

Rabbinic Explanations of the Yetzer Hara (Evil Inclination)

Rabbi Yitzchak Breitowitz

The seforim say, that this is the homiletical meaning [of] 'you shall not burn fire on the day of Shabbes' because fire is a metaphoric designation for machlokes, fighting, anger, fire! And Hashem says, do not bring in aish on Shabbes. Shabbes has to be peace...The seforim tell us, there's a special yetzer hara. In Chassidus there's an interesting idea that when you're on the verge of accomplishing something very great, there will often be a strong yetzer hara to take you away from it. The yetzer hara fights over-time to prevent good things. And that's why it's often said in Kabbalah, the stronger your yetzer hara not to do a good thing, the more significant the good thing is. Meaning, God is in effect telling you there's something really, really good here and that's why the cohes of tuma are going to stop you from trying to do it.

You know, they tell the story. They tell the story about a businessman in Yerushalayim who almost hated to make any money at all because he would sit in the store all day and he would learn Torah. And when a customer came right and then he was almost annoyed when a customer came. 'Ah I got to stop, alright,' because he really just wanted to learn. And he was very successful, he had customers and money and parnasah. And he learned every second. So when he died, his son, who was frum said, 'You know, if my father was so successful in business, even though he didn't really pay any attention to the business, I'm gonna do better, I'm gonna really, really invest in the business, pay attention, and kal'vahomer! I'm gonna do real good.' And what happened was, he did that, and he went bankrupt in six months. So he went to a rebbe and he said, 'My father didn't care about his business at all. He put no time into it, he put no effort into it, and he was so successful; and I work so hard in this business, and it falls apart.' So the rebbe says, 'I'll tell you exactly what's going on. Your father was using every spare second to learn Torah, the yetzer hara had to figure out a way, how do I get this guy away from the Gemara? So I got to send him this customer and that customer and that customer and that customer. Okay, so at least I get him away from learning for those days.' Then the Rebbe said to the son, 'You, you know, when the customer doesn't come in, you're reading spreadsheets. So why does he have to send you customers? You know, he got, he has you anyway,' in other words, you're not. So he says he doesn't need to give you business. He's already got you. Right. So that's the idea that the more significant the thing you're doing, the stronger the yetzer hara. So maybe this is a message for people who are married

to remember this when you when you get married. That is, there's a tremendous yetzer hara erev Shabbos to get into fights.

Really, almost any, any married person will tell you this. And the reason is because you know, Shabbos has a deadline. It's funny how, no matter when Shabbos is we're pressed for time. You know, when Shabbos is four o'clock in the winter, you know, we got to be ready at four. So you figure, when Shabbos at eight o'clock in the summer, you know, we should have plenty of time, we're ready at four. Right? No, no, when Shabbos is eight, you know, you're not ready until two minutes to eight. Somehow, the preparations expand to fill the time. But in every Jewish home, particularly when you have children already. It's very tense. You know, take your shower, get dressed, clean up, and it's all you know, put up the water, put up the Cholent, whatever it is, a lot of tension. And the seforim say, because the yetzer hara wants to take away the shalom. When you take away the shalom then the bracha of Shabbos is not going to be complete. And therefore one has to no one has to know. One has to kind of resolve that on Erev Shabbos they're not going to make machlokes. Just understand, understand there's going to be a strong urge to get mad, to get angry, to lose your temper. Right? I mean, not that we're always successful. A lot of times we won't be successful, but at least we are consciously aware that this is something we have to resolve to. And that's the remez do not burn fire on Shabbos.¹

¹Ohr Somayach, '*Shabbos is the Hospital of the Soul (Rabbi Yitzchak Breitowitz)*' (YouTube 25/02/2022 17:54) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WnYaphjfx-Y>>.

Rabbi Tovia Singer

Probably going back 25-30 years. A young man who got caught up in an Eastern cult called Hare Krishna. They're not that big now in the United States but 30 years ago, it was the thing. You'd see them in airports, shaved heads with a ponytail and hitting tambourines, collecting money. Don't ask. Jewish fellow got caught up in this group. And baruch Hashem, we studied together, and he did teshuva. He was involved in the Hare Krishna group, I think it was in California. And thank God, he repented. He returned back to the God of Israel. And he went off to Jerusalem to study. He went off to a very well-known yeshiva in Jerusalem to study and when I visited Israel, we got together, and he was very excited. He's learning Torah, he returned back to his Creator. And he said to me, 'Rabbi, I have a question. It's bothering me a little bit. I believe in everything, but something's bothering me a little bit.' I said, 'What is it?' [Replied]: 'You know, when I spent those years in Hare Krishna, I lived in a commune. And it was so ecstatic. I used to get up at something like 4:30 or five o'clock in the morning, it was still dark outside and I would jump out of bed with excitement. My job was to wash, to anoint the statues, these Hindu statues that they had in the temple. And I did this, Rabbi, with so much excitement. I was so excited that I could partake of anointing these statues in preparation for the prayers. I studied Torah. Here I am in Yerushalayim, and of course now as a Jew. We get up in the morning to pray the Shacharit, the morning prayer, and frankly,' he said, 'Sometimes it's a little hard to drag myself out of bed.' He asked me why when I was, (Hare Krishna is kind of a Hindu sect, and it's not like Hinduism in India is like it was kind of like a cultic group in the United States). He asked me the obvious question which is, 'When I was a Hare Krishna, I got out of bed there was, I was so happy. My heart was pounding with a joy to work to prepare these statues for the morning worship, to anoint them,' (don't ask). 'And now it's a little challenging getting out of bed to go for my morning prayers, what's going on?' So I told him, you know, when you were in Hare Krishna, what did your yetzer hara, what did the evil inclination tell you? 'Get up! Worship these statues.' That's what people do you know, people are so excited, they're going to go to Vegas, ah! they have no trouble making the flight to Las Vegas, to Las Vegas, it's not a problem at all. Get up! But if you have to take a flight to go somewhere to study Torah, ah! not so fast. I said, your yetzer hara, your evil inclination when you're a Hindu said, 'Get up! Go worship idols, go do this,' and he did it with such excitement and such haste. But now, now that you worship the one God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, so what is your yetzer hara, which means evil inclination. It's the Satan. It's the angel that tries to seduce you into turning your back on God. It casts forth it's blandishments, that your free will. Why? How do you know? It says so. Where? Deuteronomy 30:14-15 all the way through 19. Before you I place life and death, good and evil... choose life. Isaiah 45:7, God created good, created evil. It's all in the Bible. Well, if there was no evil inclination, there'd be no virtue, virtue would be impossible. What good is it if you're born

