

REVISITING ΣΤΟΡΓΗ AND ΑΓΑΠΗ
IN SIRACH, 3 AND 4 MACCABEES

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ABSTRACT: Both στοργή and ἀγάπη are widely translated as love. BDAG understands στοργή as the love of spouse: husband to his wife or wife to her husband. Αγάπη, on the other hand, generally refers to a sacrificial love revealed in Christ in the Christian literature. This research, however, refuses BDAG's limited aspect of στοργή and a general understanding of ἀγάπη as God's sacrificial love in Christ. This article, therefore, attempts to provide more comprehensive understandings of these two loves by revisiting στοργή and ἀγάπη in the book of Sirach, 3 and 4 Maccabees. To achieve this goal, this research employs lexical analysis for its methodology.

KEYWORDS: Storge, Agape, Sirach, 3 Maccabees, 4 Maccabees, Lexical Analysis.

Introduction

The word στέργω, as a verb, appears only once in the Bible (in the Old Testament, deuterocanonical books, and the New Testament). It appears in the book of Sirach 27:17, saying στέρξον φίλον καὶ πιστώθητι μετ' αὐτοῦ ἐὰν δὲ ἀποκαλύψῃς τὰ μυστήρια αὐτοῦ μὴ καταδιώξῃς ὀπίσω αὐτοῦ. NETS translates it as show a friend affection, and keep faith with him, but if you reveal his secrets, do not follow him. The verb στέργω has a meaning: to feel affection for, desire, entreat, or satisfaction (BDAG and Liddell-Scott Greek Lexicon). BDAG defines στέργω as to love. This verb could be used to depict the love of a wife for her own husband or vice versa. BDAG, however, says that στέργω is rarely used for sexual expression. Liddell-Scott Greek Lexicon's definition of στέργω is rather more comprehensive. Liddell-Scott Greek Lexicon states that στέργω is frequently used to picture the mutual love of parents and children, tutelary god for the people, city and its colonies, the gods for

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their master. Less frequently, this love demonstrates the love of husband and wife (cf. BDAG). It is so rare that this love expresses sexual love either in human relationships or animals. In summary, Liddell-Scott Greek Lexicon offers a more comprehensive definition of *στέργω*. The analysis section of this article, however, argues that *στέργω* also appears in the friendship and community relationship.

The *ἀγάπη*, on the other hand, Christopher West sees it as God's sacrificial love revealed in Christ. To him, *ἀγάπη* is related to the love of God (West 2007: 10; cf. Greenway 2016). Cochran Jr. states that early Christianity developed the meaning of *ἀγάπη* based on Jesus' teaching and life. Therefore, it is not surprising that Christians connect *ἀγάπη* to Jesus' characters in ministry such as humility, sacrifice, and forgiveness (Cochran Jr. and VanDrunen 2013: 13-56). This research, however, opposes the limited notion that *ἀγάπη* is God's sacrificial love. The analysis section of this research reveals *ἀγάπη* could refer to mankind's love to wisdom (Sirach 4:12; 7:21), city (Sirach 24:11), gold (Sirach 31:5), unknown object (Sirach 6:33). Silverman also states that *ἀγάπη* is relationally flexible and applicable to the full range of human relationships: impersonal, personal, intimate, and internal relationships (Silverman 2021: 22).

Since there are limitations on the previous research, therefore, this article attempts to revisit the understanding of *στοργή* and *ἀγάπη* in the book of Sirach, 3 and 4 Maccabees. This research uses lexical analysis as its methodology to offer more comprehensive understandings of *στοργή* and *ἀγάπη*.

Methodology

Lexical analysis is the study of the meaning of individual words (Silva 1994). The meaning, nevertheless, should be understood within the context: literary context or cultural context (Chia 2021: 24-32). The context of the word prevents the interpreters from the erroneous of interpretation (Mickelsen 1972: 99; cf. Chia 2023: 1-10). Therefore, the research examines *στοργή*, *στέργω*, and *ἀγαπάω* within their contexts.

