Council gathered within its walls (Acts 15); emissaries went out from Jerusalem (8:14; 11:22, 27) and returned there (19:21; 21:15).

3. Paul was born at Tarsus (Acts 21:39; 22:3; cf. 9:30; 11:25) but “brought up” in Jerusalem (22:3; the vb. is ἀνατρέφω G427). It is uncertain how old he was when he moved to Jerusalem, though some believe he was a very young boy (see esp. W. C. Van Unnik, Tarsus or Jerusalem: The City of Paul’s Youth [1962]). In any case, for Paul too Jerusalem is the center of Christendom, but in a different sense from the Synoptics and Acts. The gospel went out from Jerusalem (Rom 15:19) and has brought into being a new unity between Gentiles and Jews, the church (cf. Eph 2:14; see ἐκκλησία G1711). Paul emphasizes his agreement with the Jerusalem apostles (Gal 2:1–10), but he does not view them as the highest authority. If he seeks out the apostles (cf. 1:18–20), it is out of brotherly love and respect, for they preceded him chronologically; but, like them, he received his commission and instructions from the Lord himself (1:1; 2:2).

Because the Gentile Christians have received a share in the spiritual blessings of the orig. Jewish Christian community, it is natural for Paul that the Jerusalem church should be rendered service in “material blessings” in the form of financial help (Rom 15:27). The objection that his “service for Jerusalem” (ἡ διακονία μου εἰς Ἰερουσαλήμ, 15:31) involved a kind of tax corresponding to the as each individual sees fit (1 Cor 16:2; 2 Cor 8:7–8; 9:7). We should rather view the collection as both the legitimation of the Gentile Christian churches and the documentation of their interdependence with the orig. Jerusalem church (cf. also 2 Cor 8:14–15; 9:12). Commenting on Rom 11:26, “The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob” (a citation of Isa 59:20), Bruce writes: “Not only did the gospel first go out into all the world from Jerusalem; Jerusalem (if this reading of Paul’s language is correct) would be the scene of its glorious consummation” (F. F. Bruce, “Paul and Jerusalem,” TynBul 19 [1968]: 3–25, esp. 25).

4. In Revelation the city of Jerusalem is described (albeit without mention of the name) as the historical scene of the passion and as involved in the events of the end. As the wicked city (“which is figuratively called Sodom and Egypt,” Rev 11:8) it will be trampled over (11:2; cf. Luke 21:24). In 14:1 the OT name for the temple hill, Mt. Zion, is used; the Lamb is said to be standing there, “and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father’s name written on their foreheads.”

“A prophet is nowhere more in danger than in Jerusalem”
5. Apart from the uses of the name indicated so far, there also occurs in the NT the idea of the heavenly Jerusalem.

(a) In Gal 4:26 Paul speaks of “the Jerusalem above” (ἡ ἄνω Ἰερουσαλήμ), which, acc. to a fig. interpretation, is the free woman who has given birth to believers (see Σάρρα G4925). In Jewish apocalyptic tradition the heavenly Jerusalem was the preexistent place where God’s glory was always present. For Paul it was also the place of freedom from the law. This “Jerusalem above” forms a sharp contrast to “the present Jerusalem” (ἡ νῦν Ἰερουσαλήμ), the earthly city, the mother of those who are spiritually enslaved (4:25).

(b) In Heb 13:14 we read that believers “are looking for the city that is to come.” But 12:22 makes clear that Ἰερουσαλήμ ἐπουράνιος, “heavenly Jerusalem,” is not merely “the goal of the pilgrimage of the people of God which has no abiding city on earth... The community has already come to Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem. The new Jerusalem is the city in which the new διαθήκη has been made through the blood of Jesus” (TDNT 7:337).

(c) In Rev 3:12 and 21:2 “the new Jerusalem” (ἡ καινὴ Ἰερουσαλήμ) is described as a heavenly city. At the end of the age it will descend from heaven as the bride of the exalted Christ and receive as its citizens all those who have been marked as conquerors (3:12). This beautiful city (21:2, 10–11) that has descended to earth is of vast extent (21:12–16). But one thing is absent from it—the temple, “because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple” (21:22). This statement reveals a significant contrast with Jewish expectation, acc. to which the temple marks the focal point of the heavenly Jerusalem.

(2) Love

ἀγαπάω G26 (agapaō), to love, cherish, take pleasure in; ἀγάπη G27 (agapē), love, affection, love feast; ἀγαπητός G28 (agapētos), loved, beloved, dear, valued

Concept: Feast; Friend; Love

General Literature

The etym. of ἀγαπάω cannot be determined. This vb., which appears freq. from Homer onward, has a broad range of usage in general Gk. lit. When applied to things, it may mean “to value highly, prefer, be content with”; when used of persons, the sense is “to love, treat or regard with affection, be fond of.” The term can be applied to children, and the adj. ἀγαπητός (“bringing contentment, cherished, beloved”) is sometimes used in partic. of an only child (but see J. Chadwick, Lexicographica graeca: Contributions to
the Lexicography of Ancient Greek [1996], 32–34). A few times the vb. refers to sexual love. In some instances it is applied to someone favored or preferred by a god (cf. Dio Chrys. Orationes 33.21), implying a generous move by one for the sake of the other. The noun ἀγάπη is only a late construction and occurs very rarely outside the Bible (for the sparse evidence, see BDAG s.v.).

Jewish Literature
1. These lexical patterns change significantly in the LXX, where the vb. occurs c. 250x (some 50 of them in the Apoc.; by contrast, φιλέω G5797 occurs only c. 30x, incl. a handful of times in the Apoc.). With relatively few exceptions, ἀγαπάω renders Heb. אָהַב H170 (c. 170x [the next most freq. equivalent is רָחםַ H8163, “to show mercy,” only 4x]; אָהַב is transl. with φιλέω 10x). The reason for this equivalence is debated: some have argued that the Gk. translators chose ἀγαπάω because it (allegedly) has less to do with passion than with the will (placing value upon a person or thing); others point to the general decrease of φιλέω in Gk. lit. as a whole (see below, NT 6); still others suggest that the translators were motivated by the partial sound correspondence between the Gk. and Heb. terms.

In any case, there is no doubt that the noun ἀγάπη becomes prominent for the first time in the LXX, occurring 18x (10 of them in Song of Songs; 4 in the Apoc.), always for Heb. אהב H173 (ἀγάπη occurs only 3x in Philo and not at all in Jos., but almost 100x in the ApF). The cognate ἀγάπησις, with no apparent difference in meaning, occurs in the LXX 9x (plus 4x in Apoc.), most of these also as the rendering of אהב (φιλία occurs only in Proverbs [9x, usually for אהב] and in the Apoc.; ἔρως only in Prov 7:18; 30:16).

2. Love can mean the vital urge of the sexes for one another, and some OT passages speak openly of the sexual side of love (e.g., Jer 2:19–25; Ezek 16). The powerful perception of the differentiation of the sexes and of marital love as an enriching gift derives not only from the creation narrative (Gen 2:18–25), but even more so from Song of Songs, which celebrates the strength of passionate love: “Place me like a seal over your heart, / like a seal on your arm; / for love is as strong as death, / its jealousy unyielding as the grave. / It burns like blazing fire, / like a mighty flame” (Cant 8:6).

In addition to the relationship between the sexes, family ties as well as the spiritual bond between friends can be described as love. Thus, when the affection of Jonathan and David for one another is spoken of, it is expressed in terms of a communal fellowship deeper than the romantic or physical love between the sexes: “Your love for me was wonderful, more wonderful than that of women” (2 Sam 1:26, where the LXX uses ἀγάπησις; ἀγαπάω is used in 1 Sam 18:1, 3 [lacking in cod. B]; 20:17). The modern attempt to view David’s relationship with Jonathan as homosexual misses the specific point of the text, namely, that a deep spiritual bond has greater value than a strictly erotic relationship.

“The modern attempt to view David’s relationship with Jonathan as homosexual misses the specific point of the text”
In a further sense, love is understood as lying at the root of social community life: “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Lev 19:18; see πλησίον G4446). Love in this context means devotion toward one’s neighbors, receiving them with full acceptance. This aspect is illustrated by the social legislation, which is partic. Concerned with the rights of aliens, the poor, and others in special need (19:34; 25:35).

3. The word love is used in the OT less commonly and with greater caution for describing the relationship between God and human beings. In this respect the Heb. Scriptures contrast with Gk. lit. in being far removed from any mystical thinking. The OT makes clear that we can never ascend to God; rather, all human thought, feeling, action, and worship are a response to a previous movement by God (some have thought that this difference accounts for the LXX’s choice of the simpler word ἀγάπη over the more loaded ἔρως, but see below, NT 6).

(a) At the beginning of the OT stands not only the God who loves, but also the God who elects and who acts directly in nature and among human beings—in partic., his people, with whom he has made a covenant (Exod 24; see διαθήκη G1347). The great deeds of Yahweh are the deeds of his history with his people, such as the exodus, the gift of the land, and the Torah. Righteousness, faithfulness, love, and grace are some of the concepts embodied in such actions. The people, in turn, reply with jubilation, praise, and obedience.

God’s judgment and grace (Heb. תִּ֡חֵן II H2876) permeate the whole of the OT. It is not an isolated characteristic of God that is being described, but rather his total activity, itself based on his sovereign will. God holds to his covenant, despite Israel’s freq. relapses, which draw divine wrath on them. The only ground for this faithfulness is to be found in his electing grace and love (e.g., Hos 11:1). Statements concerning this devotion of God to his people reach the level of suffering love, as Isa 53 predicates of the Servant of the Lord.

(b) It was the prophets who first ventured to elaborate on the theme of the love of God as the main motif of his electing work. It was an enormity of unique proportions for Hosea—surrounded by the Canaanite world of sexual fertility-cults—to represent the relationship between Yahweh and his people as that of a deceived husband and a prostitute. Yet, despite the fact that Israel had broken the covenant, and thus become a whore and an adulteress, Yahweh still wooed back his faithless wife, the godless covenant people, with an inconceivable love (Hos 2:19–20). Israel is not his people (1:9), but will become his people again through Yahweh’s patient and winsome wooing (2:23).