of a virgin and your God that you didn't sin? It's silly. So here is the point. So when a person is in any form of idolatry, of course, your evil inclination is going, 'Go!!' A person who's, I don't know, going off to a bar, I don't know, going off to Las Vegas or going off to some other place where, you know what goes on, right? So how hard is it for that person to muster, to find, to seize the excitement, the energy, 'Sam, we're going to the plane, we're going to go to thing and the moment we get into Las Vegas, we're going right to the craps table,' and he's just so happy, full of joy, Right? So what happens if a person is very excited about. So it's very simple what's going on here. On the other hand if it's going to pray, it might not be exciting as going to who knows Bermuda to a beach where people forget to get dressed. It's all, it's all, it's all very simple.²

If you have an evil inclination and if you didn't, there is something wrong with you, so study it and also serve God with it. I always tell people that if you have an inclination, I remember speaking to a fellow who left Christianity after five hours of discussion and then he told me he is attracted to men. What does he do?...So I told him, 'You are very lucky, I envy you.' [Responded] 'What are you talking about??' I said, 'You can say that I feel an attraction to men and you can say, 'Hashem, but I love you so much I won't act upon the thought.' Do you know what your reward will be in the world to come?' I said, 'Frankly for me after I am 120 is God going to reward me for not sleeping with another man, I doubt it. Why? it's not appealing, in fact the idea is very strange to me. So take your evil inclination and serve God with it. And when you have a desire to do whatever is against the will of Hashem say, 'You know I would really like to do that, I really would. But I love You Hashem so much that I won't, because I know it's not Your will.' So serve God with your evil inclination, it's a fabulous tool, it's a great opportunity, why dismiss it? Why run from it? Embrace it. You know what a great thing it is to be tested by God and say, 'Look, I really would like to do that but I won't. Why? because I love You.' That's the greatest thing in the world. Think of the man who is away from his wife at some sort of convention and he sees an attractive lady and he can see that she is very friendly with him. He knows that sin is right there at the door waiting for him, very accessible. And he says, 'You know what, she's a nice looking lady but I love Hashem, I don't want to commit adultery.' This is a praiseworthy person. So take your inclination and use it in service of God. Now the only way to cleanse yourself is to open up a Torah. If you open up a Torah no

²Tenak Talk (TaNaCh), 'Who is Satan and the War of Armageddon? Rabbi Tovia Singer explains – 1495' (YouTube, 5/12/2022 25:43) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SZFqBJHr1Q>>.

matter what thought you have you will see that that thought will leave you immediately. You can't, you open a Torah and start reading it and the evil thoughts will leave you immediately, immediately. Because that Devil cannot reside with the Torah. It can reside with the Christian bible, with other books, but not with the Torah. That's all. Really serve God with your evil inclination. It was given to you, God said, I am not making this up, it's in the Bible. 'Before you I place life and death, good and evil.' It says it, this is not preached in churches but it is in Deuteronomy chapter 30 verse 14 and 15 and again repeated in verse 19. 'I call heaven and earth as witnesses, before you I place life and death, good and evil, choose life.' Hashem put evil, He put it there and our job is to resist it. If there was no evil inclination in the world then virtue would be impossible; it's really that simple.³

Rabbi Yaron Reuven

Now the yetzer hara, what's his job? You wake up in the morning, what's your job? What's your job

³Non Jews for Judaism, 'Q&A with Rabbi Tovia Singer', (YouTube, 10/12/2021, 31:43)
<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jnk79WzKXrc&t=3s>>

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in the morning? Everybody know what their job in the morning is? Serve HaKadosh Baruch Hu, that's your job in the world. You were created to serve the Master. That's your job in the world. The Gemara in masechet Chagiga page 4a says if you did not find a way to sanctify HaKadosh Baruch Hu's Name today, it was better of you were never born. Why? You didn't do your job. He's the Master. He is the King. A King has servants. You're one of them. If you served Him today, chazak u'baruch. If you didn't serve Him today, you have a serious problem. You have a serious problem. Why? You didn't serve the King. He's not your friend. So our job in the world, each one of us, men, women, boys, girls, children, adults, is to serve Hashem. Full force. What's the yetzer hara's job? The yetzer hara's job is to kill you. Yetzer hara's job is to stop you from serving Hashem. First he comes and he tells you something to convince you not to go pray. Something to convince you not to do mitzvot. Why? He tries to give you an inclination, he goes, 'Listen, you can pray but pray later. Why don't you play a few games first? Come on, your almost beating the game. Couple more rounds and then you pray.' He's not going to tell you don't do the mitzvah outright because then you will know it's the yetzer hara talking to you. He's going to look at you like a rabbi and say, 'No listen, do the mitzva but just have fun a little bit first. Do the mitzvah but just write this email first. Do the mitzvah but just finish this appointment first. Just do all this stuff first, then do the mitzvah.' Why? Because now the longer and longer you take, the longer you take, the less fire you have for this mitzvah. That's why the Gemara in masechet Yoma says: why do we put on the tefillin of the Yad [hand] before the tefillin of the Rosh [head]? Now you don't need to be a big tzadik to know that the more important tefillin is the tefillin of the Rosh. You could live without a yad, you can live without an arm, but you can't live without a Rosh. That's where your neshama is. So the tefillin that's more important, that's more holy, is the one of the head. So which tefillin should you put on first? The more important one, no? How come we put on the first one? We put on the first one because we learn from Avraham Avinu, a mitzvah you never delay. Your arm naturally (let's say you put it on your left arm), your going to use your right arm to put it. Where is your right arm going to reach first physically? Your head or your arm? As you lift it naturally? Your arm... Chazal says in the Gemara masechet Yoma, that's enough of a reason to put the tefillin on the arm first. Why? Just get something done while your ahead. Who knows if you're going to survive to see the head? Put it on the arm first. After you put it on the arm then put it on the head. Why? Because you got to the arm first. Even though the head is more important, it's more important to do the first mitzvah that you get to... Point is the yetzer hara is going to tell you, don't do this mitzvah. Do it later. After you don't do it, he goes to Hashem and he prosecutes against you. So you get punished. Who is the punisher? Satan. And every single day a Jew has to act as if the Satan himself is standing over his head with a huge axe ready to chop of his head. And Chazal says if he's not scared to death that the Satan is about to chop of his head, that's already because he chopped it. You're already working for him full-time and you don't even realise it. That's why rabbotai, it's

very, very important for a person to understand that your obligation in the world is to serve Hashem. The Satan's obligation in the world is to be your resistance because that's where you get a reward for it. If it was easy for us to do mitzvot then there's no reason for us to get paid for it. The Satan's job is to be the resistance.⁴

Yeşer ha-Ra' and Original Sin by Matthew Wade Umbarger (MDPI)

⁴Rabbi Yaron Reuven, 'What's The Job Of The Yetzer HaRa?' (YouTube, 9/7/2021, 0:14) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ks8olJQwA-Y>>.

