

Fornication
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Introduction

The issue of fornication is repeatedly mentioned in both the Old and the New Testament. The question arises what the term really means. We will focus on the Greek terms as found in the Septuagint (LXX) and in the New Testament. Five Greek words form the word family that describes fornication. It consists of three nouns and two verbs. In alphabetical order the terms are: *ekporneuō*, *porneia*, *porneuō*, *pornē*, and *pornos*. The lexicon definition of the noun *porneia* is “prostitution, unchastity, fornication, of every kind of unlawful sexual intercourse.”¹ The verbs *ekporneuō* and *porneuō* can be translated “to prostitute,” or “practice prostitution or sexual immorality.” A *pornē* is a female prostitute, a harlot. A *pornos* represents a male prostitute or a fornicator, one who practices sexual immorality. In this article “fornication” is used to refer to this Greek word family, especially to *porneia*.

I. Fornication in Extra-Biblical Greek

In the non-Jewish Greek world a *pornē* was a prostitute for hire, oftentimes a bought female slave. On the other hand, a *pornos* was a man who had intercourse with harlots or who allowed himself to be abused for money, in other words, a male prostitute. The word is also translated “catamite” and “sodomite.” *Porneia* is not found frequently in classical Greek. It can be rendered “fornication,” “licentiousness,” “prostitution,” or “unchastity” and includes homosexuality. The two verbs mentioned above and also found in extra-biblical Greek stand for committing fornication and prostituting oneself. *Ekporneuō* seems to be stronger than *porneuō*. In addition, classical Greek has a number of composite words which refer to a brothel, a brothel keeper, being born by a harlot, etc., synonyms for *porneia* and *pornē*, which use the same root, and other related terms that belong to the same word family.²

II. Fornication in the Septuagint

1. Observations

The Greek word family *-porn-* is found approximately 147 times in the canonical books of the LXX. It is used predominantly in a symbolic way³ and stands for turning away from the Lord and getting involved in idolatry. In Jer 31:1-10 both the northern and the southern kingdoms are accused of playing the harlot with their lovers instead of being faithful to the Lord.

However, the terms are also used in a literal sense. They apply to secular as well as to so-called sacred prostitution. Tamar behaved like a prostitute, and Judah regarded her as such. While pregnant she was accused of having played the harlot (Gen 38:13-24). As a widow she had sexual intercourse with a man—in this case with her father-in-law—and that was considered to be fornication.

Daughters were not to be made harlots by their fathers and were warned against fornication (Lev 19:29; 21:9). At Shittim the Israelites had sexual relations with the women of Moab which is called fornication.

Another case is presented in Deut 22:13-21. A husband discovers that his wife was not a virgin when the couple married. Again the word family *-porn-* is used to describe what the woman had done. Obviously, this is a case of premarital sex described with the term “fornication.” The punishment is death by stoning.

Deut 23:17 warns Israel’s daughters and Israel’s sons not to function as prostitutes. Instead of the normal Hebrew word used to translate playing the harlot (*zānāh*) the Hebrew words *q^edēšāh* and *qādēš* for a female and a male prostitute are employed. Some understand these words as pointing to cult or temple prostitutes and claim that temple prostitution was a common practice in the Ancient Near East.⁴ Others seriously question this interpretation.⁵ The word *zōnāh* describing a harlot, is found in the very next verse and may be used as a kind of synonym.

In Hos 2:2-7, Hosea’s experience with his wife becomes an illustration of God’s experience with his people. In Hos 2:2 harlotry and adultery are found in parallelism.⁶ By committing harlotry a married woman also commits adultery. In Ezekiel, although used with a symbolic meaning, prostitution is adultery. Jerusalem played the harlot and committed adultery against God, its husband.⁷ Israel and Judah pictured as God’s two wives, named Oholah and Oholibah, have multiplied their harlotry and by doing this they have committed adultery.⁸ In Isa 57:3 the terms adulterer and prostitute stand next to each other. They may be used interchangeably, if the gender is adjusted, just to avoid duplication of one term.

