



BSFL: *Leviticus 18; 20; Proverbs 3; 6*

Abomination

A Word Study

Hittite religious scene, possibly a man being led by two soldiers to be a human sacrifice; from the Aslani Gate at Bogazkoy (in modern Turkey), which was the capital of the ancient Hittite Empire.



Apis and Amon-Re) and the cow (Hathor). Such blasphemy could have resulted in a violent reaction by the Egyptians. “Abominations” in God’s sight include sexual perversion (Lev. 18:22-30; compare 18:6-30; 20:13); unclean foods (Deut. 14:3); a defective sacrificial animal (17:1); occult practices (18:9-12); cross-gender dressing (22:5); dishonest scales (25:13-16; Prov. 11:1); a devious person (3:32); a sacrifice by the wicked (15:8); the way of the wicked (v. 9); pride (16:5); hypocritical worship (Isa. 1:13); and especially idolatry (see Deut. 7:25-26; 13:14; 17:4; 20:18; 27:15; 32:16; 1 Kings 14:24; Ezek. 7:20) and practices associated with idolatry, such as human sacrifice (Deut. 12:31; 18:9-10; 2 Kings 16:3; compare Lev. 18:21 with Lev. 18:26-30). Noteworthy is Solomon’s warning of seven things particularly offensive (*to’ebah*) to God: “The LORD hates six things; in fact, seven are detestable to Him: arrogant eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that plots wicked schemes, feet eager to run to evil, a lying witness who gives false testimony, and one who stirs up trouble among brothers” (Prov. 6:16-19, HCSB).

Ta’ab (“to loathe, detest”) is a verbal derivative of the noun *to’ebah*; the Old Testament translates this “to commit abomination” or “act abominably” 7 times in KJV (NRSV 5, NASB 5). It often refers to idolatry. For example, Ezekiel depicts Israel as a prostitute who “made” her beauty “an abomination” by her idolatrous ways (Ezek. 16:25, ESV; compare 1 Kings 21:26).

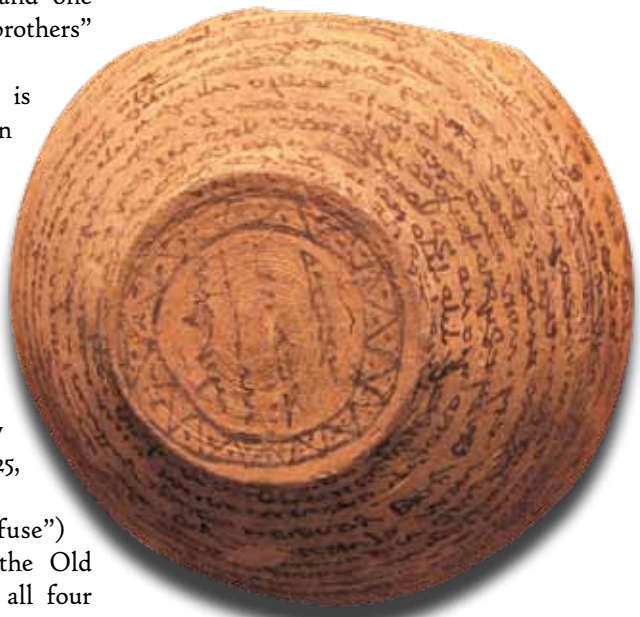
Piggul (“foul thing, refuse”) occurs only four times in the Old Testament, and KJV renders all four

as “abomination” or “abominable” (so does NRSV except in Ezek. 4:14). The term refers to sacrificial meat consumed after it had begun to ruin—therefore unacceptable to God as a fellowship offering (Lev. 7:18; 19:7), the broth of forbidden meat (Isa. 65:4), and “impure” meat (Ezek. 4:14, HCSB).

Once KJV includes “abomination” in its translation of *ba’ash* (“was had in abomination,” 1 Sam. 13:4; also NKJV). Essentially this verb (“to stink, smell”) describes a “stench” like the foul odor of rotting fish (Ex. 7:18,21; Isa. 50:2) and figuratively denotes that which is offensive, odious, or hated (Gen. 34:30; Ex. 5:21; 2 Sam. 10:6). By attacking the Philistine outpost, Israel became “repulsive” (HCSB) or “odious” (NASB) to the Philistines (1 Sam. 13:4).