Abstract

Many modern rabbis insist that original sin was invented by St. Paul, and that it does not have a Jewish antecedent. Instead, rabbinic Judaism explains human evil in terms of “*yeṣer ha-ra’*,” “the evil inclination.” But evidence from Second Temple period wisdom and apocalyptic literature suggests that ideas like Paul’s were indeed common in certain quarters of Jewish thought in the first century. Paul’s doctrine of original sin draws from an assortment of Old Testament texts. What seems novel in Romans 5 is essentially an aspect of his apocalyptic vision. Rabbinic texts from the Mishnah onwards intentionally suppress this apocalyptic account of original sin. Instead of original sin, rabbinic doctrine posits the *yeṣer ha-ra’* as the explanation for human wickedness. This is an innate aspect of human nature. But it is something that good discipline, and especially the practice of Torah, can amend. Some aspects of Pauline teaching actually run parallel to these later texts pertaining to the *yeṣer ha-ra’*, as well. In particular, his use of *sarx* seems to be a theological cognate to this concept of an evil inclination.

1. Introduction

A number of years ago, my friend Rabbi Nissim Wernick (זכרונו לברכה) invited me to have lunch with him, and in between his breadsticks and soup, proceeded to pelt me with Jewish criticisms of Christianity. The major theme of his diatribe was that Christianity, specifically the Apostle Paul, had invented the doctrine of original sin so as to justify construing the Messiah into a spiritual redeemer for all of humankind, rather than a political redeemer for Israel. Rabbinic Judaism, going all the way back to the days of the Pharisees, he assured me, was completely unaware of such a doctrine. It was an intriguing argument, and one for which I was ill-prepared to counter (much to Rabbi Wernick’s delight, I assure you). Since then, I have confirmed that this is indeed the mainstream view of rabbinic Judaism. For instance, in his influential book from the 1950s, *Where Judaism Differed*, Abba Hillel Silver wrote that “Jewish theology accepts no ... doctrine of man’s corrupt origin, ‘that all men descended from Adam contract original sin from him, and that this sin is transmitted by way of origin.’” ([Silver 1957, pp. 158–59](#)).

I have been haunted by Rabbi Wernick’s challenge ever since that last meal with him. His criticisms niggle at me primarily for two reasons. First of all, one of my great joys in researching early Christian belief and practice has been to discover that almost all of it developed organically from Jewish doctrine and ritual. (Rabbi Wernick was always quick to acknowledge this.) If what Rabbi Wernick was saying was true, then here was a glaring instance in which a fundamental Christian doctrine did *not* develop from a Jewish precedent. Obviously, the Holy Spirit could have revealed this to the early Church, or to Paul as a part of the new dispensation of Grace, but Paul

does not speak of original sin like this. Typically, when he takes on teaching something that he has received as a new revelation, he uses words like “mystery”. This is not the case in the fifth chapter of Romans. So, why does Paul seem to assume that his audience will already know what he is talking about if he is making this doctrine up on the spot?

I was also recalling the years that I had studied at Ozark Christian College, where my professors had instructed me in the majority position of the Campbellite Restoration Movement: original sin was not really a biblical doctrine.¹ Rather, each human individual has learned to sin by the example of the world at large. (For this reason, infant baptism was illegitimate.) One professor had gone so far as to depict Augustine as a heretic opposed by his “orthodox” champion, Pelagius. To some extent, Rabbi Wernick seemed to be in agreement with them. When I made the decision to become Catholic, it meant that I had to abandon this specific doctrinal position. It bothered me that my former co-religionists might share something in common with Judaism that I could not.

So, in this short article, I want to revisit this discussion with Judaism about original sin by suggesting that Paul did indeed develop his ideas, guided as he was by the Holy Spirit, from older doctrines that can be ascertained from Second Temple period literature, especially apocalyptic texts. We will see that Paul’s doctrine of original sin is essentially an aspect of his apocalyptic vision. I will also propose that Paul’s doctrine of the *sarx*, the flesh, runs parallel with certain teachings that were retained in rabbinic Judaism pertaining to the *yetzer ha-ra*, the evil inclination, which is often posited as a sort of Jewish alternative to original sin.

But first, a few caveats. I am intentionally avoiding inter-denominational squabbles about original sin within the Church. Thus, as important as the disputes between East and West about original and/or ancestral sin are, this article will perhaps sound as though I believe that they have all been resolved, or never amounted to much to begin with. This is certainly not the case. Nor am I delivering this as a rebuttal of all of the modern, Christian rejections of the doctrine of original sin, although it can probably be construed that way. And, for the sake of simplicity, I am going to refer to Paul’s doctrine of the consequences of the Fall as “original sin”, although many Christians today would surely balk at that choice of vocabulary.²

2. Original Sin in Romans Five

Let’s begin with the source-text in Paul, in Romans five, as rendered in the RSV.

12 Therefore as sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all men sinned—13 sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law³...18 Then as one man’s trespass⁴ led to

condemnation for all men, so one man's act of righteousness leads to acquittal and life for all men. 19 For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by one man's obedience many will be made righteous.