Analysis

This research limits its scope of investigation to the book of Sirach, 3 and 4 Maccabees. Why is the book of Sirach? Scholars have been particularly interested in this book because it covers a wide variety of topics, moral, wisdom, theological, and historical (Hambardzumyan 2016:1). In the prologue of this book, Ben Sira, the author of Sirach, was described as someone who had devoted himself to the reading of the Law, the Prophets, and the other books of Jewish ancestors, and had acquired considerable proficiency in them. Ben Sira also wrote instructions and wisdom so that those who love learning might make even greater progress in living according to the Law (NRSV). Crenshaw and Westermann describe that the book of Sirach was written to

experience a long life in which one enjoys good health, family, friends, and adequate possessions to meet one's need (Crenshaw 1981: 217; Westermann 1995: 135-137). The project of becoming wise was told because of achieving knowledge and understanding through the counsel of one's teachers and forebears as well as one's own observations, and then living rightly based on such knowledge (Schmidt 2019: 218; Gregory 2010: 6). Since *στέργω* and *ἀγαπάω* appear 26 times in the book Sirach (Sir. 1:10; 2:15-17; 3:17, 26; 4:10, 12[2x], 14[2x]; 6:33; 7:21, 30, 35; 13:15; 24:11; 20:1; 27:17; 31:5; 34:16; 45:1; 46:13; 47:8, 16, 22), then the book of Sirach as wisdom literature will provide necessary information to *στέργω* and *ἀγαπάω*.

The inclusion of the book 3 and 4 Maccabees because these books narrate the death of the seven loving brothers and the experience of the loving mother who lost her children. The book of 4 Maccabees particularly stands out for its extended reflection on the graphic suffering of nine faithful Jews and the significance of their deaths. It also stories the endurance and commitment of the mother to virtue (Xeravits and Zsengellér 2005: 113-118; DeSilva 1998: 219-221).

Στέργω in the book of Sirach

The book of Sirach reveals the fuller range of *στέργω*. Sirach 27:17-21 signify that *στέργω* could also reveal the love in community. The book of Sirach encourages the readers to be a faithful friend by keeping secrets. Otherwise, it would destroy friendship and their friends will escape like a gazelle from a trap (NETS). Thus, the book of Sirach does expand the lexical meaning of *στέργω*: to love our neighbor.

Στοργή in the book of 3 Maccabees

The word *στοργή*, as a noun, occurs only in the book of Maccabees: one time emerges in 3 Maccabees (5:32), and three times appear in 4 Maccabees (14:13-14, 17). 3 Maccabees 5 reveals *στοργή* is not limited to the love of parents and children (5:31, 49-50), but it is expanded to the love of common upbringing and need (5:32) and their relatives (5:49). Therefore, 3 Maccabees communicates that growing up and living together could produce *στοργή*. The Greek word *συντροφία* does not limit to the family, but it could apply to friendship and community (LSJ). The love *στοργή* could appear due to the common needs (5:32).

Στοργή in the book of 4 Maccabees

4 Maccabees 14:13, 14, 17 clearly describe the love of mother to her children. 14:13 pictures the love of mother as a human being to her children, whereas 14:14 and 14:17 illustrate the love of mother as unreasoning animals to her offspring. Therefore, the appearance of *στοργή* in the book of Maccabees provide more lexical meanings in Greek lexica. First, *στοργή* is the love occurs due to common upbringing both in

friendship relationship and community. Second, *στοργή* is the love of common appears due to common needs. Third, *στοργή* is the love of mother to her children both in human and animal relationship.

Αγαπάω and ἀγάπη in the book of Sirach, 3 Maccabees, and 4 Maccabees

The word *ἀγάπη*, as a noun, does not appear in the book of Sirach, 3 Maccabees, and 4 Maccabees. The word *ἀγαπάω*, as a verb, occurs 28 times in the book of Sirach, 3 Maccabees, and 4 Maccabees (Sir. 1:10; 2:15-17; 3:17, 26; 4:10, 12[2x], 14[2x]; 6:33; 7:21, 30, 35; 13:15; 24:11; 20:1; 31:5; 34:16; 45:1; 46:13; 47:8, 16, 22; 3 Ma. 2:10; 3 Ma. 6:11; 4 Ma. 13:24; 15:3).