“Despite the fact that Israel had broken the covenant... Yahweh still wooed back his faithless wife”

Besides this marriage analogy, however, Hosea also used the picture of a father to describe Yahweh’s unfathomable love for Israel, whom he loved in Egypt and drew to
himself with bonds of love (Hos 11:1–4). But Israel turned away, and so Hosea pictured a struggle going on within Yahweh himself as that between the jealous wrath of a deceived father and his glowing love: “How can I give you up, Ephraim? / How can I hand you over, Israel? ... / My heart is changed within me; / all my compassion is aroused. / I will not carry out my fierce anger, / nor will I turn and devastate Ephraim again. / For I am God, and not man—/ the Holy One among you” (11:8–9). This description by Hosea of the passionate and zealous love of God is unprecedented in its boldness: his divine character does not express itself in destructive power, but in tender and compassionate love, which precedes any responsive human love, suffers through the faithlessness of his people (6:4), and does not hand them over to ultimate ruin.

The later prophets took over from Hosea the picture of love and the theme of the beloved, with modifications. Jeremiah spoke of Israel’s first love in the wilderness and of the people growing cold in Canaan (Jer 2:1–8). But Yahweh’s love is everlasting (31:3), and he will restore the degenerate people again (3:6–10; 31:4). In Isa 54 it is not the wife who has left her husband, but Yahweh who has abandoned his young bride, to whom he now again turns in compassion: “For a brief moment I abandoned you, / but with deep compassion I will bring you back” (54:7). One can even speak of Yahweh’s “political love,” to be recognized in the return of the exiles from Babylon: “Since you are precious and honored in my sight, / and because I love you, / I will give people in exchange for you, / and nations in exchange for your life” (43:4).

(c) Deuteronomy expresses similar ideas. But whereas in the prophets the focus is Yahweh’s love as the basis for his future actions in saving his lost people, the allusions to his electing love in Deuteronomy always provide the ground for exhorting Israel to love God and to follow his directing (Deut 7:6–11). This theme is summarized in the Shema: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength” (6:5). Love for God is realized in obedience to his will as expressed in the covenant, in keeping the law (Exod 20:6; Deut 10:12–13), and in devotion to one’s neighbor (Lev 19:18). The law concerning aliens provides a striking example of the way human social love is to be founded on the acts of God: “The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt. I am the Lord your God” (Lev 19:34). Love, here, means dealing with a person as a true friend. Of course, the command to love one’s neighbor is not, in the OT, something capable of comprehending the whole law: love for Yahweh is represented in a whole gamut of instructions and directives.

4. (a) In Hel. and rabb. Jud., love became the central concept for describing God’s relationship with his people. Despite mystical nuances derived from Greece and the ANE, the concept still maintained its basic OT implications. God loves his people through every distress they meet. Proof of his love is the Torah: believers reciprocate
God’s love as they obey the commandments, emulate God’s zealous compassion, and remain true to God, even to the point of martyrdom (4 Macc 13:24; 15:3). Loving one’s neighbor is of supreme importance in Jewish piety. There are even individual exx. of commands to help one’s enemy, if need be, whether a member of the chosen people or not. There is also the occasional observation that God allows his forgiving love to hold sway well beyond the requirements of justice (Str-B 1:905, 917–18; 3:451, 485, 766, 778).

(b) Essential for an understanding of the NT is the quite different structure of Qumran piety. The Qumranians believed that their community had been chosen in God’s love, but that this love referred only to the “children of light.” Indeed, God hates all who belong to the company of Belial, and the community is instructed to “love everyone whom God elects, hate everyone he hates” (1QS I, 3–4; contrast Matt 5:43–48). The command to love does indeed play an important role, but since God’s love is not conceived as having universal application, even love for one’s neighbor has only a restricted ref. to members of the community. (Cf. E. F. Sutcliffe, “Hatred at Qumran,” RevQ 2 [1959–60]: 345–55.)

New Testament

1. Introductory comments. Love is a central and all-encompassing concept of the Christian faith (cf. John 3:16), “God is love” (1 John 4:8), and therefore “we also ought to love one another” (4:11). In this connection, the NT writers use ἀγαπάω and its cognates rather than their synonyms (see below, sect. 6). This word group occurs c. 320x in the NT, with the greatest concentration found in 1 John (c. 10x per ch.), Ephesians (almost 4x per ch.), and the Gospel of John (c. 2x per ch.; strangely, these terms do not appear in Acts except for ἀγαπητός [Acts 15:25, and even this example is in a quotation of the letter drafted by the Jerusalem Council]).

One should not infer that this word group has some kind of intrinsic “divine” meaning, as though the terms by themselves indicate selfless, sacrificial, pure love. In the LXX, for example, the vb. is used of Samson’s attraction to Delilah (Judg 16:4), of Saul’s initial liking for David (1 Sam 16:21), of King Hiram’s political friendship with David (1 Ki. 5:1), of Solomon’s attachment to his numerous pagan wives (1 Ki. 11:2), of the people’s devotion to vain things (Ps 4:2 [LXX 4:3]), of the wicked’s love for unrighteousness, evil, and cursing (11:5 [10:5]; 52:3–4 [51:5–6]; 109:17 [108:17]), of the love for death that characterizes those who hate divine wisdom (Prov 8:36), of greediness for money and wealth (Eccl 5:10 [5:9]), of the rulers’ passion for shameful behavior (Hos 4:18), of the desire for a prostitute’s wages (9:1), of the craving to oppress (12:7 [12:8]), of the inclination to swear falsely (Zech 8:17), of greediness for bribes (Isa 1:23), of passion for the adulterous bed (57:8), of the tendency to wander away from God (Jer 14:10), and even of Amnon’s lust for his half-sister Tamar (2 Sam 13:1, 4, 15 [where both the vb. and the noun are used]).
Negative uses are found in the NT as well: of the Pharisees’ desire for places of honor in the synagogue (Luke 11:43, where the parallel has φιλέω, Matt 23:6 [cf. 6:5]), of the world’s preference for darkness (John 3:19), of the Pharisees’ longing for human glory (12:43; cf. Plato Phaedr. 257e, ἀγαπῶσι τοὺς ἐπαινέτας, “[the statesmen] love those who praise [them]”), of Demas’s love for the present age (2 Tim 4:10), and of the love for the world that indicates the absence of God’s love (1 John 2:15).

It remains true that in the vast majority of its NT occurrences, ἀγαπάω is used with ref. to a distinctive Christian virtue, but this fact witnesses to the significance of the theological concept, not to any positive qualities inherent in the word itself. (The absence of the terms ἐράω and ἔρως in the NT [and near absence in the LXX] cannot be explained by saying that the Bible has a higher view of love than do secular writers, for the Scriptures freq. refer to “bad” or illicit love, lust, and so on without using that word group. In these cases, the bib. writers prefer more specific terms, such as ἀσέλγεια G816, ἐπιθυμέω G2121, πορνεύω G4519, etc.) On the other hand, one can hardly deny that the OT teaching on love and esp. the NT emphasis on this virtue have had a significant effect on the vocabulary, regardless of what may have motivated the initial choice of a specific term. In partic., it is worthy of note that the NT never uses the noun ἀγάπη in negative contexts. Rather, its meaning always seems related to the phrase ἡ ἀγάπη τοῦ θεοῦ, “the love of God” (whether in the subj. gen. sense, “God’s love for us,” or in the obj. gen. sense, “our love for God”), incl. the love for fellow believers—and even for one’s enemies—that the presence of God evokes. This usage brings ἀγάπη very close to concepts like faith (see πιστεύω G4409), righteousness (δικαιοσύνη G1466), and grace (χάρις G5921), all of which have a single point of origin in God alone.

2. Synoptic Gospels.
   (a) In the synoptic tradition the main emphasis falls on the preaching of the kingdom of God (see βασιλεύς G995) and of the new way of life that breaks in with Jesus himself. God sends his beloved (ἀγαπητός) Son, to whom we are commanded to listen (Matt 3:17; 12:18; 17:5; Mark 12:6 [with their respective par.]; cf. Gen 22:2, 12, 16; Ps 2:7; Isa 42:1). The noun ἀγάπη is not used to express the motive behind this divine work. Instead, other words and pictures take its place (e.g., οἰκτίρμων G3881, “compassionate,” Luke 6:36 [see οἰκτίρμος G3880]; ἔλεος G1799, “mercy,” Luke 1:50). Jesus’ activity among us thus reveals the mercy and love of God: Jesus himself is the one who truly loves, and he takes to himself the poor, the sick, and sinners. The word ἀγάπη is not found in the passion narrative either, but the underlying thought of redemptive mercy and love lies clearly in the background (cf. Mark 10:45; 14:24).

The Sermon on the Mount is best understood when the Beatitudes are seen in the first instance as statements by Jesus about himself (Matt 5:3–11; cf. Luke 6:20–22; see

“The Sermon on the Mount is best understood when the Beatitudes are seen in the first instance as statements by Jesus about himself”
μακάριος G3421). Jesus is the first to keep the radical demands of discipleship and so fulfill the law. The command to love one's enemies (Matt 5:44; cf. Luke 6:27), the word of forgiveness from the cross (Luke 23:34), and the promise to the robber (23:43) all fit into the same pattern.

(b) In the Synoptics love for God is based on the twofold summary of the law (Matt 22:34–40 par. Mark 12:28–34; cf. Luke 10:25–28). Here too, through God's mercy, grows the new reality of love revealed in Jesus' ministry. His followers enter and share this love and so fulfill the demands of the Sermon on the Mount. Discipleship, however, also involves suffering, and when disciples suffer they are recognized by God (Matt 10:37–39). This demand indicates the hardship love has to face; it can succeed in this world only by way of suffering. If love cost God what was most dear to him, the same will certainly apply to a disciple.