As Fitzmeyer remarks, "Adam's disobedience placed the mass of humanity in a condition of sin and estrangement from God; the text does not imply that they became sinners merely by imitating Adam's transgression; rather, they were constituted sinners by him and his act of disobedience."⁵

There are, of course, numerous problems of interpretation in these verses that Christians have been arguing over for centuries, including Verse 12, "the *crux* of this difficult passage", ([Sanday and Headlam 1895, p. 134](#)) particularly over the phrase translated "because all men sinned" by the RSV, "ἐφ' ᾧ πάντες ἥμαρτον". Origen seems to have misinterpreted the phrase in construing it as meaning that everyone has sinned *in* Adam, and Augustine caused this to be the standard view in Western Christianity (however, it is possible to "distinguish between acceptance of Augustine's general understanding of the thought of the clause and acceptance of his grammatical explanation of 'in quo'", as Cranfield noted) ([Cranfield 1975, p. 276](#)). The translation of the RSV is probably correct, and yet, as Sanday and Headlam pointed out, this does not necessarily sever the "the connexion between Adam and his posterity. If they sinned, their sin was due in part to tendencies inherited from Adam." ([Sanday and Headlam 1895, p. 134](#)).

3. Original Sin in Rabbinic Judaism

Nearly all modern rabbis seem to agree that here in Paul there are fundamental differences with their own theological anthropology, insisting that there is nothing in the Jewish literary corpus that has any hint of correlation with Paul's statements here. To put it succinctly, for rabbinic Judaism, Adam's trespass led to his own personal condemnation, full stop, and not the condemnation of all humankind.⁶

There are exceptions, of course. For instance, Rabbi David Kimchi, in his commentary on Isaiah 43:27, "Your first father sinned", wrote, "And how will you say that you have not sinned, when, behold, your first father sinned, the first man, because Adam was stamped with sin, because 'the inclination of a man's [or Adam's] heart is evil from his youth (Genesis 6:5) ?'"⁷ Samuel S. Cohon, representing the Reform Jewish tradition, said that the doctrine of original sin "in varying forms figures in Jewish as in Christian thought" and that it "derives its vitality from the raw facts of life." ([Cohon 1987, p. 219](#)). He argued, as I will here, that when Christianity developed this dogma, it was "following certain trends in Judaism", though he acknowledged that Judaism never assigned "to it the importance which it occupies in Christianity". Cohon also denied that Genesis three has anything to do with original sin, "contrary go the uses made of it by Paul and his followers", though he acknowledged that it serves as an etiological explanation of our mortality ([Cohon](#)

[1987, p. 220](#)). He explained, “The Yahvist concerns himself with the origin of death and suffering rather than with the origin of human sinfulness”. Thus, sin is “a power external to man.” ([Cohon 1987, p. 225](#)). Most importantly, he insisted that any notions of sin imputed to Adam’s progeny because of his fall put forth “by both Christianity and Judaism are without foundation.”⁸

4. Source Texts from the Hebrew Bible

Surely, Paul’s ideas about original sin, including his exegesis of Genesis three, are not completely original, albeit they may be more clear and refined than many of the other texts that I am about to bring up for our consideration. Most of these are from the Second Temple period or a bit later, but even in the Hebrew Bible there are abundant sources for Paul’s thought. In polemical proof-texting, apologists often appeal to Psalm 51:5, of course: “Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.” But I think that Paul was influenced more by a Torah tradition stretching from the words of Exodus 34:7, (where God is said to visit “the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children’s children, to the third and the fourth generation”)¹⁰, through the prayers of identificational repentance in Nehemiah 1 (“I and my father’s house have sinned,” v. 6) and Daniel 9 (“for our sins, and for the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and thy people have become a byword among all who are round about us,” v. 16). An even more proximate theme that Paul is borrowing from the Hebrew Bible is that of the concrete, microcosmic representative of the nation deciding the fate of his people, especially prominent in the Deuteronomistic history of the kings of Israel. For instance, 2 Kings 24:3 drily observes that Jerusalem suffered all of her disasters at the hands of Babylon “for the sins of Manasseh”, beginning in the reign of Jehoiakim, Manasseh’s grandson. This very idea was taken up by Jeremiah, in his message that judgement for Judah was inevitable: the Lord will make the people of Judah a horror “because of what Manasseh the son of Hezekiah, king of Judah, did in Jerusalem” (15:4).

The prophetic vision of divine justice is simply not democratic. We can indeed suffer terrible judgements when those who represent us before God sin against Him. For Paul, Adam was the Deuteronomistic king *par excellence*, representing all of humanity, and his sin resulted in our bitter exile of estrangement from God, and consequently, only the Second Adam could restore us to the place of divine honor.

5. Original Sin in Other Second Temple Period Texts

Paul was not the only Second Temple period Jewish author to synthesize all of this biblical material in such a way. Samuel S. Cohon recognized this, writing, “Only in Apocryphal and Pseudepigraphic Jewish writings does the Paradise story begin to figure as the basis for speculation regarding the origin of death and of sin.” ([Cohon 1987, p. 228](#)). And C. E. B. Cranfield

went even further, arguing that “what is implicit in the OT account [of Genesis three] was of course, made fully explicit in later Jewish writings.” ([Cranfield 1975, p. 280](#)). He also suggested that it is probable that “Paul was familiar with many of the ideas concerning Adam to be found in the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha and in Rabbinic literature”, although “the restraint and sobriety of his own references to Adam are noticeable.” ([Cranfield 1975, p. 281](#)). His explanation for this restraint is Paul’s motive to focus on the person and work of Jesus rather than Adam. “Adam in his universal effectiveness for ruin is the type which—in God’s design—prefigures Christ in His universal effectiveness for salvation.” ([Cranfield 1975, p. 283](#)). James Dunn concurs: “Paul here shows himself familiar with and indeed to be a participant in what was evidently a very vigorous strand of contemporary Jewish thinking about Adam and the origin of evil and death in the world.”¹¹

Ben-Sira has this to say about Eve, in the first half of the second century BC: “From a woman sin had its beginning, and because of her we all die” (Ecclesiasticus 25:24). True, Ben-Sira throws this out as but one among a whole gob of rather chauvinist proverbs that show up in this chapter. (One can’t help but suspect that he did not have a very happy home life.) Cohon pointed out that in Ben-Sira, “this idea is completely isolated, and contrasts with the general trend of the book to regard morality as a law from everlasting.” ([Cohon 1987, p. 228](#)). But all the same, the proverb works on the assumption that the sin of Adam and Eve engendered our own transgressions and deaths.