Αγαπάω in the book of Sirach

In the book of Sirach, eight verses convey the subject of love is human beings and the object is the Lord (1:10; 2:15, 16, 17; 7:30; 34:16; 47:8, 22). Three verses demonstrate that the object of human beings' love could be danger (3:26), wisdom (4:12; 7:21), city (24:11), gold (31:5), unknown object (6:33). Sirach 13:15 reveals all living creatures as the subject of love, and what is like to them as its object. Sirach 30:1 demonstrates that the father who loves his son will persist in whipping him so that he may be glad at his outcome (NETS). Four verses, on the other hand, narrates that God as the subject of love and mankind as the object of his love (4:10, 14; 45:1; 46:13). Three other verses do not reveal the subject of love, but they do mention mankind as the object of love (3:17; 7:35; 47:16).

Αγαπάω in the book of 3 Maccabees

In 3 Maccabees 2:10, the verb *ἀγαπάω* appears in the high priest Simon's prayer to the Lord. Simon prayed that the Lord would hear his people's prayer amid crisis because God loves the house of Israel. The high priest's prayer narrates that the crisis occurs due to their great sins and faults (2:13, 19). In other words, their affliction emerges due to their own sins which causes them to be on the brink of destruction. Then, the high priest Simon pleads to the Lord for deliverance. Consequently, the verb *ἀγαπάω* refers to God's love and faithfulness to his covenant to his people who are unfaithful during their suffering. In 3 Maccabees 6:11, the verb *ἀγαπάω* also occurs in the prayer of Eleazaros, a well-known old man among the priests of the country. He intercedes to ask God's deliverance. Although this petition does not mention God's people sins, it does story God's faithfulness to his people in the lands of enemies: Abraham's descendants (6:3), Israel from Pharaoh (6:4), three companions in Babylonia (6:6), Daniel (6:7), and Jonah (6:8).

Ἀγαπάω in the book of 4 Maccabees

In 4 Maccabees 13:24, the verb *ἀγαπάω* occurs in the context of brotherly love (13:23). 4 Maccabees 13:19 reveals that these seven brothers have their biological mother: Solomonia. They dwelt an equal length of time and they were shaped for the same time (13:20). They grew from the same blood, and they were brought to mature birth from the same life-spring (13:20). They also drink milk from the same mountains (13:21). They grew more robust through common nurture, daily companionship, other education, and discipline in divine law (13:22). They zeal for nobility of character and practiced the same virtues made them to love each other more (13:24-25). This commonness enables them to love (*ἀγαπάω*) each other despite of their maltreatment, torture, and death (13:27). In 4 Maccabees 15:3, the verb *ἀγαπάω* appears in the context of the martyr. She loved piety more than her own life. Due to their birth pangs and pains that she suffered with each of them, she loved her children more than their father and any other mother. Her parental love, nevertheless, does not exceed her fear of God (15:1-32). Therefore, the love of her as a martyr surpasses the love of her as a sacrificial and loving mother.

Discussion

Στέργω and ἀγαπάω in the book of Sirach

The book of Sirach offers a few information on the word *στέργω* and *ἀγαπάω*. First, the book of Sirach does not record the noun form of *στέργω* and *ἀγαπάω*. In other words, this book only documents the verb form of *στέργω* and *ἀγαπάω*. The book of Sirach, therefore, understands love, both *στέργω* and *ἀγαπάω*, as an active love which requires subject and object of the love. Love itself is not a subject or an object. Love is not a means or a possessed thing or a result of human active activity, but it is an active activity. Templeton, for instance, believes that *ἀγάπη* pictures the most beautiful relationships in the Old Testament: the mankind's love between David and Jonathan, and God's love to the hungry and the poor (Templeton 1999: 14-15). Second, Sirach 27:17 demonstrates that *στέργω* is in imperatival mood. On the other hand, the book of Sirach always refers *ἀγαπάω* in an indicative mood for 25 times (Sir. 1:10; 2:15-17; 3:17, 26; 4:10, 12[2x], 14[2x]; 6:33; 7:21, 30, 35; 13:15; 24:11; 20:1; 31:5; 34:16; 45:1; 46:13; 47:8, 16, 22). In other words, the book of Sirach clearly differentiates the understanding of *στέργω* and *ἀγαπάω*. While Sirach understands *στέργω* as a par-aenesis, *ἀγαπάω* is considered as a reality. Third, Sirach conveys that *στέργω* could be lost if the subject of love does not practice faithfulness to his/her friend. *Αγαπάω*, on the other hand, is the love that does not rely on its object. The object could be unworthy to receive this love, but the subject continues to love him/her/it. Sirach 3:26, for example, unfolds that the object of love is a danger or hazard. Sirach 30:1 also

