

The Doctrine of Dogs

Topics

Charts and Maps

Preface: The

1. The Hebrew word for *dogs* is keleb (כֶּלֶב) [pronounced *KEH-le^b*]. It will become clear by the passages quoted that these are the semi-wild dogs who lived outside the cities and were scavengers, eating whatever garbage or carcasses that they could find. This diet made them disease-carriers. By their very nature, these animals were unclean, and contact with such animals was considered unclean. Strong's #3611 BDB #476.
2. Apparently, some dogs were domesticated in the ancient world and used for shepherding. We find evidence of this in Job 30:1. As far as I am aware, this is the only such reference, and, given the amount of shepherding which takes place in the Bible, this limited reference indicates that this was not necessarily a widespread practice.
3. Dogs in Egypt were domesticated and used for hunting.¹ As we will see, the Jewish attitude toward them was wholly different.
4. We also apparently have a mention of watchdogs in Isa. 56:10.
5. The first mention of dogs in Scripture is Ex. 11:7. God has proclaimed the death of the firstborn of all Egypt, yet says that not even a dog will bark (or *sharpen his tongue*) against any of the sons of Israel. This use indicates that there is not a friendly relationship between man and canine.
6. The Jewish people were not to be scavengers. They were not to eat meat which was torn apart in the field (say, for instance, if they came upon a partially-eaten carcass). The meat was to be thrown to the dogs in the field. This tells us that dogs did not live with the Jews as domesticated animals, but were wild animals who lived nearby.
7. We have a rather obscure reference to dogs made in Deut. 23:18; in v. 17, the sons and daughters of Israel are told never to become cult prostitutes and in v. 18a, the wages of a prostitute are not to be brought into the Tent of God (as a votive offering). In v. 18b, the same is said of the *wages of a dog*. Several commentators suggest that this refers to a male prostitute—a sodomite—given the way they would have intercourse. This makes the most sense for this passage. What we can come away with is (1) either the word for dog is also applied to male cult prostitutes or the cost of a dog is not to be brought into the Tent of God for a votive offering, apparently due to some unspecified uncleanness. Either interpretation places the dog in low esteem.
8. Gideon's army was pared down by the observation of how men took water. Those who lapped water like a dog (just stuck their face into the water) and those who knelt to drink were eliminated from Gideon's strike force.
9. Goliath accused David of coming at him with sticks as if he (Goliath) were a dog (I Sam. 17:43). This simply tells us that dogs were shooed then as they are now.
10. One of the few times that David reasons with Saul, he asks him why is he pursuing David with a cadre of men. "Have you raised up the armies of Israel to pursue a dead dog? A flea?" he asks him. I Sam. 24:14
11. When Abner thought that he was being insulted by Ish-bosheth, he asked, "Am I a dog's head that belongs to Judah?" II Sam. 3:8

¹ *The New Bible Dictionary*; editor J. D. Douglas; ©Inter-Varsity Fellowship, 1962; ©by W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; p.322.