(c) These considerations suggest a new and distinctive way of understanding love for one's neighbor: it is God's love, creating the new realities among human beings, that is itself the basis and motivation for love between people. The combination of the command to love God (Deut 6:5) and the command to love one's neighbor (Lev 19:18) appears only in Mark 12:28 and par. The second command is quoted also in Rom 13:9; Gal 5:14; Jas 2:8. The two commands were stressed by the rabbis as well: R. Akiba calls the command to love one's neighbor a basic principle of the Torah, embracing all others (cf. Str-B 1:900–908). But the summation and substantiation of the command in the love of God is a peculiarly NT insight. Further, Jesus decisively stepped over the boundaries of Jewish tradition in the radical command to love one's enemies (Matt 5:43–48 par. Luke 6:27–28, 32–36). It is true that a general love for people, even for all creatures, had already been accepted as axiomatic; and as noted above (JL 4), Jewish tradition speaks about helping enemies. But the radical and laconic nature of the sentence—enemies are to be loved—is not found in rabb. teaching (cf. Str-B 1:553–68). Jesus' interpretation of the second command in the parable of the Good Samaritan implicitly extends love to include everyone (Luke 10:37; cf. 7:47).

3. Pauline writings.
(a) Paul stands entirely in the line of OT tradition when he speaks of the love of God. The adj. ἀγαπητός is very common in his writings (27x), and it often approaches the meaning “chosen.” In partic., Rom 11:28 (κατὰ δὲ τὴν ἐκλογὴν ἀγαπητοὶ διὰ τοὺς πατέρας, lit., “but according to election beloved on account of the patriarchs”) shows how this word in Paul’s thought links up with the Israelite election-tradition. The “called” (κλητοί, a term that alludes to God’s gracious election) are also the ἀγαπητοί (Rom 1:7; cf. Col 3:12). As in the OT, the motive for divine election is God’s love, which can also be expressed by the term ἔλεος (the LXX usually translates Heb. רחמים H8163, “to show mercy,” with ἐλεέω G1796 and οἰκτίρω G3882, but in a few instances with ἀγαπάω).
The contrasting concept in Paul is ὀργή G3973, “wrath” (cf. Rom 5:8–9; Eph 2:3–4). All human beings find themselves on a direct road leading to the wrathful judgment of God; from this destiny God in his electing love rescues those who believe (1 Thess 1:10). This love thus becomes a revealing activity in Jesus Christ’s saving work (Rom 5:8; 8:35–39), so that the circle of guilt, wrath, and judgment is broken through. Indeed, Jesus Christ himself is said to be the source of this love (e.g., Gal 2:20; Eph 5:2; cf. 2 Thess 2:13). Now if God’s action can be defined as love, then the great love song of 1 Cor 13 can be understood not merely as a chapter of ethics, but as a description of all God’s activity. As many have pointed out, in place of the word “love” we can put the name of Jesus Christ (cf. 2 Cor 13:11, 13, where God and his love appear to be used synonymously). This does not mean that God becomes the “good Lord” who lets anything pass, for there is still the possibility of disbelief and there is still the judgment to come. But God’s righteousness is realized in the fact that the beloved Son stands in the place of the unrighteous (cf. 2 Cor 5:18–21).

The electing love of God lies also in the background of Eph 5:22–33, where the relationship between husband and wife is compared with the love of Christ for the church. There are two points of contact here. On the one hand, there is the election of Israel (cf. Rom 9), and the church is regarded as the new Israel that has come to faith in Christ. On the other hand, there is the OT picture of marriage, dating from the time of Hosea, with the implication of a relationship of fidelity and covenant love. What is true for the Christian community is true also for the individual and for marriage. God’s love is able to overcome every kind of difficulty and infidelity. Electing love is at the same time compassionate and forgiving love.

Certainty of salvation consists in knowing that God’s loving activity, of which the resurrection is the final seal, is stronger than any other power, incl. even death (Rom 8:37–39; 1 Cor 15:55–57). The resurrection is the crowning act of God’s love. In it is displayed the victory over these forces (cf. 2 Cor 5:16–21). See ἀνίστημι G482.

(b) A believer is a sinner who is loved by God. Having entered the sphere of God’s love, believers themselves become loving. Hence, as in Jesus’ teaching, love for God and for one’s neighbor derive from God’s own love. It is this divine love, poured into our hearts by the Spirit, that moves believers (Rom 5:5; 15:30). The human response to God’s saving act is described by Paul mostly as πίστις G4411 (“faith”) or γνῶσις G1194 (“knowledge”), but also freq. as ἀγάπη (cf. 1 Cor 8:3; Eph 3:19). Through the Spirit, knowing God and being known by him are two sides of the same coin (1 Cor 13:12; Gal 4:9); similarly, those who are loved by God love him. In those who recognize that they are loved (cf. Rom 8:37), faith is active through love (Gal 5:6). Thus love can be said to be the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22); faith and love in fact are often mentioned side by side (e.g., Eph 6:23; 1 Thess 1:3; 3:6; 5:8; 1 Tim 1:14).
The formula ἐν Χριστῷ ("in Christ") speaks of the existence of the believer in the sphere of the love of God. When I am "in Christ" or Christ is "in me," this love has taken hold of me and is making me, a believing person, into a loving person (cf. Gal 2:20; 1 Tim 1:14). As someone who loves, a believer is a "new creation" whose origin lies in the love of Christ (cf. 2 Cor 5:14 with v. 17).

(c) In 1 Cor 13 Paul summarizes virtually everything to be said here. Love stands over every power and authority, introducing and encircling the whole. Prophecy, faith, hope, and knowledge (vv. 2, 7–8) are subordinated to it—not, however, as gradations of lessening importance, but as component parts of that one powerful force which permeates and animates everything. In the context of 1 Corinthians, love is the greatest of the gifts of the Spirit, as well as the force that holds a Christian community together and builds it up. Without love, no fellowship or shared life is poss. (1 Cor 16:14; Eph 1:15; 3:17–19). The body of Christ is built up by love (1 Cor 8:1; Eph 4:16; Phil 2:1–2; Col 2:2; 2 Thess 1:3). When Paul offers the church the example of his own love, he is calling believers back to their fellowship in the love of God (2 Cor 2:4; 8:7). Moreover, the apostle views love for neighbor as the fulfillment of the OT law (Rom 13:8–10; Gal 5:14). The law has already been fulfilled because Jesus, who is love, has died for sinners. Insofar, therefore, as Christians love one another they too fulfill the law, not in the sense that they attain any perfection, but that they are now living in God’s new reality through the strengthening power of forgiveness. See νόμος G3795.

(a) God’s nature and activity are illustrated with partic. clarity by John’s use of ἀγάπη and ἀγαπάω, partly because he employs these terms more often than does Paul in absolute fashion (i.e., as a noun without qualifying gen., or as a vb. with no obj.). The two words occur in the Johannine writings (incl. Revelation) over 110x, a much greater frequency than that of terms referring to associated concepts such as righteousness (δικαιοσύνη G1466 and cognates 23x), “grace” (χάρις 7x), and “mercy” (ἐλεέω 1x, ἐλεέω not at all). Just as John 1:1–14 speaks of the preexistent λόγος G3364, Jesus in this gospel speaks of the Father’s preexistent love for him (John 17:24; cf. 3:35; 10:17; 15:9). God is essentially love (1 John 4:8), and his purpose right from the beginning has been one of love. The love of the Father for the Son is therefore the archetype of all love. This fact is made visible in the sending and self-sacrifice of the Son (John 3:16; 1 John 3:1, 16). For sinners to “see” and “know” this love is to be saved. God’s primary purpose for the world is his compassionate and forgiving love, which asserts itself despite the world’s hostile rejection of it. In God’s ἀγάπη his δόξα G1518 is simultaneously revealed, for love’s triumph is seen in the glorification of Jesus, that is, his death, which here includes his return to the Father (John 12:16, 23–33). The believer, taken up into this victory, receives life (cf. 3:36; 11:25–26; 1 John 4:9).

(b) According to John, believers are included in the relationship of love enjoyed between Father and Son (John 14:21–24; 15:9–10; 17:26). The disciples are to love
Father and Son with an equal love (14:21–24; cf. 8:42; 1 John 4:16). The continual oscillation between the subj. and obj. of love in John shows that the Father, the Son, and the believers are all united in the one reality of divine love (1 John 3:16; 4:7–8); the alternative is death (3:14–15). The typical Johannine phrase μένειν ἐν (“to remain in”) can refer equally to Jesus (John 15:4–7) or to love (15:9–10; cf. 1 John 4:12–15 with v. 16).

(c) In John, even more clearly than in Paul, mutual love is grounded in divine love (John 13:34; 1 John 4:21). Love is a sign and a proof of faith (1 John 3:10; 4:7–21). Love for others derives from God’s love for us; and without love for our brothers and sisters there can be no relationship with God. Thus John presents love as a command (John 13:34; 14:23–24; 15:12, 17; 2 John 5).

5. Other uses. Love found expression for itself in early Christian circles by way of the “kiss of love” (φίλημα ἀγάπης, 1 Pet 5:14; cf. Rom 16:16), evidently a token of fellowship that was a regular part of the worship of the congregation; practically no details of this custom are known (see φιλέω NT 3). In addition, ἄγαπη was the word used for an important ceremony in early Christianity. The only explicit ref. to this custom in the NT is Jude 12, whether the author decries certain people who were “blemishes at your love feasts” (ἐν ταῖς ἁγαπαίς ὑμῶν σπιλάδες; cf. also 2 Pet 2:13 v.l.). It appears from 1 Cor 11 that the celebration of the Lord’s Supper was linked with a normal meal; later evidence suggests that this feast eventually became separated from the Eucharist and celebrated in its own right, though patristic allusions to it provide little specific information (cf. Ign. Smyrn. 8.2; Clem. Alex. Paedogogus 2.1; see also ODCC, 26).