Below: Those who practiced the religion of Mandaeanism would often write a protective spell on the inside and outside of a bowl and then bury it upside down. These incantation bowls had 2 purposes: to ward off evil spirits and to serve as a trap for any demons that came near. The inscription,

written in a version of Aramaic known as Mandaic, asks for protection for a woman and her family. God described participation in occult practices as an abomination. Mandaeanism, which is similar to Gnosticism, is still practiced by a handful of people in Iraq, Iran, Syria, and Jordan.



By Stephen R. Miller

E NGLISH VERSIONS vary in the number of different Hebrew words rendered “abomination” and its various forms in the Old Testament (KJV 8; NRSV 7; NIV and NASB 3; HCSB 2), but *to’ebah* is by far the most common. Ezekiel is particularly fond of this Hebrew word, employing it 43 times (over one-third of its total Old Testament usage). In KJV all 117 instances of *to’ebah* are translated “abomination/s” or “abominable [thing/s].” The number of instances in NRSV is 96 times, NASB 105, and HCSB 4. Only in Proverbs 26:25 does NIV render *to’ebah* as “abominations.” Like HCSB, NIV usually prefers to translate this term as “detestable” or “detestable thing/practice.”

Old Testament Terms

To’ebah expresses that which is repulsive, detestable, or offensive to human beings or to God. Egyptians looked upon shepherds with disgust (Gen. 46:34); even eating with unsophisticated Hebrews was repugnant to the Egyptians (43:32). Israel’s animal sacrifices were an “abomination” to the Egyptians (Ex. 8:26), probably because prominent Egyptian gods were associated with the bull (named

HITTITE SCENE: ILLUSTRATOR PHOTO/ DAVID ROGERS/ ARCHAEOLOGICAL MUSEUM/ ANKARA, TURKEY (256/19) BOWL: ILLUSTRATOR PHOTO/ BOB SCHATZ/ ROYAL ONTARIO MUSEUM/ TORONTO (2917/6) FIRE: ISTOCK PHOTO



Left: Burial scene with Isis, Apis the bull, and Osiris in the catacombs at Kom-El-Shogafa, in Alexandria, Egypt. Although this was a Roman burial

site dating to the 2nd cent. A.D., the catacombs are decorated with a motif that developed centuries earlier. Egyptians, whose gods often resembled animals, rejected the idea of offering animals as worship sacrifices.



Below: Bronze figurine depicts an attendant leading a boar to a Roman temple for sacrifice; dated 1st-2nd centuries A.D.

ILLUSTRATOR PHOTO/ BOB SCHATZ (17/16/17)

Shiqquts means a “detested thing” and is the second most common Hebrew term rendered “abomination” in the Old Testament (KJV 22 times, NIV 5, HCSB 3, NASB 10, NRSV 16). Related forms are the derived verb *shaqats*, “detest, make detestable,” rendered as some form of “abomination” 4 times in KJV (see Lev. 20:25, to make oneself abominable or detestable by eating unclean meat), and *sheqets*, “something detestable,” appearing as “abomination” 11 times in the KJV and once in NIV and NRSV. All 28 instances of *shiqquts* in the Old Testament are associated with idolatry,¹ and usually the term describes the idols themselves as disgusting and offensive to God. The terms *to‘ebah* and *shiqquts* may act as synonyms (see 2 Kings 23:13; Jer. 16:18; Ezek. 5:11; 7:20), but the former includes that which is culturally, physically, or morally repulsive, whereas the latter is limited exclusively to idolatry.

New Testament Terms

Bdelugma, “a detestable thing,” appears six times in the Greek New Testament; English versions usually render it “abomination” (KJV 6 times, NIV and NRSV 4, NASB 5, HCSB 2). In the Greek *Septuagint* (abbreviated LXX) *bdelugma* commonly represents

to‘ebah, but also *shiqquts* and *sheqets*.² Four times in the New Testament the word unquestionably refers to idolatry (Matt. 24:15; Mark 13:14; Rev. 17:4,5), and perhaps in Revelation 21:27. The verb form *bdelussomai* (“to detest, loathe”) appears twice in the New Testament (Rom. 2:22; Rev. 21:8). The KJV and NASB translate it as “abominable” in Revelation 21:8, possibly an allusion to idolatry. Idolatry is clearly in view in Romans 2:22 (KJV “abhorrest idols”; HCSB “detest idols”). The Greek term *athemitos* (literally, “unlawful”) occurs in KJV and NASB as “abominable” (NIV “detestable”) in 1 Peter 4:3 to describe idolatry as forbidden by God’s law (see Acts 10:28).