2. Summary

The following picture emerges in the Old Testament:

- (1) The word family *-porn-* depicts prostitution, playing the harlot.
- (2) It is predominantly used in a figurative sense, but it also has a literal meaning. Both the symbolic and the literal meaning correspond with each other and are even used in juxtaposition.
- (3) The word family is being used for premarital sex.
- (4) Prostitution or fornication can be adultery.
- (5) When Tamar is accused of fornication, it is in reality a form of incest which is prohibited by the later law in Lev 18.

III. Fornication in the New Testament

In the New Testament the word family *-porn-* is found fifty-six times. The predominant word is the noun *porneia* (fornication) which occurs twenty-five times.⁹ The word family is most often found in the Pauline writings including Hebrews, namely twenty-four times, followed by the Johannine writings with twenty references.¹⁰ This makes the Book of Revelation the work employing this word family most frequently, namely nineteen times, followed immediately by 1Corinthians which has fourteen references.¹¹

Quite often, the word family has a symbolic meaning, but in the New Testament this is not the predominant understanding. Furthermore, the symbolic meaning is restricted to the Book of Revelation. Yet Revelation uses the respective terms also literally.

1. Symbolic Meaning

In Rev 2:18-29 the church in Thyatira is addressed. In this church the woman Jezebel teaches and practices fornication (Rev 2:20-21). Jezebel is a symbolic figure. As the wife of king Ahab she had passed away already several hundred years ago. However, the larger passage seems to contain a definition of the term fornication. Jezebel's followers have played the harlot and have committed adultery with her (Rev 2:20,22). Yet the others, who did not do that, are not described as those who have not played the harlot but as those "who do not hold this teaching, who have not known the deep things of Satan" (Rev 2:24). Thus fornication is not literal fornication in this instance, but has to do with the deliberate acceptance of false teachings and a turning away from the Lord which, at the end, is a move toward Satan. Spiritual fornication is unfaithfulness to God who in symbolic contexts is oftentimes considered to be the husband of his people.¹² On the other hand, it is very interesting to note that those whom Jezebel encourages to commit fornication in verse 20, who are also called the servants of God, have at least partially committed adultery with her (Rev 2:22). Thus fornication clearly includes adultery, even if it is used in a figurative context.

In the preceding church a reference to Balaam is found. He taught Balak to entice the Israelites to commit fornication (Rev 2:14). The respective Old Testament report must be understood literally. However, those who hold the teaching of Balaam in the church of Pergamum, seem to embrace spiritual fornication. Yet the church itself did not renounce faith in Jesus (Rev 2:13). The same phrase "to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit fornication" (Rev 2:14) is found in reversed order in Rev 2:20 and seems to point to spiritual fornication.

Babylon is the great harlot (Rev 17:1, 15, 16; 19:2) and the mother of harlots (Rev 17:5). The kings of the earth have committed fornication with her (Rev 17:2; 18:3, 9). She offers the wine (of the wrath) of fornication (Rev 14:8; 17:2; 18:3). Her cup is full of abominations and the unclean things of her fornication (Rev 17:4). She corrupts the entire earth with her fornication (Rev 19:2). Clearly, this is symbolic fornication.

2. Literal Meaning

a. References to Historical Events

The New Testament contains several references to Old Testament events in which fornication occurred. In Heb 12:16 Esau is called a *pornos* . In Heb 11:31 Rahab, the prostitute, is found. Jam 2:25 also refers to Rahab as a prostitute who, however, was justified. The Balaam episode has been mentioned above (Rev 2:14). In 1Cor 10:8 the same incident is related. Israelite men had committed fornication with Moabite women plus idolatry. As a result thousands were killed (Num 25:1, 9). Num 31:16 mentions Balaam's advice to defeat Israel by means of fornication and idolatry. Fornication in these cases describes sexual acts unrelated to marriage. They may be extramarital as well as premarital affairs.

