

## CHAPTER 4

### THE OLD TESTAMENT AND HOMOSEXUALITY

#### 4.1 The historical background

When looking at the literature assessing the Biblical attitude toward homosexuality we find differing estimates of its prevalence in ancient times. If it is difficult to determine the nature and extent of homosexuality at the present time, it is even more so in ancient times. Most of the surviving literature comes from professional literary hands and does not address homosexuality per se. Although incidental mention is not without historical value (some think it presents a less-biased picture), it limits the amount of material to work with and presents difficulties for interpretation. Therefore a survey of the historical background is helpful prior to interpreting the relevant Old Testament texts.

Leviticus 18:1-3, 24-30; 20:23-25 give the impression that the practices forbidden in the book of Leviticus also were known among the Egyptians and Canaanites, perhaps being customary or prevalent among these peoples. Some scholars agree with this estimate, stating that, "male homosexuality was rampant in Biblical times and has so remained in the Middle East down to the present day."<sup>1</sup> "It is possible the Mores of Sodom and Gibeah were not greatly different from those of other Canaanite and Israelite towns and villages."<sup>2</sup> Harrison agrees with this estimate also, writing, "Homosexuality was known and practised in the

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<sup>1</sup> R. Patai, *Sex and family in the Bible and the Middle East* (New York: Doubleday & CO., 1959), P.169.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

Near East as a form of carnal indulgence from very early times".<sup>3</sup> Moreover, he suggests that homosexual activity within the cultus predated the Israelite arrival in Caanan. "Sacro-homosexual practices and female prostitution within the context of the cultus was probably well established throughout the ancient Near East long before the Israelites occupied Caanan."<sup>4</sup> Bailey, on the other hand, finds it impossible to confirm such a conclusion. From the available evidence. He states,

"Research fails to establish any satisfactory positive support for the allegation that homosexual practices were customary among the nations surrounding the Hebrews; rather, the Meager evidence suggests that such practices were variously regarded as criminal, sinful or personally degrading."<sup>5</sup>

From this perspective, he treats statements in Leviticus that attribute such practices to the nations around Israel as exaggeration, "simply a piece of rhetorical denigration - or at most, a polemical exaggeration of heathen vice - designed to intensify Israel's sense of national 'holiness' or separation as a peculiar people dedicated to Yahweh."<sup>6</sup> Accordingly, "they are disregarded as accurate indications of contemporary Pagan Morals, they simply express the Israelite condemnation of the ethos of heathenism which Israel must renounce just as it renounces religious

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<sup>3</sup> R.K. Harrison, *Leviticus: An Introduction and Commentary*: (Downers Grove, IL; Inter-varsity Press, 1980), P.191.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> D.S. Bailey. *Homosexuality and the Western Christian tradition*. (Hamden, CT: Shoe String Press 1975), P.59.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

and cultural syncretism with surrounding nations practising idolatry".<sup>7</sup> We will attempt to gauge the accuracy of the Biblical statements as a historically valid observation describing the surrounding nations. Clearly, if the statements in Leviticus are mere rhetorical flourish, much of the content of the book becomes bombast. The great seriousness and sternness of the book verges on farce if it is in fact set against a backdrop of non-existent internal or external dangers for Israel.

#### 4.1.1 Egypt

The ideal family relationship in Egypt was for a young man to find himself a good wife and raise a fine family of children. "Since inheritance was through the female line, daughters were important. The young husband stood in close relationship with his maternal grandfather. He was the natural protector of the youth after marriage, more so than even his own father."<sup>8</sup>

Unconventional sexual practices are not well documented in ancient Egypt. "Herodotus, a Greek traveller and author who visited Egypt some time after 460 B.C, mentions bestiality and necrophilia."<sup>9</sup> The Talmud states that "Potiphar bought Joseph for himself, suggesting a homosexual intention."<sup>10</sup> From earlier Egyptian sources, Pritchard cites two statements, the first from the eighteenth dynasty (ca. 1550 B.C), which he categorises as Egyptian Social Law. Here a man asserts, "I have not had sexual relations with a boy." Another statement from the 125<sup>th</sup> chapter

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid; P.60.

<sup>8</sup> M.S. Shaw, "Family Life in Ancient Egypt," *Journal of the Manchester Egyptian and Oriental Society* 28 (1933): 37 – 40.

<sup>9</sup> Herodotus 2.46.89.