Abomination of Desolation

A special use of *shiqquts* and *bdelugma* is in the phrase, “abomination of desolation.” Scriptures mention the abomination of desolation five times (Dan. 9:27; 11:31; 12:11; Matt. 24:15; Mark 13:14). Some English versions vary in their translation of Daniel 9:27. Rather than, “And the abomination of desolation will be on a wing of the temple” (HCSB; see NIV), ESV reads, “And on the

wing of abominations shall come one who makes desolate” (compare KJV, NKJV, NASB). In any case, the “abomination of desolation” is implied in Daniel 9:27 since some kind of sacrilegious act or object (“abomination”) causes the temple to be “desolate” of worshipers. In addition, all three Daniel references include a form of *shiqquts* (“abomination”) and *shamem* (“be desolated, appalled”) that link the verses together.

Scholars agree that Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175-163 B.C.) erecting an altar to Zeus (Jupiter) in the Jerusalem temple in December, 167 B.C. was a fulfillment of the “abomination” in Daniel 11:31.³ Critics also take Daniel 9:27 and 12:11 to refer to Antiochus’s blasphemy, whereas evangelical scholars usually associate these passages with the Roman destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in A.D. 70 or with a sacrilege of the eschatological antichrist.⁴

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ILLUSTRATOR PHOTO/ BRENT BRUCE/ ASHMOLEAN MUSEUM, OXFORD, ENGLAND (3/13/17)



ILLUSTRATOR PHOTO/ MIKE RUTHERFORD (5/7/95-4)

Above: A lad tends sheep and goats near the funerary temple of Amenhotep III at Luxor, on the west bank of the Nile. In the days of the patriarchs, Egyptians considered shepherds to be disgusting (Gen. 46:34).

Left: From the 2nd cent. A.D., statue depicting Jupiter, the supreme god of the Roman pantheon. He was the god of the sky and thunder. Antiochus IV Epiphanes erected an image of Zeus (known to the Greeks as Jupiter) in the Jerusalem temple.

eschatological antichrist; or (3) both.⁷ Those who favor view 2 believe the sacrilege of the eschatological antichrist is described in 2 Thessalonians 2:3-12; Daniel 9:27 and 12:11 (the passage Jesus cited). Interpreters who appeal to both events conclude that it has a dual application. Since elements of Jesus' prophecy reach beyond the Roman destruction of A.D. 70 to His return (Matt. 24:29-30,36-44), views 2 or 3 appear to be the best options. **B**

1. Hermann J. Austel, "שִׁיֻּקֻּט" (*shiqquṭs*, detestable thing) in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, ed. R. Laird Harris (Chicago: Moody, 1980), 2:955; "שִׁיֻּקֻּט, שִׁיֻּקֻּט" (*shiqquṭs*, detestable thing) in William L. Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 382.
 2. Joseph H. Thayer, *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (1896; reprint ed., Nashville: Broadman, 1977), 99.
 3. Stephen R. Miller, *Daniel*, vol. 18 in *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1994), 301-302; compare Josephus *Antiquities of the Jews* 12.5.4. See 1 Maccabees 1:47,54,59; 2 Maccabees 6:4-5; compare with Daniel 8:13.
 4. Miller, *Daniel*, 253-57, 269-73, 325-26.
 5. D.A. Carson, "Matthew" in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, gen. ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 500.
 6. Josephus, *Wars of the Jews* 6.4.7; 7.5.5. Some of these temple treasures are depicted on the Arch of Titus in Rome.
 7. For a discussion, see James A. Brooks, *Mark*, vol. 23 in *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1991), 212-13.

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"Abomination of desolation" appears twice in the New Testament (Matt. 24:15; Mark 13:14). In His Olivet Discourse, Jesus attributed the saying to the prophet Daniel and indicated that its fulfillment was yet future. According to Jesus' testimony, all references to "the abomination of desolation" in Daniel were not fulfilled during the time of Antiochus IV. Since scholars agree that Daniel 11:31 refers to Antiochus's sacrilege, Christ's words must point to the "abomination of desolation" of Daniel 9:27

and/or 12:11—probably the latter since the Greek of Matthew and Mark (*to bdelugma tes eremoseos*) agrees exactly with the LXX of Daniel 12:11.⁵ Jesus, then, is identifying the "abomination" of these passages with a future sacrilege in the Jerusalem temple. Most scholars associate this New Testament "abomination of desolation" with (1) some aspect of the Jewish revolt and Roman destruction of the temple in A.D. 70 (such as Rome's General Titus's entry into the temple and plunder of its treasures);⁶ (2) the