Jude 1:7 talks about Sodom and Gomorrah and the Cities of the Plain. They engaged in fornication and “went after other flesh.” The latter term seems to stand for homosexuality. The Old Testament text of Gen 19:4-8 forms the background for Jude 1:7,¹³ and it clearly implies homosexual acts. The inhabitants of Sodom wanted “to know” the men who visited Lot, that is, they wanted to have sexual intercourse with them,¹⁴ although they were not aware of the fact that these men were angels.¹⁵ Because of their homosexuality unknowingly they “went after other flesh.”¹⁶ Thus, in Jude the phrase “going after other flesh” points to homosexuality, which is apparently also true for the term “fornication.” The same Old Testament background describes what Jude calls committing fornication and going after other flesh. There is little doubt that the latter phrase more clearly describes the former.¹⁷ If the word *kai*, normally translated “and,” is used epexegetically, that is, with the meaning “namely,” then fornication is equated with homosexuality. If it is not used epexegetically, fornication in Jude 1:7 would be a broader term which, however, in this context seems to include homosexuality.¹⁸

In New Testament times, some incidents are reported in which fornication occurred. In Matt 21:31-32 Jesus talks favorably about tax collectors and prostitutes not because of what they had done in the past but because they believed John and repented. Uniting with a prostitute (*pornē*) is discussed in 1Cor 6:15-16. Obviously, church members in Corinth argued that this is permissible (1Cor 6:12) and may have practiced it. The prodigal son is accused by his brother of having devoured his father’s property with prostitutes (Luke 15:30). Thus, fornication points to prostitution as it was known from the early days of humankind until today.

A specific case of fornication is related in 1Cor 5, and fornicators are mentioned in verses 9-11. In this text the masculine form of the same noun is used (*pornos*) which in 1Cor 6:15-16 refers to female prostitutes (*pornē*). However, the case starting with 1Cor 5:1 implies more than prostitution. In this text, a man commits fornication by having his father’s wife. This woman is not called his mother. She may be his stepmother. The case is very severe. It is an offense even to the gentile environment. Yet the church seems not to be disturbed by that. The act of having sexual intimacy with one’s stepmother is called *porneia*. Some verses farther Paul warns against fornicators in the Christian church and counsels fellow believers not to associate with them. The case of 1Cor 5:1 is clearly spelled out in Lev 18:8. Lev 18 discusses unlawful sexual relations. First of all, it is evident that Paul considered Lev 18 or at least parts of it as still valid for Christians. Secondly, the term *porneia* clearly stands for incestuous relations and may include all unlawful sexual activities spelled out in Lev 18, that is, different forms of incest, sexual relations with a woman during her period, sexual relations with the wife of another man, homosexuality, and sexual relations with animals.¹⁹

The issue of fornication was discussed and decided upon at the Jerusalem Council—Acts 15:20, 29; 21:25. Gentile Christians were ordered to abstain from fornication. Obviously, the Jerusalem Council did not discuss the validity of the Decalogue. The term that they dealt with was *porneia*, whereas the Ten Commandments use the verb *moicheuō*. It seems quite certain that the delegates to this Council and especially James had in mind Lev 18.²⁰ Paul then in the case of the Corinthian man followed the decisions of the Council of Jerusalem. *Porneia* was referring to a broad range of sexual deviations including prostitution as found in 1Cor 6.

In John 8 a dialogue between Jesus and the Jews takes place focusing on the question whether or not Abraham is more than their physical father. In John 8:41 the Jews tell Jesus: “We were not born of fornication” and may imply “but you were.” If this is the case, then these people

seem to stigmatize Jesus by implying that he was an illegitimate child. Consequently, the term *porneia* would include premarital sex.

b. Lists of Vices

The New Testament offers a number of lists of vices. Among the elements of these lists oftentimes fornication is found. However, frequently fornication is not the only element that refers to sexual deviations.

