

04035 עֲבַד found in TWOT #1553

1553.0 עֲבַד (`ābad) **work, serve.**

(1553a) עֶבֶד (`ebed) **slave, servant.**

(1553b) עָבַד (`ābād) **work** (Eccl 12:1).

(1553c) עֲבוֹדָה (`ābôdâ) **labor, service.**

(1553d) עֲבֻדָּה (`ābūddâ) **service**
(household servants) (Gen 26:14; Job 1:3).

(1553e) עֲבָדוּת (`abdût) **servitude,**
bondage (Ezr 9:8, 9; Neh 9:17).

(1553f) מַעֲבָד (ma`bād) **work** (Job 34:25).

`ābad appears 290 times in the OT. The etymology of this word seems to share the ideas of several Semitic roots, e.g. the old Aramaic root which means "to do or make," an Arabic root meaning "to worship, obey" (God) and its intensive stem meaning "to enslave, reduce to servitude."

This service may be directed toward things, people, or God.

When used in reference to things it is usually followed by an accusative of the thing upon which the labor is expended, e.g. "to till" a field (Gen 2:5 and often elsewhere); "to dress" vineyards; workers or artisans in flax (Isa 19:9) or in city construction (Ezek 48:18). Occasionally it is without the accusative as in Deut 15:19, "to till" [the ground]. The second category is followed by an accusative of person, e.g. Jacob's serving Laban (Gen 29:15; Gen 30:26, 29). Sometimes this usage includes the preposition *b^e* with a person, thus one "works by means of another" or uses another as a slave (Exo 1:14; Jer 22:13; or in the Pual stem with captives, Isa 14:3). Servitude also includes "to serve as subjects" to a king or ruler (Jud 9:28; 1Sam 11:1). In the Hiphil

stem, it means "to compel one to labor" as a slave (Exo 1:13). When the service is offered to God, however, it is not bondage, but rather a joyous and liberating experience (Exo 3:12; Exo 4:23; Exo 7:16; Exo 10:26; Psa 22:31; Job 21:15; Jer 2:20; Mal 3:14). All too frequently, the text records that this service was given to other gods who were not gods at all (Deut 7:16; 2Kings 10:18-19, 21-23, etc.).

The same concept is used of serving Yahweh with the Levitical service (Num 3:7-8; Num 4:23, 30, 47; Num 8:11, 19ff., *latreuō* for etc.). Interestingly enough, the LXX reserved the Greek word the official service of the priests only. The NT however, steadfastly resisted using this group of words for the NT ministry or its functions except in Rom 15:16, where it refers to Paul's labors for Jesus Christ. Instead, it reserved it for other religious contexts, especially those dealing with the OT ritual (Heb 9:21; Heb 10:11; Lk 1:23).

`ebed. Slave, servant. The form appears 799 times in the OT.

While the most basic idea of *`ebed* is that of a slave, in Israel slavery was not so irksome, since this status involved rights and often positions of trust. A fellow Israelite could not be held indefinitely against his will, but his period of bondage was limited to six years (Exo 21:2). Even the much protested description of a slave as his master's money (Exo 21:20-21) was not an "unsentimental thought," but served to control physical abuse by the master. Whenever evil intent could be proved (Exo 21:14), or the slave died (Exo 21:20), the master was liable to punishment. If the master's intent was debatable, an injured slave at least won his freedom (Exo 21:26-27), and the master lost his loaned money (Exo 21:21). Note also the servant's position of honor in Gen 24:ff; Gen 41:12 (cf. Gen 15:2).

A king's subjects are his servants (Gen 21:25; Exo 7:28), as are all his vassal kings (2Sam 10:19) and tributary nations (1Chr 18:2, 6, 13). Those in the service of the king

are also his servants (Gen 40:20), including officers (1Sam 19:1), officials (2Kings 22:12), and ambassadors (Num 22:18).

Often the term "servant" was used as a polite and humble reference to oneself (Gen 33:5). This could reach extreme proportions as in the expression "your servant, the dog" and the like (2Kings 8:13; 2Sam 9:8). Cf. also the Tell el Amarna tablets and Lachish letters nos. 2, 5, 6. The expression "your servant" was frequently used when addressing God in prayer (Exo 4:10; Psa 19:12, 14; Psa 109:28).

The most significant use of the term "servant" is as a messianic designation, the most prominent personal, technical term to represent the OT teaching on the Messiah. The central teaching passages on this theme are found in the last twenty-seven chapters of Isaiah. There the term occurs twenty times in the singular (chaps. 39-53) and eleven times in the plural (chaps. 54-66).