Approximately one hundred years prior to Paul writing his Epistle to the Romans, the author of the second chapter of the Wisdom of Solomon provided a similar, less chauvinistic etiology for our mortality, and introduces the devil into the picture: “23 God created man for incorruption, and made him in the image of his own eternity, 24 but through the devil’s envy death entered the world, and those who belong to his party experience it”. Paul actually echoes this text in the wording of Romans 5:12 ([Cranfield 1975, p. 274](#)).

Going in the other direction, about 100 years after Paul, virtually the same sentiment is contained in the twenty-third chapter of the Apocalypse of Abraham. Similarly, in the Greek Apocalypse of Moses 32, Eve, lamenting her transgression, cries out, “all sin has come about in creation through me!”¹² So, these ancient Jewish sources are aware of the interpretation that the serpent was not just a snake, but at the very least an agent of Satan, bringing about the current human condition of sin and death. And this dualistic version of the Fall, where the choice of Adam and Eve constitutes a cosmic battlefield for good or for evil, is where apocalypticism enters in.

6. Original Sin in 2 Baruch

From about the same time, 2 Baruch takes it for granted that we suffer death as a result of Adam's sin, indeed, as a penalty. Consider this section from chapter fifty-six, where the author describes a vision of dark waters that is as terrifying a description of original sin as you could hope for:

And as you first saw the black waters on the top of the cloud which first came down upon the earth; this is the transgression which Adam, the first man, committed. For when he transgressed, untimely death came into being, mourning was mentioned, affliction was prepared, illness was created, labor accomplished, pride began to come into existence, the realm of death began to ask to be renewed with blood, the conception of children came about, the passion of the parents was produced, the loftiness of man was humiliated, and goodness vanished (2 Baruch 56: 5–6).[13](#)

For a second century Jewish text, there is a whole lot here that anticipates the later Christian descriptions of the consequences of Adam's fall, including the hint that somehow it is transmitted through the "passion of the parents" as later asserted by the likes of Augustine and Maximus the Confessor. Klijn observes that though "it is, of course, impossible to prove dependency on" any New Testament texts in 2 Baruch, "the parallels are especially striking with the Pauline Epistles, in particular Romans and 1 and 2 Corinthians."[14](#)

But 2 Baruch does not place the burden of sin squarely on Adam's shoulders. Chapter fifty-four tempers this perspective, especially. "For even though Adam sinned first, and premature death came upon all, even so, for these that were born from him, each individual has brought future torment to their own soul, or each of them has brought for themselves future acclaim" (verse 15). Then, just a few verses later, the author makes this case even more strongly: "Adam did not bring all of this about except for his own soul, alone. But we have all, each individual, become an Adam unto our own soul" (verse 19).[15](#)

7. Original Sin in 4 Ezra

4 Ezra, which was probably written towards the end of the first century, is perhaps the most perspicuous in its presentation of the doctrine of original sin. In chapter seven, Ezra is concluding an exceedingly lengthy debate with God about His justice towards humankind.

This is my first and last word: It would have been better if the earth had not produced Adam, or else, when it had produced him, had restrained him from sinning. For what good is it to all that they live in sorrow now and expect punishment after death? O Adam, what have you done? For though it was you who sinned, the fall was not yours alone, but ours also who are your descendants. (vss. 116–126).[16](#)

This is not from a Christian vision of sin and redemption. The verses that follow prescribe the Law of Moses, not the Cross of Christ, as the antidote for these moral ills! So, this is a thoroughly Jewish text.[17](#)

All the same, 4 Ezra provides a fairly cynical perspective on anyone's capacity to fulfill the requirements of Torah. Ultimately, anyone who is saved must throw themselves upon the grace of God.

But though our fathers received the law, they did not keep it, and did not observe the statutes; yet the fruit of the law did not perish -- for it could not, because it was thine. Yet those who received it perished, because they did not keep what had been sown in them. And behold, it is the rule that, when the ground has received seed, or the sea a ship, or any dish food or drink, and when it happens that what was sown or what was launched or what was put in is destroyed, they are destroyed, but the things that held them remain; yet with us it has not been so. For we who have received the law and sinned will perish, as well as our heart which received it; the law, however, does not perish but remains in its glory (9:32–37).[18](#)

Samuel S. Cohon observes, "In his admission of the insufficiency of the Law as the means of redemption, IV Ezra dangerously approaches the Paulinian position." ([Cohon 1987, p. 233](#)).

There are other places in 4 Ezra that confirm that the author does indeed intend to put forth some sort of doctrine of original sin. In the third chapter, for instance, he writes that "the first Adam, burdened with an evil heart, transgressed and was overcome, as were also all who were descended from him. Thus the disease became permanent; the law was in the people's heart along with the evil root, but what was good departed, and the evil remained" (vss. 21–22).[19](#) Consequently, Adam's evil heart now belongs to his descendants, as well (vs. 26, as well as 7:48). These lines also seem to anticipate the rabbinic doctrine of the evil inclination.

Metzger summarizes 4 Ezra's perspective on original sin like this: "This deflection is due, in some way, to the sin of Adam (7:[118]), who possessed an evil heart (*cor malignum*, 3:20) in which a grain of evil seed (*granum seminis mali*) had been sown (4:30). Since all of Adam's descendants have followed his example in clothing themselves with an evil heart (3:26), each is morally responsible. It will be seen that this view corresponds to the rabbinic doctrine of the evil inclination or impulse (*yeṣer ha-ra'*)."[20](#)

8. Original Sin in Later Midrash

Vestiges of a more crude accounting for original sin exist in certain midrashic texts. For instance, in Yevamot 103b Eve's partaking of the fruit of the tree of knowledge is considered to be a euphemism. In reality, she engaged in coitus with the serpent, and this corrupted her progeny in

a morally genetic way. “As Rabbi Yochanan said: ‘In the hour when the serpent came upon Eve he cast filth into her. When Israel stood upon Mount Sinai their filth was cut off. Gentiles, who never stood upon Mount Sinai, did not have their filth cut off.’”²¹ It is easy to be distracted by the odd details in this text, but perhaps the most important message here is that Torah is completely efficacious in eradicating original sin.²² In fact, Alan Cooper writes that “the polemic intent of that text has long been recognized.” (Cooper 2004, p. 446).

Similar traditions pertaining to Eve’s role in the Fall are recorded in Bereishit Rabbah 17:8. This is a sort of catechism on peculiar differences between men and women, but it concludes with a string of indictments against Eve.