6. Synonyms and antonyms. It has become commonplace—not only in popular lit. but in scholarly treatments as well—to say that while Eng. has only one word for “love,” Gk. has three, each of which has a clearly distinguishable meaning: ἔρως (vb. ἐράω) supposedly has a negative connotation and indicates a desire for personal satisfaction, so that it is often applied to sexual matters (this word group is rare in the LXX and totally absent in the NT); φιλία G5802 (vb. φιλέω G5797) is said to be a somewhat neutral and colorless term, referring primarily to friendships and family relations; ἄγαπη and ἄγαπαω, finally, signify a self-giving attitude that seeks the best for others, even if unlovable (some of these distinctions owe much to the influential work by A. Nygren, Agape and Eros [1953]; earlier, Trench (p. 43) had argued that ἔρως and its cognates had been corrupted by the world, and “they carried such an atmosphere of unholliness about them...that the truth of God abstained from the defiling contact with them”).

This approach is problematic, however. Not only does it give an oversimplified picture of the Gk. vocabulary—it is also inaccurate in several respects. To begin with, Gk. has more than just three words whose use can come within the broad category of “love,” such as ἀντέχω G504 (mid.; see ἔχω G2400), ἐπιθυμία G2123 (vb. ἐπιθυμέω G2121), ἐπιπόθησις G2161 (vb. ἐπιποθέω G2160), ἱμερος (vb. ἱμείρω), κολλάω G3140, πόθος...
(vb. ποθέω), στιλάγχων G5073 (pl.), στοργή (vb. στέργω), and others. And, of course, it is far from the truth that Eng. has only one word to express the concept of love in its various forms (cf. affection, amorousness, ardor, attraction, devotion, eroticism, fondness, infatuation, libido, lust, passion; vb.s.—adore, be attracted/drawn to, cherish, be enamored of, fall for, like, long for, need, treasure, want, yearn for; verbal phrases—have a crush on, be in love with, be smitten with, give pleasure to, make love to, be crazy/wild about)…

As for φιλέω, it is true enough that this vb. occurs freq. in contexts of friendship, and that often it is used in the mild sense of “to like (something)” (cf. Gen 27:4 et al.), to a person’s love for wisdom (Prov 29:3), to the love for parents (Matt 10:37), to God the Father’s love for the Son (John 5:20), to Jesus’ deep love for Lazarus (11:3 [= ἀγαπάω in v. 5], 36); to the Father’s love for the disciples in response to the disciples’ love for Jesus (16:27), to the love for the Lord that is required to avoid a curse (1 Cor 16:22), to Christian brotherly love (Titus 3:5), and to the risen Lord’s love for his people (Rev 3:19). (It should be added that φιλέω could also mean “to kiss,” and that this meaning became more freq. when the alternate vb. κυνέω fell out of use. Very prob., the increased frequency of ἀγαπάω during the Hel. period, reflected in the NT, has something to do with the decrease in the use of φιλέω with the meaning “to love.” See R. Joly, Le vocabulaire chretien de l’amour, est-il originel? Φιλεῖν et ἀγαπᾶν dans le grec antique [1968], 33.)

Special attention is usually given to the well-known dialogue between Peter and the risen Jesus in John 21:15–17; here the alternation between ἀγαπάω (which Jesus uses the first two times he asks, “Do you love me?”) and φιλέω (which Jesus uses the third time and Peter uses in his answer all three times) naturally raises the expectation that some semantic distinction is intended. B. F. Westcott (The Gospel according to St. John [1882], 303) argued that by using the second vb. Peter “lays claim only to the feeling of natural love…of which he could be sure. He does not venture to say that he has attained to that higher love (ἀγαπᾶς) which was to be the spring of the Christian life.” This view has been widely accepted and seems to be reflected in the earlier NIV rendering of ἀγαπάω as “truly love” (1984 ed.; the word “truly” is omitted in the 2011 ed.). Trench (42–43) also sees a distinction, but his understanding is almost exactly the opp. of Westcott’s! According to Trench, ἀγαπάω involves “respect and reverence,” and thus to Peter this word “sounds far too cold” and fails to express “the warmth of his affection.” “He therefore in his answer substitutes for the ἀγαπᾶς of Christ the word of a more personal love, φιλῶ σε… And this he does not on the first occasion only, but again upon a second. And now at length he has triumphed; for when his Lord puts the question to him a third time, it is not ἀγαπᾶς any more, but φιλεῖς.”

That two erudite Gk. scholars should reach such contradictory conclusions raises doubts about the validity of the enterprise.
taken place in Aram.; when the text was translated into Syr. (a form of Aram.), both Gk. vbs. were rendered with the standard Aram. vb. for “love,” ḥdm (some scholars have argued that Gk. was the language more commonly spoken by Jesus and the disciples, but this remains a minority view). Moreover, consideration must be given to the fact that John’s writing style is characterized by wordplays of various sorts, and in this very passage we find other lexical alternations: βόσκω G1081 (“to tend, graze, feed”) in 21:15, 17, but ποιμαίνω G4477 (“to herd, tend, shepherd”) in v. 16; ἄρνιον G768 (“sheep, lamb”) in v. 15, but πρόβατον G4585 (“sheep”; v.l. προβάτιον, “little sheep”) in vv. 16–17; οἶδα G3857 (“to know”) in vv. 15–17a, but γινώσκω G1182 (also “to know”) in v. 17b...

5. SUMMARY

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8 The *NIDNTTE* entry on ἀγαπάω contains three more paragraphs, which we elided from this eBook simply to make more space. -Editors
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אַבָּא G5 (abba), father

Concept: Family

JL It is often said that Aram. אֲבָא (as well as its fem. equivalent אִמָּא, “mother”) orig. derived from baby-language and that it corresponds to Eng. dada or daddy, but the evidence for this view (e.g., b. Ber. 40a; b. Sanh. 70b) is far from persuasive (see J. Barr, “‘Abbā Isn’t ‘Daddy,’” JTS 39 [1988]: 28–47). In fact, this term, whatever its origins, was evidently understood to be simply the so-called determinative (or “emphatic”) form of the standard Aram. word for “father” (אָב H10003; sim. אִמָּא derives from אֵם). In the Tgs., Aram. אֲבָא is the standard rendering of Heb. אָבִי, “my father” (Gen 20:12; Josh 2:12; Isa 8:4; and freq.). Other Jewish writings make clear that this was the word normally used by adult sons and daughters, and that it could even be used as a respectful title for scholars, similar to the term rabbi (see ῥαββί G4806). Thus it is an exaggeration, and somewhat misleading, to say that the word אֲבָא has a childish character and is equivalent to Eng. daddy. It remains true, however, that אֲבָא was used by children in the home (cf. the use of Father by children in many Eng.-speaking families).

It is also significant that nowhere in the entire wealth of devotional lit. produced by ancient Jud. do we find אֲבָא being used to address God, and the reason may well be that pious Jews were hesitant to call upon the Lord with the familiar word used in everyday family life (for what follows, see J. Jeremias, The Prayers of Jesus [1967], 11–65). In rabb. documents we find very few passages where this term is used in ref. to God. For example, R. Nehemiah (fl. c. AD 150) is reported to have spoken of “the will of Abba in heaven” (Lev. Rab. 32:1 [on Lev 20:4]; two sentences later he uses the expression “my Father [אֲבָא] in heaven”). Of special interest is a story regarding R. Hananiah ha-Nehba, who lived just before the NT period: “When the world was in need of rain the rabbis would send to him school children, and they would take hold of the hem of his garment and say to him, ‘Abba, Abba, give us rain.’ Then he would plead with the Holy One (blessed be he), ‘Master of the Universe, do it for the sake of these who are unable to distinguish between the Abba who gives rain and the abba who does not’” (b. Ta’an. 23b; cf. Str-B 1:375, 520). Although Jud. was well aware of the concept of God’s Fatherhood (cf. Ps 103:13; Prov 3:12), we should not infer from this story that God was typically described, still less addressed,
ἀββά

as נָבָ. Ḥanan is here simply taking up the children’s cry in order to appeal to God’s fatherly mercy; he himself, however, uses the respectful invocation “Master of the Universe.”

The term ἀββά occurs in the NT only 3x: Mark 14:36; Rom 8:15; Gal 4:6. In each case it is used as a way of calling on God in prayer. In the other Gk. lit. of early Christianity it is found only in quotations of these passages.

1 It is clear from the gospel tradition, and moreover indirectly confirmed in Rom 8:15 and Gal 4:6 (see below), that Jesus addressed God in his prayers as “(my) Father.” In so doing, he undoubtedly made use of the warm, familiar term אַבָּא. The only recorded exception is the cry of dereliction from the cross (Mark 15:34 par.), which appears to be a quotation from Ps 22:1.

The invocation אַבָּא is expressly attested in the Markan text of the prayer in Gethsemane (Mark 14:36). But in the other prayers of Jesus recorded by the evangelists it is again this Aram. term that underlies, either directly or indirectly, the various Gk. renderings: ὁ πατήρ, “father” (Matt 11:26; cf. BDF §147), τοῦ πατρός μου, “my father” (v. 27), and in the voc. form, πάτερ, “father” (v. 25), πάτερ μου, “my father” (26:39, 42), and πάτερ ἡμῶν, “our father” (6:9). These variations should poss. be explained as alternate translations, since in Palestinian Aram. אַבָּא was used not only as a form of address (voc.), but also as the standard noun for “father” and as a term meaning “my/our father” (cf. Jeremias, The Prayers of Jesus, 56). Jesus’ distinctive use of this word in prayer is an expression of his unique relationship to God. It discloses not only his attitude of trust and obedience toward the Father (Mark 14:36 par.), but also his own incomparable authority (Matt 11:25–27 par.).

2 The early church took over the use of אַבָּא in prayer. This is shown by Rom 8:15 and Gal 4:6, the two passages where Paul may have been thinking of the Lord’s Prayer. Now in Luke’s version (Luke 11:2–4, usually regarded as earlier than Matt 6:9–13), the invocation reads simply πατήρ and suggests אַבָּא as the Aram. original. We may infer that when Jesus taught his disciples this prayer, he was giving them authority to follow him in addressing God as אַבָּא, thus granting them the privilege of being regarded as children of God (cf. John 1:12). Accordingly, Paul sees in the invocation “Abba” clear evidence of our adoption as sons through Christ and of the eschat. possession of the Spirit (Rom 8:14–17; Gal 4:4–7; see υἱός G5626 NT 2). The fact that the church, like Jesus, may say “Abba” is a fulfillment of God’s promise: “I will be a father to you, and you shall be my sons and daughters” (2 Cor 6:18, a free citation of 2 Sam 7:14; cf. also Jub. 1.24–25).