In the long list of vices in Matt 15:19 and in Mark 7:21-22, Jesus mentions adultery (*moicheia*) and (*porneia*).²¹

Quite often the apostle Paul uses similar enumerations. In 1Cor 6:9-10 “fornicators,” “idolaters,” “adulterers,” “effeminate,” “homosexuals”²² and others are referred to. Twice fornication is found next to impurity (*akarthasia*)—Eph 5:3, 5²³; Col 3:5²⁴--and twice next to impurity and sensuality (*aselgeia*)—2Cor 12:21; Gal 5:19.²⁵ In the list of 1Tim 1:9-10, again fornicators and *arsenokoitai* are mentioned. The latter term is translated “sodomites” by the NRSV and “homosexuals” by the NASB. Thus in these lists of vices fornication is distinguished from adultery, impurity, and homosexuality and may not include these other sexual deviations. The two lists in 1Cor 5:9-11 use only one sexual term, namely *porneia*. Certainly, the context of incest is very important, but probably *porneia* is used here in a wider sense including all sexual vices, especially since Paul’s admonition was already given in a previous letter to the Corinthians before the case of 1Cor 5:1 was made known to Paul.

The Book of Revelation contains three lists of vices in Rev 9:21; 21:8; and 22:15 in which the word family *-porn-* occurs. Probably, the terms in these lists, especially those in Rev 21 and 22, must be understood literally. Only one sexual deviation is named among all the other sins and that is fornication.²⁶ It seems that in these cases fornication is a broad term including all other sexual evils, because other terms pointing to sexual misconduct are absent.

c. Exhortations

In 1Corinthians Paul devotes almost three entire chapters to sexual issues. The fornicator of 1Cor 5:1 has been discussed. In 1Cor 5:9-11 Paul first refers back to a previous letter in which he admonished the church members not to associate with fornicators. The meaning of the term fornicator in verse 9 is not restricted to incest. In the present letter he specifies his admonition by calling believers to dissociate and withdraw completely from a fornicator, who is a church member, and not to eat with such a person. Fornication in this case may include incest, but certainly covers more than that. Although fornication can never be an option for followers of Christ, they cannot avoid all contact with fornicators in the world and obviously should not do so, because these people must be won to Christ.

In 1Cor 6b Paul continues his discussion of sexual topics.²⁷ Verses 13-18 contain the word family *-porn-* five times. Because the body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, all fornication must be fled. Sexual immorality directly affects the body. Because the body is a member of Christ, it never should become one with a harlot. Joining a prostitute is not an option for one who has joined the Lord. Whereas Paul in 1Cor 5 summons Christians to dissociate from fornicators that are church members, in 1Cor 6 he commands them not to commit acts of fornication. Thus

fornication is prostitution as well as an extramarital or a premarital sexual act. In 1Cor 7:2 Paul's call to have one's own wife, that is, to be married in order to avoid fornication, may define fornication as premarital sex. However, the very next verse pointing toward the mutual marital obligation of the respective couples seems to form another safeguard against fornication. Thus to avoid fornication one may wish to marry and use the gift of sexuality in the God-given way within the marriage. Apparently, fornication refers to premarital as well as extramarital affairs.²⁸ The demand to avoid fornication is repeated in 1Cor 10:8. Since the thousands that had been killed were probably not all unmarried men, fornication refers again to premarital and extramarital intercourse.

In 1Thess 4:3 Paul declares that it is the will of God to abstain from fornication. This verse is part of a sentence which comprises verses 3-6. The passage includes the next two verses. It is a paragraph on God's will, namely sanctification. It starts with God's will and sanctification. It concludes with the concept of God's will and the same word sanctification, which is found a third time in the middle of the passage.²⁹

1Thess 4:3 God's will: sanctification → no fornication (*porneia*)

1Thess 4:7-8 God's calling: sanctification → no impurity (*akatharsia*)

This seems to indicate that at least here fornication is identical with impurity. Within the large sentence of verses 3-6 fornication is mentioned first: We should abstain from fornication. Then it is spelled out what that means, namely "how to possess his own vessel [probably his own wife] in sanctification and honor . . . , and that no man wrong and defraud his brother in this matter . . ." Thus, fornication is to have intercourse with the wife of a fellow believer. This is a clear case of adultery if the fornicator is married. Therefore, fornication may include adultery and sometimes be called impurity.