“And why does the man go out with his head uncovered and the woman with her head covered?”

[Rabbi Joshua] said to them, “Because a transgressor is ashamed before the sons of Adam, so she goes out with her head covered”.

“And why do women go walking in front of the dead?”

He said to them, “Because they brought death to the world, so they go walking in front of the dead, as it is written, ‘all men follow after him,’ (Job 21:33)”.

“And why is the commandment of menstrual impurity given to her?”

“Because she poured out the blood of the first man, therefore the commandment of menstrual impurity is given to her”.

“And why is the commandment of the challah given to her?”

“Because she brought a curse upon the first man who was the final ‘challah offering’ of the world, that’s why the commandment of the challah was given to her”.

“And why was the commandment of the Sabbath candle given to her?”

He said to them, “Because she extinguished the soul of the first man, that’s why the commandment of the Sabbath candle was given to her.”²³

Curiously, although for the most part rabbinic literature avoids the subject of original sin, in the sixteenth century a gnostic version of the dogma emerged in the teaching of Isaac Luria. In Lurianic Kabbalah, Adam’s transgression has the effect of trapping human spirits in the material world in which they cannot help but sin.²⁴

To be sure, there are other etiologies for evil in ancient Jewish literature. So, for example, the Enoch traditions propose that the sons of God who seduced the daughters of men in Genesis six are to blame for almost all of our wicked ways. And the Dead Sea Scrolls, particularly in

the *Community Rule*, ascribe evil to God's sovereign decision, in which he assigns some individuals to be ruled over by a spirit of deceit.

9. Original Sin an Apocalyptic Doctrine

In some apocalyptic traditions, at least, an account of original sin as having sprouted up in the Garden of Eden is quite evident, and this seems to be what Paul is drawing from in Romans. As is well known, Jewish apocalypticism owes a great deal to exposure to Persian thought. Samuel S. Cohon includes the doctrine of human depravity in the collection of dualistic ideas that exerted influence on early Judaism, and notes that it posed a particular difficulty for Judaism's monotheistic framework.²⁵

But Paul does not owe only his doctrine of the fall to this apocalyptic framework. His teachings on the destiny of humanity redeemed from this fall are also apocalyptic. In Romans 5:17, Paul writes, "If, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ".

This echoes an apocalyptic expectation expressed in Daniel 7:22 and 27 that in the eschaton God's holy ones will receive an everlasting kingdom (See [Dunn 1988, p. 282](#)). It is also found in the Psalms of Solomon 3:12: "Those who fear the Lord will rise up into life eternal and their life will be in the light of the Lord and it will never again be eclipsed."²⁶

So, both Paul's doctrine of original sin and the eschatological reign of the holy ones who have been redeemed from it are part of a larger corpus of Jewish *apocalyptic* literature. What is unique to Paul is his proposal that Jesus provides the redemption necessitated by the Fall. Consequently, I am convinced that we must approach Romans five as primarily an *apocalyptic* text. Most commentaries on Romans five do the opposite, treating it as a piece of systematic theology that is drawing upon a few ideas that it shares in common with a handful of apocalyptic texts.

10. The Yeşer Ha-Ra'

Rabbinic sources, following the codification of the Mishnah around 200 AD, seem to be virtually oblivious to all of this apocalyptic material. Instead, the source of evil is explained by the *yeşer ha-ra'*, usually translated "the evil inclination". There actually seems to be an early instance of this doctrine in Ben-Sira. It is especially clear in 15:14: "It was he who created man in the beginning and he left him in the power of his own inclination". A similar idea occurs in 17:31: "What is brighter than the sun? Yet its light fails. So flesh and blood devise evil". Finally, it's possible that 21:11 makes reference to the *yeşer*: "Whoever keeps the law controls his thoughts, and wisdom is the fulfilment of the fear of the Lord."²⁷

However, most rabbinic discussions of the *yeşer ha-ra'* are based on this mishnah, Berakhot 9:5: "And you shall love the Lord your God with all of your heart i.e., with both of your inclinations, with the good inclination (*yeşer ṭōb*) and with the evil inclination (*yeşer ha-ra'*)". This mishnah is probably derived from the fact that in 1 Chronicles 28:9, the plural for "heart" appears in conjunction with *yeşer*: "the Lord searches all **hearts**, and understands every **plan** (*yeşer*) and thought."²⁸ No doubt, the idea of loving God with our evil inclination strikes Christians as odd. Another text from the Mishnah, Pirquei Avot 4:1 might help: "Who is the mighty one? Whoever subdues their inclination. As it is said, (Proverbs 16:32) 'He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city.'"

At times the *yeşer ha-ra'* is identified with Satan himself. One such example is in Bava Batra 16a: Reish Lakish said, "Satan is the *yeşer ha-ra'*, he is the angel of death, and he is that Satan of whom it is written, 'and Satan went out from before the Lord' (Job 2:7). He is the *yeşer ha-ra'*, as it is written there, '**only** evil all the day' (Genesis 6:5), and it is written here, '**only** do not stretch forth your hand against him' (Job 1:12). He is the angel of death, as it is written, '**only** spare his soul' (Job 2:6). Apparently Job is in his hands."

(See [Cohon 1987, p. 247](#))

For Reish Lakish, the recurrence of "only" suggests a deeper connection between these texts, explained by the activity of Satan lurking in the shadows of these verses.

11. The *Yeşer Ha-Ra'* as a "Necessary Evil"

But other rabbinic texts treat the *yeşer ha-ra'* more ambiguously, as a necessary evil, or even a good. The Zohar goes so far as to say that "the *yeşer ha-ra'* is as necessary for the world as rain is for the world, for without the *yeşer ha-ra'*, there would be no joy in listening and discussing tradition" (Zohar I, 138a).²⁹ In fact, Targum Pseudo-Jonathan on Genesis 2:7 says that "the Lord God created with two *yeşers*,"³⁰ suggesting that God is directly responsible for the *yeşer ha-ra'*.