12. When David chooses to honor Saul's remaining relative Mephibosheth, Mephibosheth prostrates himself before David and compares himself to a dead dog in II Sam. 9:8.
13. When David is cursed by Shimei, Abishai asks to go over and cut off Shimei's head. "Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king?" II Sam. 16:9b
14. Ahijah prophesies against Jeroboam, saying that anyone who belongs to Jeroboam who dies in the city will be eaten by dogs (which, presumably, is a great insult). I Kings 14:11
15. A similar prophecy was issued against anyone who was a part of Baasha's rulership. I Kings 16:4
16. Ahab killed Naboth for his vineyard. Therefore, God through Elijah told him that where the dogs licked up Naboth's blood, they will lick up Ahab's as well. He further prophesied that the dogs would eat Jezebel and that those who belong to Ahab who live in the city will be eaten by dogs. I Kings 21:19–24. The prophecy against Ahab was fulfilled in I Kings 22:37–38. The prophecy against Jezebel was repeated in II Kings 9:10 and fulfilled in vv. 36–37, where she was thrown off the city wall.
17. Hazael compares himself to a dog, which was an indication of some grace orientation. II Kings 8:13
18. In a psalm of David which looks forward to the cross, he says, "Dogs surround me." This would be a reference to Roman unbelievers (the soldiers) and to the Jewish religious crowd. Psalm 22:16. He asks for deliverance from the power of the dog in v. 20.
19. We have our own passage, where the soldiers of Saul return like dogs in the night (Psalm 59:6, 14).
20. God would destroy his enemies and the dogs of Israel would eat them (Psalm 68:23).
21. A fool who repeats his folly is compared to a dog who returns to his vomit. Psalm 26:11
22. A person who gets involved in the strife of others is compared to someone who grabs the ears of dog (Psalm 26:17).
23. The human viewpoint of Eccles. 9:4 is that it is better to be a live dog as opposed to being a dead lion. The lion is seen as majestic and powerful, and the dog is placed at the other end of the spectrum.
24. Israel is about to face another invasion, and her prophets (teachers) are not truly standing watch over Israel; in fact, they are blind to the signals of danger. In fact, they are compared to dumb dogs—i.e., dogs that do not bark. The implication would be that some dogs were domesticated and kept in order to warn of intruders. However, these prophets were like dogs who did not speak; they are insulted by being compared to dogs, and to a class of dogs who were made useful, but were actually useless. Such dogs, even though they did not earn their keep, were insatiable in their appetites. Isa. 56:10–11.
25. In Isa. 66:3, we have an interesting set of comparisons: **He who kills an ox is as if he struck a man; he who sacrifices a lamb is as if he broke a dog's neck; he who offers a present is as if it were swine's blood; he making mention of incense is as if he blessed an idol. Yea, they have chosen their way, and their soul delights in their abominations.** The reference is to the paganism and insincerity of Israel's religion.
26. Jeremiah prophesies against the judgment to come against Israel, and he warns of 4 kinds of doom: **the sword to kill, and the dogs to drag off, and the birds of the heaven and the beast of the earth to devour and destroy** (Jer. 66:3b).
27. In the New Testament, the word for *dogs* is kunarion (κυνάριον) [pronounced *koo-NAHR-ee-on*], which means *dog, pet dog, puppy*. Strong's #2952. The other word for *dog* is kuôn (κύων) [pronounced *KOO-ohn*]. This word is also used metaphorically to refer to *an impudent man, a man of an impure mind; a sodomite*. Strong's #2965.
28. We have an interesting exchange between Jesus and a Gentile woman in Matt. 15:21–28 and Mark 7:25–30. A Gentile came to Jesus and asked him to cast the demon who occupied her daughter. *Dogs* in these passages refer to Gentiles, and Jesus tells this woman, in so many words, that he has come to the Jews, and her approach to him is like taking the food away from his children. She says that even dogs (referring to herself) are given the scraps from the table. Jesus heals her daughter.²
29. In the sermon on the mount, Jesus tells his followers, **"Do not cast pearls before swine; do not give what is holy to dogs."** The idea is that you do not give something which is valuable (God's Word) to those who have absolutely no interest and no capacity to appreciate it. Matt. 7:6
30. In the story about the poor man, Lazarus, and the rich man, we have very literal dogs who come and lick the sores of Lazarus (Luke 16:20).
31. Philip. 3:2: **Look out for the dogs, look out for the evil workers, look out for the concision party.** *The term dog also is used to denote a person that is shameless, impudent, malignant, snarling, dissatisfied, and*

² This is Strong's #2952; all other references are to #2965.

*contentious, and is evidently so employed here.*³ These are the Judaizers, who would come into a church and infect it with legalism, attempted to get believers to return to the Law of Moses.

32. Peter speaks of those who are saved and then return to their evil habits; the result (in this life), if they allow themselves to be overcome by their sins, is worse for them than it was in the beginning. A simple example would be a drug addict who believes in Jesus, cleans up, and then returns to drug abuse. He is in a worse state than he came out of. Then Peter quotes the proverb, **A dog returns to his own vomit** (II Peter 2:22 Psalm 26:11).
33. At the end of the prophecies of Revelation (specifically Rev. 22:15), those outside the holy city are **dogs, drug addicts, fornicators, murderers, idolaters, and those who love and practice lying**. Some interpret this as referring to sodomites; others simply to unbelievers.
34. To sum up, most references in the Bible to a dog are contemptuous. A dead dog is seen as the height of insignificance. The worse final fate a person could have, is for his body to be eaten by dogs.
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³ Albert Barnes, *Barnes' Notes*; e-Sword, Philip. 3:2.