<sup>10</sup> Sot. 13b, see also I. Jakobovits, "Homosexuality," In *Encjud* 8 (1972): 961.

of The Book of the Dead reads, "O His face behind him, who comes forth from the Tep-het-djat, I have not been perverted; I have not had sexual relations with a boy."<sup>11</sup>

The outstanding account of homosexuality in Egyptian literature is a story about the attempt of the god Seth to violate his younger brother. The myth, which deals with conflict between the gods Horus and Seth, presents a number of settings in which the struggle takes place. One of these is the homosexual rape of Horus. The homosexual interest of Seth is seen clearly in a papyrus fragment found in Kahun, where Seth shows a decided interest in the body of Horus, "the majesty of Seth said to the majesty of Horus: "How beautiful are thy buttocks."<sup>12</sup>

Papyrus Chester Beatty I, dated about 1160 B.C, records the homosexual act of Seth,

Thereupon Seth spake unto Horus: come let us pass a happy day in my house. Thereupon Horus said to him: I will do so, verily I will do so. And when it was eventide the bed was spread for them, and the twain lay down. And in the night Seth caused his member to become stiff, and made it go between the loins of Horus. Thereupon Horus put his hands between his loins, and he caught the seed of Seth."<sup>13</sup>

The conflict between Horus and Seth has been seen as having either a cosmological significance explaining the relationship of sun and moon or

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<sup>11</sup> J.B. Pritchard, ed; ANET (1950). PP. 34 – 35.

<sup>12</sup> G.W. Griffith, ed., ed., The Petrie Papyri: Hieratic Papyri from Kahun and Gurob (Principally from the Middle Kingdom), 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: B. Quaritchs, 1898), P.3, VI, 12, 1 – 29.

<sup>13</sup> A.H. Gardiner, tr., ed., The Library of A. Chester Beatty: Description o a Hieratic Papyrus with a mythological Story, Love-songs, and other Miscellaneous Texts-chester Beatty Papyri, No. 1 (London: Oxford University Press, 1931), see Pect, 11, 2-4 and P. 21.

a political significance relating to some conquest of the past. Whatever the intent of the myth, what is the significance of the homosexuality in the two legends from Kahum and P. Chester Beatty? Griffiths finds more than the ignominy dealt by the conqueror to the conquered:

At first sight Seth's homosexual treatment of Horus seems to fall in better with the idea of the ignominy inflicted on an enemy. But Seth is not the ultimate conqueror, although he is represented as boasting of his deeds of war ... it is certainly looked upon as a mark of ignominy for the sufferer; but it is abominated not as an expression of triumph by the enemy so much as for the shame attached to the act itself, just as the eating of excrement is abominated.<sup>14</sup>

Westendorf points out that "the shame in homosexual intercourse belongs entirely to the underdog, whereas the act itself seems unimportant."<sup>15</sup> Seth boasts of having performed the job of a man on Horus who is insulted and spit upon by the Ennead (P. Chester Beatty 1, 12, 3-4).

In Egyptian thinking the change of roles rendered the passive partner powerless. Even for the gods this was true. Westendorf observes, "Atum, has no power over NN; rather NN copulates in his anus." Coffin Texts VI, 258 f-g).<sup>16</sup> This seems to imply that one rendered another completely powerless by violating him sexually and lends support to the view that the Egyptians had a custom of violating defeated enemies in this way.

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<sup>14</sup> J.G. Griffiths, *The Conflict of Horus and Seth from Egyptian and Classical Sources* (New York: Liverpool University Press, 1960), P.43.

<sup>15</sup> W. Westendorf, "Homosexuality," *Lexikon der Agpytologie* 2, ed. (Wiesbaden: O. Harrassowitz, 1977): Col 1272.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

On this point Gardiner finds no evidence of such a practice, “Here, at all events, we have unmistakable evidence of the belief that such a practice existed, though of its actual performance there is no proof either in ancient Egypt, or as Prof. Seligman informs me, anywhere else in Africa.”<sup>17</sup> Perhaps the significance of the homosexual act is to be found in the nature of Seth himself." Seth is scarcely a god of fertility, for in this myth his boundless energy is not productive. Isis had already warned Horus how to deal with Seth so that his seed would be wasted. In this myth his seed is feared not for its generative power, but as poison.<sup>18</sup> Griffiths translates the Kahum account thus:

The majesty of Seth said to the majesty of Horus, how beautiful are thy buttocks! How flourishing (?)...The majesty of said, wait that I may tell it ... to their palace. Horus said to his mother Isis ... Seth desires (?) to have intercourse with me. And she said to him, take care, do not approach him for that; when he mentions it to thee a second time, say thou to him, it is altogether too difficult for me because of (my) nature (?), since thou art too heavy for me; my strength will not be equal to thine, thou shalt say to him. Then when he shall have given thee strength, do thou place thy fingers between thy buttocks, Lo it will give ... Lo, he will enjoy it exceedingly (?)... this seed which has come forth from his generative organ without letting the sun see it ... come thou.<sup>19</sup>

Seth is fooled. He does not introduce his semen (poison) into Horus. Horus catches it and throws it into the water. Isis succeeds in impregnating Seth with

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<sup>17</sup> Gardiner, P.22, n.2

<sup>18</sup> See Westendorf. The same Egyptian word serves for “semen” and poison.” Spells to Protect against poisoning by Semen were used in Egypt.