In twelve of the twenty examples of the singular and in all eleven of the plural, the servant is the nation Israel. Passages in which the singular occurs include Isa 41:8-10; Isa 42:18-19; Isa 43:9-10; Isa 44:1-3, 21; Isa 45:4; Isa 48:20; and perhaps Isa 49:3. The plural occurs in Isa 54:17; Isa 56:6; Isa 63:17; Isa 65:8-9, 13-15; Isa 66:14. As Willis Beecher reminds us, this is not just Israel the servant as an ethnical group. It is that, plus something more. It is also Israel as the people of the promise or covenant made with Abraham and David. There is both national Israel and spiritual Israel, regardless of whether it is native or adopted, which shares the promise.

There are also passages in which the servant is differentiated from actual Israel and has a mission to Israel (Isa 49:1-9; Isa 42:1-7; Isa 50:4-10; Isa 52:13-53:12). This servant must be identified with the Israel-servant, but he must also be distinguished from them, having a mission to them (as explicitly stated in Isa 49:5-6; cf. Isa 49:3). Obviously this is the reverse of eponymous heroes who bequeath their names to their countries and nations so

that the same term refers to both. Here, the focal member of the group arrives last rather than first. There is a corporate solidarity between three groups which in Franz Delitzsch's illustration are arranged like a pyramid with the base representing all national Israel (Isa 42:19), the middle representing spiritual Israel, i.e. native believers and adopted believers (Isa 41:8-10), and the apex representing the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

An alternative view finds two servants in these passages--the blind failing servant Israel of Isa 42:19; Isa 49:3, etc. and the healing and restoring Messiah servant of Isa 42:1 and Isa 49:5; Isa 50:10; Isa 52:13 and Isa 53:11.

Isaiah is not the only prophet who applies this term to the covenant people; see also Jer 30:10; Jer 46:27-28; Ezek 28:25; Ezek 37:25. It is applied to David, the Messiah of promise, in Jer 33:21-22, 26; Ezek 34:23-24; Ezek 37:24-25, and to David's descendant, Zerubbabel, in Hag 2:23. Of special interest is its connection with the messianic title "Branch" (Zech 3:8).

Other religious usages include all "worshippers" of God (a phrase commonly used by all Semitic peoples in referring to their false gods, e.g. "the servant of Baal," Marduk, etc.), any servants in the temple or its service, and those who served their Lord in unique roles as his servants such as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Joshua, Caleb, David, Hezekiah, Eliakim, and Zerubbabel. Also the title of God's prophets, "my servants," or "his servants" or "your servants," occurs twenty-four times.

ʿābôdâ. Labor, service. It appears 145 times in the OT.

Man's work and labor is not the result of sin and the fall. Already in God's great creation man was placed in the garden "to work it" (ʿābad, Gen 2:15). The curse (Gen 3:16-17) was only the pain and hardship which were to accompany labor, not the labor itself (cf. ʿeṣeb "sorrow"). This point is made when

Lamech says at the birth of Noah that he "shall comfort us concerning our work and toil of our hands, because of the ground which the Lord has cursed" (Gen 5:29).

The fruits of labor are reaped in the occupations of Cain and Abel and the development of the arts in Cain's family (Gen 4:21-22). Nowhere is the subject of leisure time discussed, for man works as long as there is daylight (Psa 104:23; cf. Jn 11:9). But a definite cycle of rest is provided also as a duty and a blessing on the seventh day (Exo 20:9-10). By working six days Israel imitated God who worked six days in creating the cosmos. In this way she doubtless bore witness to her pagan neighbors, who worshiped the elements of the creation personified as deities, that she worshiped the transcendent creator. Man is to rest in imitation of God, who rests from his work after the creation (Exo 20:11; Deut 5:14-15). There were also to be special feast days on which there was to be "no laborious work" (Lev 23:7-8, 21, 25, 35, 36; Num 28:25-26; Num 29:1, 12, 35).

The type of work included under this term ranges from agricultural work in the fields (Exo 1:14) to constructing the tabernacle (Exo 35:24), repairing the temple (2Chr 34:13), and working in fine linen (1Chr 4:21). Even God's work of judgment is so termed (Isa 28:21).

When the service is offered to God, it will consist of obedience. The performance of this service is found in the OT ritual and worship, e.g. the people's bringing sacrifices (Josh 22:27) and the service of the Levites and priests (Num 4:19; 2Chr 8:14).

Finally there is the "bondage" of captives or subjects. Overwhelmingly this refers to the bondage of Israel in Egypt (Exo 1:14; Neh 5:18; 2Chr 10:4; Isa 14:3). Sometimes it refers also to military service (Ezek 29:18).

Note that the word does not appear in any of the ethical teaching about work in the wisdom literature. Perhaps the word had become so strongly associated with servitude

and bondage on the one side and worship on the other that the mere secular concept of work was shifted to other terms, like m^elākâ or pā`al or ma`āšeh, although the original agricultural reference could have provided such a stimulus. Cf. our word "culture" and "to cultivate."

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