

## The Abomination That Causes Desolation

Ángel Manuel Rodríguez, BRI

The recent incursion of futurism among Adventists has led some to reinterpret the use of the phrase “the abomination that causes desolation” and the “continual” in the book of Daniel. Here we will concentrate on the phrase “the abomination that causes desolation.” The phrase is found in Dan 11:31 (LXX: *bdelugma erēmōseōs*) and 12:11 (LXX: *to bdelugma tēs erēmōseōs*). Similar expressions are found in 9:27 (LXX: *bdelugma erēmōseōn*), and 8:13 (LXX: *hē hamartia erēmōseōs*). We will briefly examine those passages.

### I. Daniel 8:13

Here we find the phrase “the rebellion [Heb. *happeša<sup>c</sup>*] that causes desolation [*šomēm*],” instead of “the abomination [*šiqqûš*] that causes desolation [*šomēm*].” Both phrases appear to refer to the same phenomenon.<sup>1</sup> The Hebrew word translated “transgression,” “rebellion” (*peša<sup>c</sup>*), designates a person who “does not merely rebel or protest against Yahweh but breaks with him, takes away what is his, robs, embezzles, misappropriates it.”<sup>2</sup> The activity of the little horn is a willful rebellion against and a misappropriation of the work of mediation of the heavenly Prince, Christ, that results in “desolation” or spiritual “devastation.”

When the verb “to desolate” (*šmm*) is applied to inanimate objects, it describes the state in which a place is left after being attacked by enemies (e.g., Lev. 26:31; Joel 1:17). When applied to humans it refers to the psychological impact produced by the desolation on those who observed it (1 Kings 9:8; Ezra 9:3, 4; Dan 8:27; 9:18).<sup>3</sup> In the Old Testament a desolated place is deserted, abandoned by those who used to live there or who had access to it (e.g., Lev. 26:22, 34; Isa. 33:8; Jer. 33:10; Zeph. 3:6; Zech. 7:14). The context of Dan. 8:13 indicates that the desolation is related to the attack of the little horn (the church during the Middle Ages) against the heavenly sanctuary. The act of rebellion caused spiritual desolation by usurping the priestly work of the Prince, by rejecting the very foundation of the sanctuary, and by establishing its own priestly work.

### II. Daniel 9:27

This text is part of the prophecy of the 70 weeks, with its prediction of the coming of the Messiah and the destruction of the *temple and the city of Jerusalem* in A.D. 70. The destruction is associated with the “abomination that causes desolation.” The phrase is not exactly the same one used in Dan. 8:13. Instead of “rebellion” we find “abomination” (*šiqqûš*), also used in Dan. 11:31 and 12:11. In 9:27 there is a problem of syntax; while the noun “abomination” is plural (*šiqqûšim*, “abominations”) the participle is singular (*m<sup>e</sup>šomēm*, poel participle, “that causes desolation”). This has led to different interpretations of the phrase. But the problem could be solved if we identify the plural as a plural of intensification, meaning in this case “utter abomination.”

The noun *šiqqûš* (“abomination”) is employed in the OT in cultic contexts to refer to “images and symbols of pagan deities,”<sup>4</sup> that is, to idolatry (cf. 1 Kings 11:5; 2 Kings 23:13; Isa. 66:3; Jer. 32:34). A good example is found in Zech. 9:7, where “the forbidden [*šiqqûš*, “abominable”] food from between their teeth,” refers to the repulsive meat of the pagan sacrificial animal. *Šiqqûš* fundamentally designates that which is essentially incompatible with the worship of the Lord. Those who practice abominations,

including the Israelites, become themselves abominable to the Lord (Hosea 9:10). This is also the case with Israelites who eat abominable animals. In Lev. 11:43 the verb *šqš*, “to detest as ceremonially unclean,”<sup>5</sup> is employed in the piel formation (*šiqqēš*), meaning “to make oneself as something unclean and abhorrent”<sup>6</sup> by eating unclean animals. The noun *šeqeš* (“cultic abomination”), another noun from the same word family, is occasionally used to refer to unclean animals that are repulsive and detestable to the Lord. It is closely related to the idea of uncleanness and, like uncleanness, it designates what is essentially incompatible with the holiness of the Lord (Lev. 7:21; 11:10-13, 20, 23, 41).