In Heb 12:16 believers are warned not to be fornicators like Esau was one. The context talks about holiness that believers must exhibit, because without sanctification no one will see the Lord (Heb 12:14). Heb 13:4 is a call to marital faithfulness, contained in a passage of different exhortations: "Marriage is to be held in honor among all, and the marriage bed is to be undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge." In this text, fornication is different from adultery unless *kai* is used epexegetically.³⁰ Adultery may refer to a married partner that has intercourse with another person than the spouse, whereas fornication may refer to a person not married but engaging in sexual activities with a married person.

In Matt 5:32 and 19:9, Jesus warns against divorce. Both verses talk about fornication (*porneia*) and committing adultery (*moicheuō* and *moichaomai*). The argument in Matt 5:32 focuses on the wife and seems to be as follows: If you divorce your wife and she has not committed fornication, by indirectly forcing her to remarry she becomes an adulteress, because the first marriage is still valid. An alternative reading would be: By divorcing your wife you stigmatize her as an adulteress. On the other hand, the argument in Matt 19:9 concentrates on the husband: A man that gets a divorce and remarries, while his wife was not involved in fornication, commits adultery. What does Jesus mean by the term fornication? Depending on its precise nature the act of fornication can be adultery.³¹ This might be the reason why even the latest revision of Martin Luther's translation renders the term *porneia* as "adultery." But it may not be wise to limit the interpretation to adultery only. Obviously, the word *porneia* was chosen deliberately in order to differentiate it from *moicheia* (adultery) and its related verbs in verses 27, 28, and 32b. In Matt 5:32 Jesus quotes Deut 24:1. This text does not only mention a certificate of

divorce but also the reason for divorce. The respective Hebrew term *’erwāh* can be rendered nakedness, pudenda, shame, something indecent, or metaphorically the undefended areas. It is a negative term with strong sexual associations. Its predominant translation is nakedness. The term is found most frequently in the context of sexual immoralities in Lev 18 and 20 and in connection with *porneia* in Ezekiel and Hosea.³² The complete phrase “an indecent thing” is only found in Deut 23:14 and 24:1. In the former text it refers to fecal matter, whereas in chap. 24 it obviously describes some kind of sexual misconduct.³³ In Matt 5:32 Jesus uses *porneia* as the only legitimate reason for divorce³⁴, rejecting at least the interpretation of Deut 24:1 by the school of Hillel which permitted a husband to divorce his wife for trivial matters such as burning a dish of food.³⁵ In Matt 19:9 Jesus uses a similar exception clauses—“except for fornication”—as in Matt 5:32. Since in both cases the literary context does not specify what fornication stands for, the New Testament and Old Testament understanding of the word stem *-porn-* must be considered.³⁶ *Porneia* seems to include a number of sexual sins as indicated in the Old Testament summary section of this article above and in the New Testament summary section below, that is, sexual relations outside of the marriage relation.

3. Summary

With regard to the word family *-porn-* the following picture can be derived from the New Testament:

- (1) Fornication depicts prostitution, playing the harlot.
- (2) It is predominantly used in a literal sense, but in the Book of Revelation it also has a figurative meaning. Both meanings are found next to each other in the letters to the seven churches.
- (3) Fornication can stand for premarital sexual relations.
- (4) In some cases, fornication is adultery or may include adultery; in others it is distinct from it.
- (5) Uncleaness and fornication may in some cases be used as synonyms.
- (6) Incest is fornication. The sexual sins listed in Lev 18 including homosexuality may be included in the term fornication.