narrates the loving father will keep whipping his rebellious son so that the father may rejoice at his result. Templeton also describes that ἀγάπη demonstrates the nature of boundless and unconditional love (Templeton 1999: 33-34). Fourth, the book of Sirach exhibits the object of ἀγαπάω is more diverse than στέργω: the Lord, human beings, creatures, danger, wisdom, city, gold, and other unknown objects (1:10; 2:15, 16, 17; 7:30; 34:16; 47:8, 22; 3:26; 4:12; 7:21; 24:11; 31:5; 4:10, 14; 45:1; 46:13; 3:17; 7:35; 47:16). Thus, the book of Sirach summarizes three differences between στέργω and ἀγαπάω: paraenesis versus reality, breakable love versus unbreakable love, particular object versus general objects.

Στοργή and ἀγαπάω in the book of 3 Maccabees

Contrary to the book of Sirach, both 3 and 4 Maccabees have στοργή or as a noun. 3 Maccabees 5 reveals that στοργή occurs and flourishes in the context of togetherness: common upbringing and familiarity. Αγάπη, on the other hand, does not appear in the book of 3 Maccabees. The verb ἀγαπάω occurs two times (2:10; 6:11). Although both στοργή and ἀγαπάω appear in the context of tribulation and persecution, the book of 3 Maccabees clearly stories that there are differences between στοργή and ἀγαπάω. First, it is the subject of love. While the subject of στοργή is the oppressed and the persecuted one, the subject of ἀγαπάω is the Lord himself as the deliverer and redeemer (2:10; 6:11). Second, it is the foundation of love. Sirach reveals that togetherness or familiarity produces στοργή. In other words, the quality of στοργή increases due to the length of time that both the subject and the object of love spend together in all circumstances. If they spend less time and they have less things in common, then the foundation of στοργή will be decreased. Αγάπη, on the other hand, does not depend on time and commonness. 3 Maccabees 2:10 reveals the Lord loves the house of Israel due to his everlasting faithfulness and his covenant despite of Israelites' rebellions and great sins throughout the history (2:13-19). His people sins bring destruction upon themselves. This indicates that God's love does not rely on time because he has loved them since the beginning of the earth (2:9). God's love also does not depend on commonness because there is nothing in common between the holy God and the rebellious people except sins that separate them. 3 Maccabees 6:11, on the other hand, does not state Israelites' sins. 3 Maccabees 6 stories the faithful of God to his people in the lands of enemies: Abraham's descendants (6:3), Israel from Pharaoh (6:4), three companions in Babylonia (6:6), Daniel (6:7), and Jonah (6:8). Again, the foundation of this love does not count in its object, but it is solely on the faithfulness of the subject. Third, it is the power of love. While στοργή indicates the love of the afflicted ones, ἀγαπάω denotes the power of the subject of love to save the object. 3 Maccabees 2:10, for instance, records the prayer of the high priest Simon for

the Lord's deliverance. 3 Maccabees 6:11 depicts the petition of Eleazaros for God's redemption. Both intercessions convey the faith of Simon and Eleazaros to the power of God's love to rescue them. Fourth, it is the object of love. The book of 3 Maccabees consistently denotes that the subject of love is one and always the same: the Lord, while the object is many and diverse: Israel, three companions in Babylonia, Daniel, and Jonah. In conclusion, 3 Maccabees summarizes four distinct criteria of *ἀγαπάω*: the subject, the quality of love, the power of love, and its object(s).