Bibliography


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"Abra'am G11 (Abraam), Abraham

Concept: Name, Proper

JL The derivation of the Heb. name אַבְרָהָם H90 is uncertain. Some relate it to Akk. Abam-rāmā ("he loves the father"); others consider it a simple Aram. lengthening of the Canaanite/Heb. name אַבְרָם H92 ("[my] father is exalted"). Abram is in fact the designation used up to Gen 17:4–5, and in this passage the name Abraham is interpreted to mean "father of a multitude" (either a play on words or a popular etym.).

1 The tradition preserved in Gen 11:26—25:11 depicts Abram/Abraham as the first of the so-called patriarchs, the ancestor of the later people of Israel (see 'Ισραήλ G2702). Some argue that the OT gives him second place behind the patriarch Jacob, since the latter received the name Israel, which was applied to the nation. But a profound and far-reaching significance was attached to Abraham.

(a) Abraham stands for the extreme prophetic experience of Israel. He is specifically called a prophet (Gen 20:7; cf. 15:13–16 and see προφήτης G4737), and he was tested as a prophet might be tested to see whether he, and his descendants through him, would esteem God highly enough to be willing to offer human sacrifice (22:1). Abraham held to the word of his God almost to the point of killing his only son. God then released him and the people of Israel, because he loves faithfulness and not sacrifice.

(b) Abraham received the promise of a nation and a land that steadily grew despite scanty beginnings (Gen 12:1–3). His life constantly appeared threatened by the lack of a son and heir (15:2–3), and the latter was born only when Sarah was past the age of childbearing (18:1–15); but behind that birth stood the promise of descendants so numerous that they could not be counted (13:16; 15:5). The promise of the land initially focused on the areas around Shechem and Bethel (12:6–8), but he was later told that it would extend from the borders of Egypt to the river Euphrates (15:18). In the panoramic perspective of the Pentateuch the theme of the land is not brought to fulfillment: it remains a future hope with the dying Moses (Deut 34:1–4). Insofar as the land was never merely a physical possession, but was constantly seen as a spiritual heritage (representing freedom, peace, and well-being in and with God), later Israel remained profoundly conscious of the fact that the nation still looked forward to the ultimate fulfillment of the promise to Abraham.

(c) The making of the covenant in Gen 17 (see διαθήκη G1347) develops this theme and ensures that the land promised to Abraham and his posterity is not understood in a nationalistic way as personal property, but as the place of worship appropriate to the Creator of the world (Gen 1). This covenant message enabled Israel to survive even the terrible situation of the national collapse and the far from glorious period of reconstruction under Persian rule. The people of God received the commission amidst the world powers to serve the Creator in a way commensurate with his being.
This insight was decisively influenced by the age-old declaration concerning the purpose behind Abraham’s call: “all peoples on earth will be blessed through you” (Gen 12:3). The context of this declaration is the promise of the land—a promise that looks forward to the kingdom of David (15:18) and relates these words, with their ring of power politics, to an antinationalistic perspective. The human race, incl. Israel and the patriarchs, had fallen prey to the desire to be like God (3:5), to the mysterious crouching of sin before the door of the heart (4:7), and to the need to establish a name for oneself in a single kingdom (11:1–9). But the Lord of the world made a new beginning with Abraham, the man who unconditionally remained true to the promise despite its extremely meager fulfillment during his lifetime. Thus the prospect of blessing for the families of the earth does not fail on account of a limited fulfillment in the period of the OT.

Alongside the instances where Abraham is mentioned in Genesis, there is the esp. important and oft-repeated expression, “the land that Yahweh has sworn to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob” (cf. Deut 1:8; 6:10; 9:5; 27; 29:13; 30:20; 34:4). Amid the despair of the exile, this expression denotes the fixed point on which election depended (see ἐκλέγομαι G1721): a solemnly attested promise of God that made it poss. for the Israelites after the loss of the land, and thus in the anxiety of being remote from God (Isa 63:15—64:11; cf. esp. the complaint of 63:15), to acknowledge their sin as sin, because they understood God as the one who is dependable. Furthermore, there is the prophetic word from God, highly apt at the time of the exile, that calls Abraham “my friend” (Isa 41:8; cf. 2 Chr 20:7; Ps 105:6 [LXX 104:6]). Thus Abraham is the forefather to whom the promise was the basis of his life; such faith God credited to him as righteousness (Gen 15:6).

2 The special position of Abraham, already foreshadowed in this development, reached its highest expression in Jud. There the belief is found that because of Abraham’s election all who confess themselves as his have a place in the coming kingdom of God, even though their sins have been many (cf. Str-B 1:116–20 on Matt 3:9). Rabb. Jud. saw Abraham’s life as a series of acts of obedience. According to it, Abraham had kept the whole law. By contrast, Hel. Jewish writers, esp. Philo, stressed his trust in God’s promises, partic. those about the final judgment and the kingdom of God, and attributed the beginnings of belief in a world to come to Abraham’s time (Str-B 3:194, 197; cf. 2 Bar. 57.2). Jewish legends relate that Abraham was the first to recognize monotheism, and that being the first proselyte he also served as a missionary (TDNT 1:8).

NT 1 Since Abraham was the father of the Israelite nation, Jesus’ descent from him became of great importance for the proclamation of the gospel. His name occurs more than 70x in the NT, esp. in Luke (15x), John (11x), Hebrews (10x), Romans (9x), and Galatians (9x). That Jesus was the Messiah descended from Abraham underlined the continuity in God’s saving activity both for his people and for the world (cf. the genealogy in Matt 1:1–17; the genealogy in Luke
3:23–38 mentions Abraham as well [v. 34], but stresses the descent from the first man Adam).

2 (a) For the Jews in general it was a special title of honor to be known as “children of Abraham” (Matt 3:9–12; Luke 3:8–9), for according to the popular belief, Abraham’s merits guaranteed Israel a share in the kingdom of God—an idea attacked by John the Baptist. According to John, descent from Abraham is in itself of no value. Only those who bring forth the true fruit of repentance (see μετανοέω G3566) and by baptism anticipate the final judgment have any right to hope for a place in the kingdom. God can raise up from stones children for Abraham. That is why Jesus considered it so important to search for the lost sheep of Israel. He healed “a daughter of Abraham” who had been crippled for eighteen years (Luke 13:16), and caused salvation to come to the house of Zaccheus as “a son of Abraham,” although he had been living outside the Mosaic law (Luke 19:9).

Jesus’ statement that “many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven,” whereas “the subjects [lit., sons] of the kingdom will be thrown outside” (Matt 8:11–12; cf. Luke 13:28–29), may have as its background the belief that Abraham was the first proselyte and the greatest maker of proselytes (see above JL 2). When Luke reports that after the resurrection the apostles addressed their hearers as descendants of Abraham (Acts 3:12–13, 25; 13:26), he intends his readers to understand how aware the apostles were of their loyalty to the faith of their ancestors and how strenuously they had sought to win the Jews, Jesus’ own people, despite their unwillingness.

(b) In Jesus’ parable of the rich man and Lazarus, the expression “Abraham’s bosom” (Luke 16:22 KJV; NIV, “Abraham’s side”) clearly designates a position of affection, security, and honor. This picture (found relatively seldom in rabbinic writings; cf. Str-B 2:226) derives from the custom of reclining on couches at a banquet so that the head of one person reached the chest of the next one. To lean one’s head against the breast of the host indicated an especially close relationship with that person (cf. John 13:23–25; 21:20). Judaism frequently expected intercession by Abraham, who lives with God (the same was true of Isaac and Jacob). The Jewish belief that those who have lived with God (e.g., the patriarchs) must remain alive after death was shared by Jesus, who justified it by saying that where God is there also must be life (cf. Mark 12:26–27 par.; see ἀνίστημι G482).

3 When Paul explains the importance of Abraham, he is concerned above all with justification by faith (see δικαιοσύνη G1466). His exposition in both Gal 3:6–29 and Rom 4:1–13, where he appeals to Gen 15:6, is not, strictly speaking, a deductive proof based on the OT narrative. Rather, because of the subsequent revelation of Christ, the apostle recognizes that Scripture had long before spoken of justification by faith.

(a) In Galatians, the details of Paul’s arguments about Abraham were partly
determined by the ideas of his Judaizing opponents, who maintained that
the Mosaic law was the definitive revelation that brought salvation (see νόμος
G3795). It followed that Abraham must have lived by the law even before it
was revealed at Sinai. By contrast, Paul maintains that anyone who lives by the
works of the law is under a curse (Gal 3:10) and that Abraham was justified not
by works but by faith (Rom 4:2–5). Scripture even foresaw that the lawless pagan
and the pious Jew would be placed on an equal footing through faith (Gal 3:7–9),
because faith excludes every basis for human honor. The law did not have the
function of making Abraham’s blessing inoperative; rather, it was given to reveal
the true nature of sin (3:19) and to prepare us for the coming of Christ (3:24).
Indeed, Christ himself is the promised seed or offspring of Abraham (3:16–17),
and by faith we share the heritage of Abraham in all its fullness (3:29).

(b) In Rom 4 these thoughts are expressed with even greater clarity. What did
Abraham discover with regard to justification? Was it something to boast about?
Not in God’s presence, for it was faith that was credited to him for righteousness
(4:1–3). A person cannot earn wages from God. Blessed are only those against
whom the Lord does not reckon sin (4:4–8; cf. Ps 32:1–2). Paul then proceeds to
show that this blessing cannot result from circumcision, which Jud. regarded as
a sign of the fulfillment of the law and of turning away from transgression (Rom
4:9–12). Abraham was after all justified before he was circumcised (see περιτέμνω
G4362). Circumcision was simply a seal of the righteousness by faith that had
previously been reckoned to the “Gentile” Abraham. Hence Abraham is the father
of all who believe, whether or not they are his physical descendants (v. 16).