Conclusion

In this study we have looked at the word family *-porn-* in extra-biblical Greek literature, in the Old Testament, and in the New Testament. In all sources, *porneia* and the related terms refer to sexual acts only. Both Old Testament and New Testament correspond largely when it comes to the word family. Though the Old Testament favors the figurative sense and the New Testament the literal meaning, the different aspects of *porneia* are found in both testaments. They include prostitution, premarital sexual relations, adultery, incest, and homosexuality, in short, sexual relations outside of the marriage. Thus the Old Testament and the New Testament enlarge the understanding of fornication as found in the Greek world. Obviously, in Scripture fornication is a broad term describing various kinds of sexual aberrations (intercourse), but can also be used in a more restricted sense, referring to illicit sexual acts of married persons or sexual intercourse of unmarried persons. Frequently, a restricted meaning can be determined by investigating the context.

In Scripture, the terms describing fornication are used in a negative way. Fornication in all its forms must be avoided by God's people (Eph 5:3; Col 3:5; 1Thess 4:3). Scripture in contrast to the Greek world does neither condone *porneia* nor does it make any compromises. Those who have committed fornication are called to repent, to receive forgiveness for these sins, and to change their lifestyle (Rev 9:21; 1Cor 6:9-11). Christians are oftentimes particularly interested in the sayings of Jesus with regard to *porneia* and divorce. Although there are many evils in society and unfortunately also in marriages, fornication describes only sexual sins and does not address issues such as spouse battering and abandonment. However, the good news of the gospel is that God is willing to bless us with healing and forgiveness, which we in turn are asked to extend to others.

¹William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: The University of Chicago press, 1957), 699; cf. Walter Bauer, *Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, 6th ed. by K. and B. Aland (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1988), 1389.

²Cf. Friedrich Hauck and Siegfried Schulz, "πόρνη, πόρνος, πορνεία, πορνεύω, ἐκπορνεύω," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. by Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1968), 6:580-584; Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, revised and augmented by H. S. Jones (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1968), 1450.

³See, for instance, Lev 17:7; 20:5; Num 15:39; Hos 4:12-13.

⁴Cf. Francis D. Nichol (ed.), *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 1 (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1953), 1034-1035; P. C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1976), 301; see also translations such as the New American Standard Bible and the New Revised Standard Version.

⁵Cf. Karel van der Toorn, "Cultic Prostitution," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 5, edited by D. N. Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 510-513; and Elaine Adler Goodfriend, "Prostitution," *ibid.*, 507-509.

⁶See also Hos 3:1 and 3; Hos 6:10 and 7:4; and Hos 4:13-14.

⁷See the entire chapter of Eze 16. The word family *-porn-* occurs about seventeen times. Yet, in Eze 16:32 the woman that has played the harlot (verses 30-34) is called an adulteress.

⁸In Eze 23 the word family *-porn-* is used about fifteen times. In Eze 23:37, 43, 45 Oholibah's prostitution is adultery. In verse 43 both expressions are used.

⁹The noun *pornē* (female prostitute) occurs twelve times, the noun *pornos* (male prostitute, fornicator) ten times, the verb *porneuō* (to play the harlot) eight times, and the noun *ekporneuō* (to play the harlot) once.

¹⁰Furthermore, Acts uses it three times, James once, and Jude also once. The Synoptic Gospels have seven references, five being found in Matthew.

¹¹In Revelation the highest concentration is found in chap. 17. In 1 Corinthians it occurs in chaps. 5 and 6.

¹²This concept is already found in the Old Testament, e.g., in Eze 16.

¹³Eberhard Nestle, Erwin Nestle, and others (eds.), *Novum Testamentum Graece*, Editione Vicesima Septima Revisa. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1993), 629, also mentions Gen 19. This view is supported by various commentaries. Cf., Richard J. Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol 50 (Texas: Word Books, 1983), 54.

¹⁴The same verb "to know" is found in verse 8 and clearly refers to intercourse. Lot's daughters "have not known man." Cf., Victor R. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis Chapters 18-50*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 33-34

¹⁵Even Lot did not know right away that these men were angels. They are introduced as messengers or angels in Gen 19:1, but this information was not available to Lot and the Sodomites. Later in the chapter they are consistently called "men" (e.g. verses 5, 8, 10). As such they were perceived by the inhabitants of Sodom. Only from verse 11 onward it may have dawned on Lot that these men were supernatural beings.