Bereishit Rabbah 9:7 is even more explicit in making God responsible for the *yeşer ha-ra'*, explaining that God's declaration that His creation is "very good" in Genesis 1:31 was in response to the operation of the *yeşer ha-ra'*. The reason offered is that, "without the *yeşer ha-ra'*, no man would ever build a house, or marry a woman, or beget offspring, or conduct commerce."³¹

Yoma 69b provides an especially vivid example of this reasoning, describing an incident that occurred in the days of Zechariah the prophet. After three days of fasting, God delivered up the *yeşer* of idol worship to them, in the form of a fiery lion cub that emerged from the Holy of Holies. In imitation of Zechariah 5:8, they trapped it in a vessel with a leaden lid, and suddenly the old inclination towards idol worship was stripped from Israel. The sages were so impressed with

the results that they prayed that the *yeşer* of transgression (in this text identified with libido) be delivered to them in the same way. On the advice of Zechariah, they imprisoned this *yeşer*, and the results were disastrous; with no urge to reproduce, the chickens even refused to lay eggs. Consequently, the sages blinded the *yeşer* of transgression and set it free, so that it could continue to do its work, albeit with handicaps.[32](#)

12. The *Yeşer Ha-Ra'* and the Pauline *Sarx*

More typically, the Babylonian Talmud develops the idea of the *yeşer ha-ra'* alongside the good inclination (*yeşer ha-ṭōb*) in a particular way: “Rabbi Nachman, bar Rabbi Chisda preached this: ‘Why is, ‘And the Lord God formed (וַיַּצַּר) the man’ written with two *yods*? Because the Holy One, Blessed Be He, created two inclinations. One is the good inclination (*yeşer ṭōb*) and one is the evil inclination (*yeşer ra'*)” (BT Berakhot 61a) (See [Cohon 1987, pp. 247–48](#)). But Rabbi Nachman, bar Chisda’s interpretation, was opposed by other rabbis. So, in the same passage, he is attacked by another Rabbi Nachman, this one the son of Isaac: “But if that is the case, does not an animal, of whom it is not written concerning it that the Lord God ‘formed’ it, have an inclination? And do we not see that it causes damage and bites and kicks? Rather, as Rabbi Shimeon, the son of Pazzi taught ..., ‘Woe unto me from the One Who formed me (*Yoşrî*) and woe unto me from my inclination (*yişrî*)!’”

Rabbi Nachman bar Isaac provides an understanding of the *yeşer ha-ra'* that in some ways parallels St. Paul’s teachings about the *sarx*, i.e., “the flesh”. It is evident, for one thing, that he does not want to attribute the existence of this inclination to God’s creative activity. Moreover, the evil inclination, according to Rabbi Nachman bar Isaac, has bestial qualities. It is not immediately subject to the rational, spiritual aspect of humanity that we generally identify with the *imago Dei*. But most importantly, Nachman bar Isaac recognizes a struggle in our will between obeying God and obeying this evil inclination. Whichever one we choose to serve, we can expect to be troubled by the one which we deny. I am immediately reminded of these words from Paul, in the fifth chapter of his Epistle to the Galatians: “16 But I say, walk by the Spirit, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. 17 For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you would”. The *yeşer ha-ra'* and the *sarx* can be viewed as analogous to one another, then, although it is probably foolhardy to equivocate them.[33](#)

The problem is that rabbinic Judaism does not really provide an origin story for *yeşer ha-ra'* in the same way that Paul seems to do for his doctrine of the *sarx*. As Samuel S. Cohon observed, the early chapters of Genesis “served the Rabbis as Biblical support for their doctrine of the Yezer, but they establish no connection between the sin of Adam and the disposition to evil.”[34](#)

13. Original Sin Disappeared with Apocalypticism from Judaism

As I draw this paper to a conclusion, I want to speculate just a bit as to why the story of Adam and Eve and their fall from grace virtually disappears from rabbinic discussions of the problem of evil.

I think that this is by and large the result of the systematic eradication of apocalypticism from Jewish religious life in the decades following the disastrous Bar-Kochva revolt. As we have observed, original sin is actually an apocalyptic doctrine. And so, when the rabbis began their project of reshaping Judaism around the lived praxis of obedience to the *mitzvot*, to the exclusion of apocalyptic expectation, the analogues to Paul's doctrine of original sin in a rabbinic milieu simply withered on the vine. Of course, this also proved convenient in that it deflected attention from the Christian Messiah, whom the Church had quite convincingly portrayed as the great Champion who would redeem humanity from the effects of this original sin.

In the end, Judaism became more this-worldly, focusing on the lived experience of Torah observance in the day-to-day. The Fall became simply one among many other historical events in the story of Israel. But for Christianity, with its sacramental perspective, the Fall took on a more cosmic character, setting up the entire plot of salvation history. This sweeping historical scope is ultimately a part of Christianity's apocalyptic heritage.

Apocalyptic texts function differently than carefully worded expositions of systematic theology. Much of their power is in direct correlation to their imprecision. For example, the "abomination that causes desolation" meant something specific for the author of Daniel and 1 Maccabees, but Matthew and Mark could use the same expression in their predictions of the destruction of the Temple for something similar, but completely different, and readers in the generations that have followed have continued to speculate in regards to other applications of these texts. What if Paul is doing something more like this in Romans five?

Perhaps the greatest benefits to a recovery of original sin as an apocalyptic doctrine are to be immediately achieved in settings where Christians from various traditions are actively engaging one another in conversations about what unites and what divides us.³⁵ It is imperative for any debate about original sin to get a good grasp of what our various proof-texts meant for their original authors and audience, thus providing a more proper historical and theological context for even beginning to talk about original sin with one another. Reading Romans five as an apocalyptic text might shake up our discussions with one another in just the right way.

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Yetzer hara by Wikipedia

In Judaism, yetzer hara (Hebrew: יֵצֵר הרע, romanized: yē ṣer hara^ʿ) is the congenital inclination to do evil, by violating the will of God. The term is drawn from the phrase "the imagination of the heart of man [is] evil" (Biblical Hebrew: יֵצֵר לֵב הָאָדָם רָע, romanized: yetzer lev-ha-adam ra), which occurs twice at the beginning of the Torah (Genesis 6:5 and Genesis 8:21). The Hebrew word yetzer having appeared twice in Genesis occurs again at the end of the Torah: "I knew their devisings that they do". Thus from beginning to end the heart's yetzer (plan) is continually bent on evil. However, the Torah which began with blessing anticipates future blessing which will come as a result of God circumcising the heart in the latter days. In traditional Judaism, the yetzer hara is not a demonic force, but rather man's misuse of things the physical body needs to survive. Thus, the need for food becomes gluttony due to the yetzer hara. The need for procreation becomes promiscuity, and so on. The Jewish concept of the yetzer hara is similar to the Christian concept of a "sin nature" known as concupiscence, which is the tendency of humans to sin. However, concupiscence stems explicitly from original sin, while the yetzer hara is a natural part of God's creation. According to the Talmudic tractate Avot de-Rabbi Natan, a boy's evil inclination is greater than his good inclination until he turns 13 (bar mitzvah), at which point the good inclination is "born" and able to control his behavior. Moreover, the rabbis have stated: "The greater the man, the greater his [evil] inclination."