Paul concludes his argument by adding another example of Abraham’s faith
(Rom 4:18–22). Just as we are dead before God and have nothing to hope for, so
Abraham and Sarah’s procreative power was dead. But trust in God created and
creates new life. The point of comparison is not the willingness to yield oneself,
but rather the deadness itself, the lack of any prerequisite conditions (that is prob.
why the story of the sacrifice of Isaac, which was popular in Jud. as an example of
obedience, is not mentioned here). Other passages fit easily into this fundamental
Pauline scheme of interpretation (Rom 9:7; 11:1, 13–21; 2 Cor 11:22).

Paul’s teaching on justification by faith was not always readily accepted in the
primitive church. Statements made by James suggest that the Pauline concepts were
misused even by Christians (Jas 2:14–26). For some of them, only the relationship
of the soul to God was important. The deeds of our transient bodies, which belong
to a fallen world, were considered to be relatively unimportant. Against such a view
it was necessary to stress that faith expresses itself in works, and that faith will be
judged, as in the case of Abraham, by the way it works itself out in life.

4 The false sense of security with which many deluded themselves by appeal-
ing to Abraham hindered faith in Jesus. This problem is the background to Jesus’
dialogue with the Jews in John 8:30–59. The first section makes it clear that the
newly found faith of some was not genuine but only superficial, for they were not
doing the works of Abraham (vv. 39–40). Abraham relied solely on God’s liberating word, but they wished to silence that word when it stood before them incarnate in Jesus. They thought that descent from Abraham guaranteed their freedom, whereas in fact only Jesus and holding fast to his word could give them true freedom.

The second part of the discussion (John 8:48–59) begins with the Jews’ suggestion that Jesus was demon-possessed when he proclaimed his word, or rather, when he proclaimed himself as God’s word. For when Jesus promised eternal life to those who kept his word (v. 51), he was, according to Jewish ideas, blaspheming God. Only God’s word can guarantee eternal life, but Jesus in their view was a mortal man like Abraham and the prophets who have died (v. 52). In fact, however, Jesus is greater than Abraham and has the divine authority to grant eternal life. Moreover, Jesus claimed that Abraham rejoiced at the prospects of seeing the day of God’s Word (Jesus), and that he did indeed see it with joy (v. 56). There is ample evidence for Jewish speculations that at the time of the making of the covenant (Gen 15:12–21) Abraham saw the main lines of Israel’s future (Str-B 2:525–26). Then comes the vital claim, “before Abraham was born, I am” (John 8:58; see εἰμί G1639). The Word of God was, is, and ever will be. Hence, in contrast to Abraham, Jesus is truly eternal.

5 The descendants of Abraham mentioned in Heb 2:16 are presumably all who live by faith as did Abraham, i.e., not only Jews but all who believe in Christ (so B. F. Westcott, The Epistle to the Hebrews, 2nd ed. [1892], 55; H. Montefiore, A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews [1964], 67). In Heb 6:13, as in Jewish tradition, Abraham is presented as a model of the believing patience and perseverance that obtain the promise. This trait is also stressed in 11:8–12, 17–19. Salvation, however, does not come from Abraham and his descendants (7:2, 4–10). They remain its recipients. Abraham recognized one greater than himself, Melchizedek (see Μελχισέδεκ G3519). In the same way, the Levitical priests were only temporary, for they too, as descendants of Abraham, gave tithes to Melchizedek. Hence the one who has been proclaimed a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek must be greater.

Bibliography

ἄβυσσος

ἄβυσσος G12 (abyssos), bottomless, subst. depth, abyss, underworld.

Concept: Hell

GL This term, though attested as early as Aesch., occurs fewer than 10x prior to the Hel. period, always as an adj. meaning “bottomless, unfathomable” (from βάθος G958, “depth”). Its use as a noun, ἡ ἄβυσσος, is first found in the LXX (and then most freq. in Christian writers), but it is so used also by writers not likely to have been affected by the Gk. Bible (e.g., Plutarch Is. Os. 364F, of a sacrificial lamb being cast into a deep cavity). The term was later applied to the realm of the dead, the netherworld.

JL In the LXX the word occurs over 40x (incl. 13x in Psalms, 7x in Job, 6x in Sirach), almost always as a noun, and usually as the rendering of the Heb. noun יָתְם H9333, signifying the great ocean depths (e.g., Ps 33:7 [LXX 32:7]; see ὕδωρ G5623). In Gen 1:2 it refers to the primeval sea. When used in contrast to “heaven” (see οὐρανός G4041), the word approaches the meaning “realm of the dead” (e.g., Ps 71:20 [70:20]; 107:26 [106:26]; Sir 24:5). The concept was significant for apocalyptic lit., as shown by this expansion of Gen 6:5–7: “And against his angels whom he had sent to the earth he was very angry. . . . And he told us to bind them in the depths of the earth” (Jub. 5.6; cf. 5.10; 1 En. 9:4; 17.7–8; 21.7).

NT In a free quotation of Deut 30:12–14 (where both the Heb. and the LXX have “the other side of the sea”), Paul uses ἄβυσσος to describe the realm of the dead (Rom 10:6–8; the apostle evidently picked up the language from Ps 107:26 [LXX 106:26]). Elsewhere in the NT the term refers to the prison for demons (Luke 8:31). It is locked with a key, but the smoke of subterranean fires rises from it (Rev 9:1–2). It is ruled by an angel (9:11). Violent locusts emerge from it (9:3–5), as does “the beast” (11:7; 17:8; see θηρίον G2563). Satan is bound in it for the thousand years’ reign (20:1, 3; see Σατάν G4927).

Bibliography

TDNT 1:9–10; EDNT 1:4; NIDOTTE 4:275–77.

ἀγαθός G19 (agathos), good, beneficial, subst. neut. pl. goods, possessions; ἀγαθοεργέω G14 (agathoergéō), to do good, confer benefits; ἀγαθοποιεῖν G16 (agathopoiēō), to do good, do what is right; ἀγαθοποιός G18 (agathopoiós), beneficent, subst. one who does good, good citizen; ἀγαθοποιεῖσθαι G17 (agathopoiēsthai), (act of) doing good; ἀγαθοσύνη G20 (agathosynē), goodness, uprightness, generosity; φιλάγαθος G5787 (philagathos), loving what is good; ἀφιλάγαθος G920 (aphilagathos), not loving what is good

Concepts: Good; Possessions
The adj. ἀγαθός, already very common in Homer, had a semantic range sim. to that of Eng. good. The terms κρείττων G3202 and κράτιστος G3196 function respectively as its comp. and superl. forms (see κράτος G3197). When applied to things, ἀγαθός could mean “fine, serviceable, advantageous, suitable”; when applied to persons, “fine, gentle, noble, brave.” The word was also used freq. in an ethical or moral sense. Used as a noun, τὸ ἀγαθόν could indicate not only “what is good” but also “the [highest] good” (summum bonum), while the pl. τὰ ἀγαθά referred to “the good things” that evoke a state of well-being, whether material (“possessions”), intellectual, moral, or religious, depending on one’s ideal for life. Most of the derivatives listed above are not attested prior to the Hel. period (some of them may be LXX or NT coinages); class. Gk. used εὐεργεσία G2307 and other terms in their place.

2 In Gk. philosophy the concept of the good plays a major role. For Plato τὸ ἀγαθόν is the all-embracing, highest, and indeed dominant idea or form: the good is the power that preserves and supports—in contrast to evil, which spoils and destroys (Resp. 608e). In Plato the idea of the good has a religious coloring (Resp. 517b–c), but Aristot. applies it as a formal concept to the totality of human relations. In his Ethics he defines the goal of all action as the attainment of some form of good (Eth. nic. 1.1; cf. F. Copleston, A History of Philosophy, 9 vols. [1946–75], 1:332–50; W. Grundmann in TDNT 1:11–12).

3 In Hel. thought the ancient humanistic attitude to life was shattered, and the predominant meaning of the concept of good once again became religious. According to the Hermetic writings, the salvation brought about by the deity (i.e., deification) is the good (Corp. herm. 1.26). Thus the predicate good was reserved for the deity who brings salvation (τὸ ἀγαθὸν ὁ θεός, “God is the good,” ibid. 2.16; cf. 6.3–4), for he alone is free from attachment to the material (cf. TDNT 1:12–13). As an expounder of Hel. Jud., Philo names ἐγκράτεια G1602 (“moderation,” Spec. 1.149), εὐσέβεια G2354 (“fear of God” [see σέβομαι G4936], ibid. 4.147), and σοφία G5053 (“wisdom,” Her. 98) as the highest possessions by means of which the soul finds the way to the highest good, i.e., God (cf. TDNT 1:13).

The adj. ἀγαθός occurs well over 600x in the LXX; it is esp. common in Proverbs and Sirach (c. 80x each; then c. 45x each in Psalms, Ecclesiastes, and 1 Samuel). Where it renders a Heb. word, this is almost always טוֹב II H3202 or a cognate. Among derivatives, the most common are ἀγαθύνω, “to do good,” but with several extended senses (almost 30x), and ἀγαθωσύνη, “goodness, kindness” (15x).

2 In the OT the concept “good” is indissolubly linked with personal faith in God. Any idea of the good that is freed from the concept of God as personal—comparable with the ideas in Gk. and Hel. thought—is inconceivable. The good is always a gift from God and as such is outside the control of human beings in their own strength (Gen 3:5). It is presupposed throughout that God is the
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one who is good, and not just “the good.” This realization is further developed within the OT in the course of a deepening of the relationship of the people and of individuals to God (e.g., Ps 34:10 [LXX 33:11]; 84:11 [83:12]).

Thus טוֹב became the regular designation of the goodness of God’s character, actions, and works. In such contexts the LXX translates טוֹב almost exclusively with ἀγαθός; it only rarely employs the nearly synonymous καλός G2819 (e.g., in the creation account, Gen 1:4 et al.). This usage might suggest that God is to be viewed as τὸ ἀγαθὸν (“the highest good” in Greco-Roman thought), even though this phrase is not explicitly applied to God in the LXX. The inference is that human beings enjoy the good, or can expect “good” treatment, only insofar as they regard God as their highest good.