¹⁶The expression "other flesh" may point to angels. Another option would be to understand it as referring to the sin of sodomy, that is, intercourse with the same gender.

¹⁷Cf. Bauckham 54; Walter Grundmann, *Der Brief des Judas und der zweite Brief des Petrus*, Theologischer Handkommentar zum Neuen Testament (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1979), 34.

¹⁸Jude is the only New Testament book which uses the term *ekporneuō*. Although this term is found forty-two times in the Old Testament and describes playing the harlot, the New Testament employs it only once. On the other hand, the verb *porneuō* without suffix occurs seventeen times in the Old Testament and eight times in the New Testament. Thus the predominant verb in the Old Testament to describe the act of fornication is *ekporneuō*, whereas the predominant verb in the New Testament is *porneuō*. It may be significant that the term *ekporneuō* is found only in Jude, and it may have a slightly different or more comprehensive meaning. Michael Green, *2 Peter and Jude*, revised ed., Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987), 180, footnote 3, states: “The rare compound *ekporneuō*, ‘fornicate’, may suggest by the *ek* ‘against the course of nature’.”

¹⁹Oftentimes, the New Testament when it alludes to or quotes an Old Testament text does not only refer to the specific text but also to the entire context. When, e.g., in Rev 12:5 the male child is mentioned, who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron, the reference is not just to Ps 2:9 but the entire second Psalm. This principle, so often found in the New Testament, may also apply to 1Cor 5:1 and its Old Testament source, Lev 18.

²⁰This is, e.g., supported by the margin of Nestle-Aland’s Greek New Testament as well as their list of Old Testament quotations and allusions. When discussing the Jerusalem council in Acts 15, Bruce refers back to Lev 18. F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Book of Acts*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1966), 315.

²¹The two terms come in the plural.

²²These are the terms used by the NASB. The Greek text talks about *pornoi*, *eidōlōlatrai*, *moichoi*, *malakoi*, and *arsenokoitai*.

²³Whereas in verse 3 fornication and impurity are found, verse 5 talks about the fornicator and the impure person.

²⁴Other words in the respective verses may also have sexual implications.

²⁵2Cor 12:21 focuses on sexual sins only. Gal 5, on the other hand, contains a longer list which is continued in verse 20.

²⁶The lists mention fornicators.

²⁷Yet, the list of vices in the first part of the chapter includes also sexual sins.

²⁸This observation does not support the view that males do commit sexual sins only if they have sexual relations with one or more wives of other men, if they, so to speak, break into another marriage, but are free to have intercourse with unmarried ladies as long as these agree, while it is sin for these women to have such a relationship.

²⁹Here is an abbreviated form of a syntactical diagram of the 1Thess 4:3-7:

τοῦτο γὰρ ἐστὶν θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ, ὁ ἁγιασμὸς ὑμῶν,

(1) ἀπέχεσθαι ὑμᾶς ἀπὸ τῆς πορνείας,

(2) εἰδέναι ἕκαστον ὑμῶν

(a) τὸ ἑαυτοῦ σκεῦος κτᾶσθαι

• ἐν ἁγιασμῷ καὶ τιμῇ,

• μὴ ἐν πάθει ἐπιθυμίας . . .

(b) τὸ μὴ ὑπερβαίνειν καὶ πλεονεκτεῖν ἐν τῷ πράγματι τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ. . . .

οὐ γὰρ ἐκάλεσεν ἡμᾶς ὁ θεὸς

ἐπὶ ἀκαθαρσίᾳ

ἀλλ’ ἐν ἁγιασμῷ. . . .

³⁰F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1970), 392, writes: “Fornication and adultery are not synonymous in the New Testament: adultery implies unfaithfulness by either party to the marriage vow, while the word translated ‘fornication’ covers a wide range of sexual irregularities, including unions within bounds prohibited by law.”

³¹If, e.g., the wife was involved in incest or prostitution while married, she had sexual relations with another man, and this is also adultery.