Free will, and the choice between evil and good inclinations

The underlying principle in Jewish thought states that each person – Jew and gentile alike – is born with both a good and an evil inclination.^[7] Possessing an evil inclination is considered neither bad nor abnormal. The problem, however, arises when one makes a willful choice to "cross over the line," and seeks to gratify their evil inclination, based on the prototypical models of right and wrong in the Hebrew Bible. This notion is succinctly worded in the Babylonian Talmud: "Everything is determined by heaven, except one's fear of heaven,"^[9] meaning, everything in a person's life is predetermined by God—except that person's choice to be either righteous or wicked, which is left to their free will.

The Bible states that every person on some occasion succumbs to their evil inclination: "For there is not a righteous man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not."^[10] The Talmud speaks of the difficulty in overcoming the evil inclination: "To what is it like, the evil inclination in man? It is like a father who takes his small son, bathes him, douses him with perfume, combs his hair, dresses him up in his finest accoutrements, feeds him, gives him drink, places a bag of money around his neck, and then goes off and puts his son at the front door of a brothel. What can the boy do that he

not sin?" In recognition of this difficulty, repentance (and in some cases, affliction) is said to atone for most sins, while the preponderance of good works keeps one within the general class of good people.

Maimonides gave instructions for how to view the evil inclination and ensuing hardships on that account:

...Therefore, let a man prepare his own mind and request from God that anything that should ever happen to him in this world, whether of the things that are by God's providence good, or of the things that are by Him evil, that the reason [for their occurrence] is so that he might attain true happiness. Now this was stated with regard to the Good Inclination [in man] and with regard to [his] Evil Inclination, that is to say, that he might lay to his heart the love of God and his [continued] faith in Him, even at an hour of rebellion or of wrath or of displeasure, seeing that all of this revolves around [man's] evil inclination, just as they have said: 'In all your ways acknowledge Him', [meaning], even in a matter involving transgression.^[14]

Moshe Chaim Luzzatto wrote in *Derech Hashem* that "Man is the creature created for the purpose of being drawn close to God. He is placed between perfection and deficiency, with the power to earn perfection. Man must earn this perfection, however, through his own free will... Man's inclinations are therefore balanced between good (Yetzer HaTov) and evil (Yetzer HaRa), and he is not compelled toward either of them. He has the power of choice and is able to choose either side knowingly and willingly".

The power within man to overcome sin

While God has created mankind with both good and evil inclinations, the two powers or tendencies that pull one in opposite directions, God commands each person to choose the good and right path over the evil. In the narrative of Cain and Abel, God tells Cain: "Isn't it true that if you do good, you shall be forgiven? However, if you will not do good, it is because sin crouches at the entrance [of your heart], and to you shall be its longing, although you have the ability to subdue it."^[16] Medieval commentator Rashi explains: "and to you shall be its longing," meaning, the longing of sin—i.e., the evil inclination—which constantly longs and lusts to cause one to stumble, "although you have the ability to subdue it," meaning, if a person wishes, they will overpower it.

The implication is that each person is capable of overcoming sin if they really wish to do so. This may or may not be difficult, and may require some reconditioning, but it is still possible.

Although there are many vices, the Sages of Israel have said that most people are drawn to "stealing" what does not belong to them (לגזל), while fewer people are inclined to "uncover the

nakedness" of others (גלוי עריות), a euphemism for lechery.^[18] On lust, Shalom Shabazi (1619–c. 1720) calls it "a phenomenon of the soul," and lays out ways in which a person tempted by lust can overcome the urge, without being swept into its clutches.^{[19][a]}

Positive role of the evil inclination

However, rabbinic sources also describe the *yetzer hara* (when properly channeled) as necessary for the continuation of society, as sexual lust motivates the formation of families, and greed motivates work:

Rabbi Nahman bar Samuel bar Nachman said in the name of Rabbi Samuel bar Nachman: [...] "And behold it was very good" (Genesis 1:31) – this refers to the *yetzer hara*. But is the *yetzer hara* indeed very good?! – Were it not for the *yetzer hara*, a man would not build a home, or marry a woman, or have children, or engage in business.

The Mishnah interprets the Biblical command to love God "with all your heart" to mean "with your two inclinations - good inclination and evil inclination". The latter half of this interpretation has been interpreted in various ways. According to some, it indicates that physical pleasures such as eating and drinking can be a form of service to God, if one's intention is to thereby strengthen the body in order to better serve God.

The *yetzer hara* is also seen positively in that its existence allows for free will, which in turn allows for reward for those who choose good deeds.

Personification of evil

Although certain ancient groups of Jews appear to have believed in the existence of supernatural evil, in particular fallen angels (as in the Dead Sea scrolls), the *yetzer hara* in non-apocryphal sources is presented as a personification of evil distinct from the supernatural Devil of traditional Christianity and Islam. This tendency to demythologize Satan is found in the Babylonian Talmud and other rabbinical works, e.g.: "Resh Laqish said: Satan, the evil inclination, and the Angel of Death are all one." Notably, however, this and other passages of the Talmud do not deny the external existence of Satan, but create a synthesis between external and internal forces of evil. Similar tendencies can also be found in some Enlightenment Christian writers, such as in the religious writings of Isaac Newton.

Countering the effects of *yetzer hara*

Many of the enactments made by the rabbis throughout the centuries are actual "safeguards" to distance a person from their natural inclination and make it harder for them to sin. David's prohibition against yichud (the decree which forbids a man to be secluded in a room with a

woman unrelated to him), and the rules outlining the conduct of Jews when entering a public bath house, are a just a few examples.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yetzer_hara - Text is available under the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike License 4.0; additional terms may apply.