That God is the one who is good becomes clear in the OT through his redemptive dealings with his chosen people: in the giving of the law (Deut 30:15; Prov 28:10), the exodus from Egypt (Exod 18:9), and the conquest of Canaan (Num 10:29–32). The Israelite found renewed reason for praising God as the one who is good by realizing that everything that comes from him is good, whether it be his work in creation (Gen 1:14 et al.; טוֹב here also embraces the aesthetic moment of beauty [thus the rendering καλός]), his word (Isa 39:8), or his Spirit (Ps 143:10 [142:10]), even if appearances seem to say the opposite (Gen 50:20).

The constant tension between God’s promises and their incomplete fulfillment was bearable for the Israelites because they recognized that those promises always look forward to a final, eschat. realization. The good that God has promised his people will come to its real fulfillment in messianic, eschat. salvation. It is in this sense that texts like Isa 52:7 and Jer 32:41 (LXX 39:41) have been interpreted messianically by Israel.

Recognition of the goodness of God could not be taken away from the remnant even by hard, shattering, historical events like the exile. Nevertheless, Yahweh’s goodness, his benevolent action in history, had been temporarily withdrawn from Israel and was deeply concealed. In the Wisdom Lit., for example, striking expression is given to the way in which devout Israelites saw, without illusion, their own limitations in the presence of the incomprehensible God. They recognized the uncertainty of all life’s values and the vanity of existence (Eccl 3:12; 5:17), and they saw clearly the human inability to achieve good (7:20). But in the last analysis even this skepticism, in which God is withdrawn and the creature stands alone, could not destroy the knowledge of the goodness of God and his benevolent activity.

3 Postexilic Jud. and rabb. theology also held firmly to the fact that God is good. God’s goodness brings salvation. It is revealed in the Mosaic law, which is good and can be carried out. In carrying out God’s law, God’s people can now themselves do good and be good (Str-B 3:92–93; 4:466ff., 536ff.). Nevertheless, essential goodness can be realized only in personal relationships with God and fellow human beings (as had been expressed in Mic 6:8).
This unshaken confidence that good could be achieved was radicalized into a strict asceticism by the people of Qumran, who linked the concept with the command to hate forever the “sons of wickedness.” But here too—as consistently throughout the OT—it is the newly emerging songs of praise that are the genuine expressions of the sect’s piety. They begin and end with the praise of God and his benevolent actions even in the midst of need and oppression. What stands out is what has been asserted in every period of Israel’s history and expressed most completely in the Psalms, namely, that God himself is the One who is really and exclusively good (e.g., Ps 16:2 [15:2]; 118:1 [117:1]; cf. 1 Chr 16:34; 2 Chr 5:13).

NT 1 The word ἀγαθός occurs c. 125x in the NT (incl. 15 instances of κρείττων [mainly in Hebrews] and 4 of κράτιστος [only Luke–Acts as a form of address]), and it is found in all the NT writings except 1–2 John, Jude, and Revelation (in these books καλός does not occur either). The compounds formed with ποιέω G4472 occur 10x (6x in 1 Pet.); ἀγαθοσύνη 4x (all in Paul); and ἀγαθογραφέω once (1 Tim 6:18).

2 According to the Synoptics, the OT teaching about God’s essential goodness was intensified by Jesus: οὐδεὶς ἀγαθὸς εἰ μὴ εἷς ὁ θεός, “No one is good—except God alone” (Mark 10:18; Luke 18:19; cf. Matt 19:17). However, this emphasis does not prevent a natural application of the predicate “good” to the moral differences among human beings, who do good as well as evil (Matt 12:35; 25:21; par. Luke 6:45; 19:17); this application of course includes within it the goodness of God (Matt 5:45; 22:10; et al.).

But this admission of normal differences and the demand for works of love (Matt 5:16 [where καλός is used]; cf. 25:31–45) must not be separated from Jesus’ preaching as a whole. Jesus calls sinners to repentance, and it is imposs. to ignore the call: “For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven” (5:20). “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (5:48).

3 In the Gospel of John, Jesus proclaims judgment according to works: “those who have done what is good [τὰ ἀγαθά] will rise to live, and those who have done what is evil will rise to be condemned” (John 5:29). But this statement too has to be seen within the context of the whole message (cf. 10:27–29; 15:5–8). It is only in Jesus Christ that we can have life. Then, insofar as we receive a share in God’s goodness, we also can it pass on to others by doing good. According to John 10:11 and 14, Jesus is the good shepherd who lays down his life and makes available here and now the eternal good of redemption (in these verses καλός is used rather that ἀγαθός without any apparent semantic difference; G. D. Kilpatrick, “Some Notes on Johannine Usage,” BT 11 [1960]: 173–74, suggests that John simply prefers the former when the adj. is used attributively, but the few instances involved do not permit a firm conclusion). According to John 1:46, Nathanael posed the skeptical question, “Can anything good [τι ἀγαθόν] come out of Nazareth?” (NRSV). Some have suggested that this question was a
well-known proverb, but others believe it was simply the utterance of a man who could not conceive that the Messiah would come from such an insignificant place (cf. L. Morris, *The Gospel according to John* [1972], 165).

Paul takes up the message of the Synoptics. He too acknowledges the relative difference between good and evil persons. Within God’s sustaining order of things, the civil authorities receive their dignity and task to maintain law and order, commending those whose conduct is good (τὸ ἀγαθόν) and punishing evildoers (Rom 13:1–4). The term ἄγαθοσποιός, used only in 1 Pet 2:14, also belongs in this context: the person who does right will receive praise from the authorities.

But the distinction that is justified among human institutions breaks down before God. Human beings are irretrievably in bondage to the powers of sin and death, and they have no right to claim the attribute “good” for themselves. Even if they are strict observers of the law, which is good (Rom 7:12), it only works death for them (7:18–24; cf. 3:20; 6:23; Gal 3:10–13). But through redemption in Christ goodness overflows in the life of the believer. “We know that in all things God works for the good [εἰς ἀγαθόν] of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose” (Rom 8:28).

In Christ the believer is created for good works (ἐπὶ ἔργοις ἄγαθοις, Eph 2:10) and receives a good conscience (συνειδήσει ἀγαθῇ, Acts 23:1; cf. 1 Tim 1:5, 19; 1 Pet 3:16, 21). This truth also underlies the urgent exhortations to bear fruit in every good work (Col 1:10) and to seek to do good to everyone (Rom 15:2; 16:19, 17:15). Likewise, in Rom 15:14 believers are commended for their ἄγαθοσποιοί, that is, their good and fitting behavior (cf. 2 Thess 1:11). Paul employs καλοποιέω G2818 (2 Thess 3:13) and ἄγαθοσποιέω (1 Tim 6:18) once each as synonymous expressions meaning “to do good”; the latter term occurs also in Acts 14:17, where it refers to God who does good.

Paul too maintains the concept of judgment according to works, whether good or bad (Rom 2:6–10; cf. 2 Cor 5:10; Gal 3:10), but this truth does not compromise the principle of grace stated elsewhere (e.g., Rom 5:1; 8:1, 31–39; see χάρις G5921). The gift and the task of the new life are kept in tension, with both aspects fully emphasized.

A striking fact is the marked preference for καλὸς in the Pastorals (24x against 11x for ἄγαθος; in the rest of the Pauline corpus, it occurs only 17x against 41x for ἄγαθος); in most instances, no clear semantic distinction can be established (see discussion of synonyms below). Note moreover in the Pastorals the rare terms φιλάγαθος (“loving what is good,” Titus 1:8) and ἀφιλάγαθος (“not loving what is good,” 2 Tim 3:3).

Among the remaining NT writings, 1 Peter is distinguished by its use of ἄγαθοσποιέω (“to do good,” 1 Pet 2:15, 20; 3:6, 17; elsewhere only in Luke 6:9, 33, 35; 3 John 11), ἄγαθοσποιός (“one who does good,” only 1 Pet 2:14), and ἄγαθοσποιά (“doing good,” only 1 Pet 4:19). Spicq (*Lexicon* 1:1–2) comments that although in the LXX ἄγαθοσποιά has to do with beneficence and charity (e.g.,
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Num 10:32), Peter’s use of this vb. and its derivatives designates moral integrity and a commendable manner of life. Such right conduct is the visible proof that an individual has really and gratefully grasped God’s goodness in a personal way.

In contrast, Heb 9:11 and 10:1 lay their emphasis upon future, eschat. gifts (cf. 1 Pet 4:19). In this age there is a constant tension between God, who is good and who gives good gifts, and earthly reality, characterized by sin and death, in which the Christian’s life is caught up. It is in this perspective that the promise of Phil 1:6 stands and has meaning: “he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Jesus Christ.” Therefore the warning of Gal 6:9 also holds true: “Let us not become weary in doing good [καλὸν ποιοῦντες], for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up."

The epistle to the Hebrews is also characterized by the freq. occurrence of the comparative κρείττων, “better, superior, preferable.” This use focuses on so-called realized eschat.: in these last days” God has spoken through his Son, who is superior to the angels (Heb 1:1–4), who has brought a better hope (7:19), and who guarantees a better covenant (7:22; 8:6; cf. also 6:9; 9:23; 10:34; et al.).

6 The differences and similarities between ἀγαθός and καλός (and semantically related terms) provide a valuable example for the study of synonyms in the Gk. NT. (It should be noted that in Gk. lit. generally ἀγαθός appears to be the more common term, though the statistics vary significantly from corpus to corpus. In the LXX, Jos., Philo, Luke-Acts, and the ApF, ἀγαθός occurs between two and three times more freq. than καλός, but both adj. occur with comparable frequency in the NT as a whole and in Plutarch. In Polyb. καλός has the edge, while the Gospels of Mark and John show a decided preference for this adj.)

On the one hand, it is relatively easy to identify semantic distinctions between the two adj.: ἀγαθός moves from the general sense “fitting, suitable” to either “useful, advantageous” (when applied to things) or “well-born, able, competent” (when applied to persons), and then to the moral sense “good, beneficent”; καλός seems to focus on appearance, thus “beautiful, fair, fine,” but it is applied also to the moral sphere, “good, noble.”