³²The term is found fifty-four times in the Old Testament. It is used metaphorically for an undefended area in Gen 42:9, 12. Deut 23:15 and 24:1 talk about an indecent thing. Shame seems to be the meaning in Isa 20:4, but in 1Sam 20:30 shame and nakedness are found next to each other. The term is used for Egypt, Babylon, and Jerusalem. About fifty times the word is translated with the term nakedness. It is found thirty-two times in Lev and eight times in Ezekiel. The word occurs twenty-four times in Lev 18 and eight times in Lev 20 which also describes unlawful sexual practices. In Ezekiel it is found four times in chap. 16 which refers to Jerusalem as God’s bride. But because

Jerusalem has uncovered her nakedness in her *porneia* (Eze 16:36), which in her case is also adultery, God will expose her nakedness (Eze 16:37). In Ezekiel Oholah and Oholibah, representing Israel and Judah, are depicted. Again *porneia* and nakedness are connected (Eze 23:10, 18, 29). Verse 18 even reads: “She uncovered her *porneia*, and she uncovered her nakedness . . .” Hos 2:9 mentions nakedness. The context talks about fornication—Hos 2:2, 4, 5. To uncover one’s nakedness may point to sexual intercourse—Lev 20:21.

³³It may not include adultery because the penalty for adultery was death by stoning—Lev 20:10; John 8:5—not a letter of divorce. On the other hand not every husband would expose his wife to the extreme punishment but would rather get a divorce. See Joseph and Mary in Matt 1:19.

³⁴Basically, there are two options. (1) Jesus is in opposition to Moses. He allows for divorce only in the case of fornication. Fornication and “the shameful things” of Deut 24:1 are not describing the same severe misconduct. (2) Jesus agrees with Moses. “The shameful things” are the same acts that Jesus describes with the word *porneia*. Jesus rejects the rabbinic misinterpretation and distortions of Moses.

³⁵Cf. *Mishna*, Gittin 9. 10.

³⁶Samuele Bacchiocchi, *The Marriage Covenant: A Biblical Study on Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage* (Berrien Springs, MI: Biblical Perspectives, 1991), 179-189, and others have argued to limit fornication in the Matthean passages to incest only. Andrew Cornes, *Divorce and Remarriage: Biblical Principles and Pastoral Practice* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993), 202, and others are opposed to that suggestion.

- (1) It is argued that if Jesus permits divorce for sexual sins other than incest, he would not be different from the school of Shammai, which in contrast to the school of Hillel did not allow divorce to happen for trivial matters such as burning a dish of food, but restricted it to sexual misbehavior, and he would not do justice to his own claim that the righteousness of his disciples must surpass that of the scribes and Pharisees. This argument is unwarranted. Even the position of the conservative School of Shammai was wider and more open than that of Jesus. See, Herman L. Strack and Paul Billerbeck, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus erläutert aus Talmud und Midrasch*, Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch, Band 1 (München: C. H. Beck’sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1986), 304, 315-320.
- (2) Although not all ‘antitheses’ of the Sermon on the Mount are antitheses in the strictest sense of the word, obviously Jesus exceeds by far Deut 24:1 and its interpretation in his time. Therefore, Jesus was considered so radical. Even the disciples decided to side with the Pharisees’ party in Matt 19:10.
- (3) Apparently, the exception clause does not require a divorce to happen but permits it. If *porneia* would be limited to incest, it would be difficult to understand why Jesus in this case did not insist on a divorce, especially since in this connection the Old Testament talked about being cut off from the people (Lev 18:29). Furthermore, the question must be asked whether or not an incestuous relationship can be considered a marriage at all and therefore can be divorced.
- (4) The argument that there was greater danger among Jews than among Gentiles to get involved in incest and that therefore Matthew would contain the exception clause, does not seem to be convincing. Obviously, Jews in the time of Jesus tried to obey God’s laws. Incest in 1Cor 5 may not have been related to Jewish Christians. According to Acts 15 the newly converted gentiles had to be instructed to abstain from fornication as described in Lev 18, and this certainly included in incest.