In Daniel 9:27 *šiqqūš* designates the abominable force that after the death of the Messiah causes desolation by destroying the city and particularly the temple. This is precisely how Jesus understood the passage when He applied it to the future literal destruction of both the city and the temple by the Roman armies.<sup>7</sup> This usage of the phrase “abomination that causes desolation” is different from what we find in Dan. 8:13, 11:31, and 12:11.

### *III. Daniel 11:31; 12:11*

In these passages the abomination is directly related to the “daily” (*tāmīd*), i.e. Christ’s mediation in the heavenly sanctuary. In Dan. 8:12 the little horn, through an act of rebellion, usurps the role of the Prince and places its own hosts over the “daily.” It is to this action that Dan. 8:13 is referring with the phrase “the rebellion that causes desolation.” In Dan. 11:31 the king of the north desecrates the temple, removes the “daily,” and then sets up the “abomination that causes desolation.” Again we find the “daily” removed and the abomination/rebellion taking its place. The opposite of the *tāmīd* (“the daily”) is the *šiqqūš šomēm* (“the abomination that causes desolation”). Daniel 8:9-13 indicates that the language of “rebellion/abomination” is describing the work of the little horn in establishing or setting up its own system of mediation and worship, its own daily services. It is to that same activity that the phrase “the abomination that causes desolation” is referring to in Dan. 12:11. The verb *nāthan* (“to set up”) is used in a variety of ways in the OT, but here it can be translated as “to set, to place, to lay,” a usage associated with idolatry (Lev. 26:1). In this case what is set up is the “abomination that causes desolation.” The setting up of this abomination includes the historical process that led to setting aside the “daily.”

Some Adventists are now arguing that the abomination of desolation in 12:11 designates the enforcement of Sunday observance shortly before the coming of the Lord, and the “daily” is somehow connected to the Sabbath. That interpretation lacks contextual and linguistic support. It is fundamentally a speculative view that should not be taken seriously. The phrase “abomination that causes desolation” designates what took place during the destruction of Jerusalem and the work of the papacy during the Middle Ages. The slightly different variations in the wording of the phrase in the Hebrew text of Daniel point to those two different events.

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<sup>1</sup>Johan Lust, “Cult and Sacrifice in Daniel: The Tamid and the Abomination of Desolation,” in *Ritual and Sacrifice in the Ancient Near East, Proceedings of the International Conference Organized by the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven from the 17<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> of April 1991*, edited by J. Quaegebeur (Leuven: Uitgeverij Peeters, 1993), 285.

<sup>2</sup>R. Knierim, “*Peša<sup>c</sup>*,” in *Theological Lexicon of the OT*, vol. 2, edited by E. Jenni and C. Westermann (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997), 1036 (hereafter *TLOT*).

<sup>3</sup>F. Stolz, “Šmm,” in *TLOT*, vol. 2, 1372.

<sup>4</sup>Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, M. Richardson, and J. J. Stamm, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the OT* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 1640 (hereafter *KBL*<sup>3</sup>).

<sup>5</sup>*KBL*<sup>3</sup>, 1646.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup>The way the different gospels report the comments of Jesus helps us understand how He understood the prophecy of Dan. 9:27. The phrase Mark uses, “standing where it does not belong” (Mark 13:14), is clarified by Matthew with the phrase, “standing in the holy place” (Matt. 24:15) referring to the temple. This is based on the Greek text of Dan. 9:27 that renders the Hebrew phrase, *‘al k<sup>e</sup>naph šiqqûšim m<sup>e</sup>šomēm* (“On a wing an abomination that causes desolation”), as “on the temple there will be an abomination that causes desolation” (*epi to hieron bdelugma tōn erēmōseōn estai*). Matthew suggests that those who practice abomination are themselves abominable and are now present in the temple to destroy it, causing desolation. Luke clearly defines the referent of the abomination as the Roman armies that surrounded Jerusalem (Luke 21:20-22; cf. T. J. Gedert, “Apocalyptic Teaching,” in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, edited by J. B. Green, S. McKnight, I. H. Marshall [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1992], 23). Jesus’ prediction, based on Dan. 9:27, “concerning the ‘abomination of desolation’ was fulfilled when the Jerusalem Temple was desecrated and destroyed in A.D. 70” (*ibid.*).

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