On the other hand, it is clear that these differences are muffled, and even completely neutralized, in numerous contexts. The choice of one term over another often results from other than semantic considerations, such as personal (or group) preferences, the desire to avoid repetition of a term, subtle syntactical factors, perhaps even the rhythm of the sentence. Certain patterns can be detected. In the NT, for example, sentences beginning with “It is good to . . .” or the like use καλόν, with ἐστιν expressed or implied (Matt 15:26; 17:4; 18:8–9; 26:24; Mark 7:27; 9:5, 42–45; 14:21; Luke 9:33; Rom 14:21; 1 Cor 5:6; 7:1, 8, 26; 9:15; Gal 4:18; Heb 13:9). It would be difficult to demonstrate that this pattern can be accounted for by some intrinsic semantic difference between καλός and ἀγαθός; more likely, we are dealing with an idiomatic or conventional usage
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(“that’s just the way you say it”; in class. Gk. the adj. ἐσθλός [“good, brave, expedient”] was freq. used in this fashion).

Apparently, ἀγαθός never moves into the domain “beautiful,” and καλός never acquires the sense “competent,” but we find considerable overlap in many other areas. Especially instructive are parallel contexts where these adjs. appear to be used interchangeably. For example, Matthew pairs the noun δένδρον G1285 (“tree”) with ἀγαθός twice in one passage (Matt 7:17–18), but with καλός in another (12:33; cf. Luke 6:43); καρπός G2843 (“fruit”) occurs usually with καλός (Matt 3:10; 7:17–19 [3x]; 12:33; Luke 3:9; 6:43), but once with ἀγαθός (Jas 3:17; cf. Sir 6:19). Note also that the noun γῆ G1178 (“land”) most naturally combines with ἀγαθή ("useful" in the sense “fertile”), and so it does often in the LXX (Exod 3:8; 20:12; Num 14:7; Deut 1:25; et al.); but it occurs with καλή in the parable of the sower (Matt 13:8, 23 = Mark 4:8, 20), and Luke goes so far as to interchange the two adjs. in this parable (Luke 8:8 [ἀγαθή], 15 [καλή]; in the LXX γῆ occurs with καλή only once, Num 13:19).

Various other examples of semantic neutralization could be mentioned, but the more significant question is whether we should look for a distinction between these adjs. in moral/ethical contexts. According to S. Custer, “Both these words may refer to what is morally good, but with this distinction: ἀγαθός usually designates that which is good because its results are beneficial, whereas καλός denotes goodness which is evident to others. When these terms are used in the sense of the good, τὸ ἀγαθὸν refers to that which is beneficial; τὸ καλὸν to that which is good in an absolute sense” (A Treasury of New Testament Synonyms [1975], 14, with a ref. to J. B. Lightfoot, Notes on the Epistles of St Paul [1895], 81, who states that in 1 Thess 5:15 τὸ ἀγαθὸν is used opp. κακόν [in the sense “injury, harm”] and that it contrasts with τὸ καλὸν κατέχετε in v. 21). Custer goes on to provide a useful sample of both bib. and extrabib. passages that seem to support such a distinction; in the parable of the laborers in the vineyard, for example, ἀγαθός may appropriately be rendered “beneficent” or even “generous,” as in several modern versions (Matt 20:15), while in Paul’s description of his inner struggles τὸ καλὸν clearly refers to that which is intrinsically good (Rom 7:21).

Several problems call for discussion, however. First, it is not at all clear why there should be a connection between “goodness which is evident to others” (the primary meaning attributed to καλός) and “that which is good in an absolute sense.” Second, some of the refs. listed are at best ambiguous. In the parable of the talents, e.g., the servants who invested the money are commended with the words, δοῦλε ἀγαθὲ καὶ πιστὲ, “good and faithful servant” (Matt 25:21, 23), but nothing in the context suggests beneficence (although the notion “useful” is poss., the meaning of the adj. prob. comes very close to that of πιστός G4412 [see πιστεύω G4409]; there appears to be little if any difference between the usage here and καλὸς διάκονος in 1 Tim 4:6). Third, the list of examples loses much of its value when one considers the many other passages where no distinction can
be demonstrated. For example, as mentioned above, Paul in Rom 7:21 uses τὸ καλὸν with ref. to intrinsic goodness, but only a few verses before he seems to use this term interchangeably with ἄγαθόν (v. 18). The strongly moral concept “good work” is expressed with ἔργον καλὸν (sg. or pl.) 16x in the NT (8x in the Pastorals), but ἔργον ἄγαθόν occurs almost as freq., 13x (6x in the Pastorals), and in one sentence it is used interchangeably with ἔργοις καλοῖς (1 Tim 5:10). (Both combinations are relatively rate in the LXX.)

It is sobering, and almost amusing, that Lightfoot’s learned colleague, B. F. Westcott, appears to distinguish the two adjs. in a diametrically opposed fashion. Commenting on Heb 10:24 he says: “It is a misfortune that we cannot distinguish καλὰ ἔργα and ἄγαθὰ ἔργα in translation: we are constrained to render both phrases by ‘good works.’ Yet the ideas suggested by the two phrases are distinct. In ἄγαθὰ ἔργα we mark only the intrinsic character of the works: they are essentially good. In καλὰ ἔργα we emphasise the notion of their effect upon others, of their nobility which attracts. The same work may be regarded both as ἄγαθόν and καλὸν, but so far as it is καλὸν it is looked at under the aspect of moral beauty” (The Epistle to the Hebrews, 2nd ed. [1892], 325). It is in fact quite poss. that the sense “beautiful, fair, pleasant” often lurks in the background when καλὸς is used, but we find little evidence that, in moral contexts, the NT writers’ choice of one adj. over the other was intended to call attention to a distinct semantic component.

The presence of other terms within the semantic domain “good” contributes relevant information. The adj. χρηστός G5982 (from χράομαι G5968, “to use,” etc.), which occurs only 7x in the NT and about 40x in the LXX, shares some interesting features with ἄγαθός: it too could mean “useful, advantageous” (though this meaning does not occur in the NT), and the shift to the moral sense “good, trustworthy” was natural, but it also acquired the narrower and more distinctive meaning “mild, gentle, kind” (see πραΰς G4558). Similarly, the nuance “mildness” may distinguish the cognate noun χρηστότης G5983 from ἄγαθωσύνη (see Trench 231–35; Spicq 1:3–4), though it is difficult to establish a substantial difference between them in the list of virtues in Gal 5:22 (J. B. Lightfoot, The Epistle of St. Paul to the Galatians, 10th ed. [1890], 213, makes the suggestive comment that the former indicates “kindly disposition” and the latter “energetic principle,” but he gives no evidence for this distinction).

Even more specific are the nouns εὐεργεσία G2307 (“well doing,” thence “service, kindness”; see ἐργάζομαι G2237) and φιλανθρωπία G5792 (“love for humanity,” thus “benevolence, kindness”; see φιλέω G5797), as well as the terms listed under Humility and Virtue. Of special interest is the apparent contrast between ἄγαθός and δίκαιος G1465 (“upright, just”) in Rom 5:7; for discussion see δικαίωσιν G1466. Other synonyms not found in the NT include ἔσθλος (“good, brave, expedient” [28x in Plut., absent in Epict.]), ἔος (“good,
ἀγαθός

noble”), κρήγυος (“good, agreeable, serviceable”), and σπουδαῖος G5080 (“good, excellent” [used in the NT only with the sense “eager, earnest”]). See also discussion s.v. ἄμωμος G320.

Finally, attention should be paid to antonyms, esp. the pair κακός G2805 / πονηρός G4505 (see Evil). In general Gk. usage κακός serves as a fairly precise opp. of both ἀγαθός and καλός (in almost all of their senses) and thus it occurs with greater frequency than πονηρός. Plato, for example, uses κακός over 4x more freq. than πονηρός; in Paul, the proportions are 2/1; in Plut., c. 2.5/1; in Jos., almost 3/1; in Philo, almost 6/1; in Epict., remarkably, more than 40/1 (κακός over 200x, πονηρός only 5x). In contrast, these two adj.s. are found with comparable frequency in the LXX, while πονηρός occurs 3–4x more often than κακός in Matthew and Luke-Acts; among the ApF, Hermas uses πονηρός almost exclusively (c. 80x, with only 4 instances of κακός [2 of which are the comparative χείρων]). The term πονηρός (from πονέω, “to toil”) initially meant “painful, grievous,” then “useless,” but in moral contexts it took on a strongly negative sense, “worthless, wicked, cowardly, base.” Possibly this strong nuance accounts for its freq. in some Christian writings. Note that πονηρός is opp. to ἅγιος and καλός c. 20x each in the LXX; in the NT it is opp. ἅγιος over 10x (mostly in Matt.), but to καλός in only two passages (Matt 7:17–18; 13:38). In the case of κακός, it is used opp. ἅγιος in c. 60 verses in the LXX (esp. in Sirach) and in a dozen passages in the NT (esp. Romans); it is found opp. καλός in the LXX only half a dozen times, and in the NT 4x (note also 1 Pet 2.12, opp. κακοποιέω).

Among other antonyms, note should be taken of ἀτοπός G876 (with a clear moral sense only in 2 Thess 3:2, alongside πονηρός), σαπρός G4911 (opp. ἅγιος and/or καλός in Matt 7:17–18 par.; Eph 4:29), σκολιός G5021 (opp. ἅγιος in 1 Pet 2:18), and φαῦλος G5765 (opp. ἅγιος in John 5:29; Rom 9:11; 2 Cor 5:10; used also in John 3:20 [cf. πονηρός in v. 29] and Jas 3:16 [summarizing a list of vices]), as well as terms meaning “unrighteous,” “sinful,” and the like (see Righteousness; Sin). Moreover, numerous terms occur referring to specific expressions of evil. Relevant adj.s. not found in the NT include βλαβερός (“hurtful, wrong”), μισθηρός (“miserable, worthless, wicked”), οὐτιδανός (“good for nothing, worthless”), and φλαυρός (“bad, mean, injurious”).

Bibliography

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