Στοργή and ἀγαπάω in the book of 4 Maccabees

The last analysis is derived from the book of 4 Maccabees. 4 Maccabees 14:13, 14, 17 clearly describe the mother's love to her children: as mankind (14:13) and animals (14:14, 17). These three verses indicate that *στοργή* appears in natural way due to a biological connection as a mother. In 4 Maccabees 13:24, the verb *ἀγαπάω* seems to appear in the context of commonness or familiarity just as *στοργή* in 3 Maccabees 5. 4 Maccabees 13:20 narrates that these seven brothers have the same biological mother and have been living together. They also have the same drink, upbringing, and blood (13:21). This sameness raises a question if *στοργή* is a synonym of *ἀγαπάω*. This article, however, sees that *στοργή* is different from *ἀγαπάω*. 4 Maccabees always connects *ἀγαπάω* with virtue, righteousness, piety, and the fear of the Lord (13:24; 15:3). In other words, 4 Maccabees always relates *ἀγαπάω* with commonness in the Lord, while *στοργή* does not. This commonness trait enables the seven brothers to love (*ἀγαπάω*) each other despite of their maltreatment, torture, and death (13:27). Regarding 4 Maccabees 13:24, DeSilva explains their formative education in Torah and shared practice of the Jewish way of life that contributes to their sense of solidarity with one another. The brotherly love was brought to perfection involved their shared excellence of character, commitment to the same virtue and goals (DeSilva 212). In other words, *ἀγαπάω* relates to virtue and the fear of the Lord. This *ἀγάπη* has explanatory power for typical normative experiences of love such as the tenacity of love, the non-fungibility of the beloved, and the strong feelings associated with love. Love is tenacious because it is based on the essential value of personhood, expressed within the type of relationship that exists between lover and beloved (Silverman 2021: 22).

4 Maccabees 15:3, another example, connects the godliness of mother with *ἀγαπάω*. Her love towards the Lord *ἀγαπάω* surpasses the love to her children and her own life (15:1-32). She, therefore, is willing to lose her children, life and to be a martyr. In conclusion, whereas *στοργή* occurs due to a biological relationship, 4 Maccabees uses *ἀγαπάω* in relation to a spiritual relationship (13:24; 15:3). Although 4 Maccabees 13:24 appears in the context of brotherly love, 13:24-25 demonstrate that their commonness in studying the divine law and their zeal to the Lord flourish

their love (ἀγαπάω) towards each other. In other words, their spiritual bond nourishes their brotherly love. 4 Maccabees 15:3 also reveals the love of mother to the Lord is greater than the love to herself and her children. The love of the mother towards God is like what Aquinas’ statement on caritas, which is the Latin equivalent of ἀγαπάω: a disposition towards relationally appropriate acts of the will – consisting of desires for the ongoing good of persons and desires for ongoing proper bonds with persons – held as final ends (Stump 2006: 25-43). It means that ἀγάπη is a disposition determined by desires rather than actions or emotions, this account makes a person’s will the locus of love. Silverman argues that in ἀγάπη, someone’s volitional structure is more central to love than his emotional states (Silverman 2021: 20).

Conclusion

A lexical analysis in the book of Sirach, 3 and 4 Maccabees reveal that the understanding of στοργή is not limited to the love between husband and wife, but it incorporates the love of parents to their children (both human and animal relationship), the love towards friends, neighbors, and community. Although this research recognizes that ἀγάπη could refer to God’s sacrificial love, 3 Maccabees emphasizes on God’s faithfulness to his covenant. 4 Maccabees 13 narrates that the subject and the object of ἀγάπη is human being. The book of Sirach expands the objects of ἀγάπη to danger (3:26), wisdom (4:12; 7:21), city (24:11), gold (31:5), unknown object (6:33), living creature (13:15), son (30:1). Therefore, the book of Sirach, 3 and 4 Maccabees broadens the understanding of στοργή and ἀγάπη.

Although there are some overlaps between στοργή and ἀγάπη, this research finds there are seven differences between στοργή and ἀγάπη. The table below summarizes those discrepancies.

The Book	στοργή (στέργω)	ἀγάπη (ἀγαπάω)
Sirach	Greek Modality: Imperative	Greek Modality: Indicative
Sirach	The nature of love is a breakable love	The nature of love is an unbreakable love
Sirach	The object of love is limited	The object of love is unlimited
3 Maccabees	The oppressed as the subject of love	The Lord as the subject of love
3 Maccabees	The foundation of love is commonness	The foundation of love is God’s covenant and faithfulness
3 Maccabees	The love cannot save the object	The love can save the object
4 Maccabees	The kind of love is biological love	The kind of love is spiritual love

These differences in the book of Sirach, 3 and 4 Maccabees contributes to the more comprehensive understanding of *στοργή* and *ἀγάπη*.

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