<sup>19</sup> Griffiths. P.42 also H. Goedicke, “seth as fool, “Journal of Egyptian archaeology 47 (1961): 145, Seth is made of look a fool not only by acts like this but by the use of puns which he takes literally.

the seed of Horus by placing it on a lettuce leaf which Seth eats. In the context of the legend the dominance theme is unmistakable cloaked in sexual imagery.

H. Te Velde scrutinises Seth and sees him as the symbol of abnormal irregular sexuality, "Seth's homosexuality and the fact that he was credited with practices of abortion, demonstrate that Seth is a god of sexuality which is not canalised into fertility."<sup>20</sup> The sexuality of Seth is always irregular; he does not care whether women are married or not. The animal of Seth, the ass, was proverbial for its lasciviousness.

Seth is an enemy of boundaries; he does not respect the boundaries of sex and wants to have relations which are sometimes homosexual and sometimes heterosexual. He is the author of confusion, refusing to recognise the divinely ordained boundaries. "Seth does not respect existing boundaries. The frontier between the sexes, which was created by Atum, is ignored by Seth."<sup>21</sup>

This is significant in that Seth's immorality and homosexuality contravene the status quo created by the Egyptian god Atum. Seth would thus be considered as one not living, according to "wisdom," the social, moral, ethical and religious regulations instituted by the gods at creation."Seth was regarded by the Egyptians as lord of foreign peoples; of Libyans, Hittites and Semites. He is given two Syrian goddesses, Anat and Astarte, as wives."<sup>22</sup> He rapes Anat.

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<sup>20</sup> H. Te Velde, *Seth: God of Confusion*: (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1977), P.55.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, P.59.

<sup>22</sup> For the background, see R.T. Rundle Clark, *Myth and Symbol in Ancient Egypt*: (New York: Grove Press 1960), P.197ff.

But in the account in P. Chester Beatty VII, she is dressed like a man." The Egyptian word used is not that for human intercourse, even when one of the partners is an animal, but for intercourse between animals.<sup>23</sup> Seth seems to be practising his usual craft, with defloration as the result. Consistency in ancient legends was not an essential element. He is described as leaping upon the goddess as a ram. He deflowers her with a chisel and rapes her with fire. Anat is taken ill after the event.

Here again the dominance-poison motif appears. Stadelmann suggests that "here we have an Egyptian enactment of a Canaanite myth, the rape of Anat by Baal."<sup>24</sup> Syncretism of Canaanite and Egyptian religion was widespread during the Ramesside Period in Egypt. Albright speaks of it as the most cosmopolitan in the ancient world.

"In the capital itself the great Canaanite gods Baal and Horon, with the goddesses Anath and Astarte, were worshipped on a par with the native Egyptian deities Seth and Horus, Nephthys and Isis, with which they were identified. Egyptian adaptations of several Canaanite myths have been discovered."<sup>25</sup>

According to Albright, Canaanite practices shockingly immoral to the Israelites were bound up with the introduction of the myths. This included rampant

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<sup>23</sup> W.R. Dawson, "Observation On Passages in Chester Beatty Papyri VII, VIII and XII," JEA 22 (1936): 107.

<sup>24</sup> R. Stadelmann, *Syrisch-Palastinensische Gottheiten in Egypt*: (Leiden: E.J. Brill Publishers; 1967), PP. 130-133.

<sup>25</sup> W.F. Albright, *The Biblical Period from Abraham to Ezra* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1965), P. 16.



prostitution of both sexes. "The Cinaedus (homosexual) formed a recognised guild in Canaanite temples, and there were other groups which combined dancing and singing with divination in a peculiarly unholy union."<sup>26</sup>

Due to the nature of the Egyptian religion, these rites had a direct influence on the people. Among the Egyptians there were no sacred books as such. "The divine life was dramatised in rites and festivals and it is through them that a man confirms his virtue and attains salvation. The actions of the gods as revealed in the cult dominated religious thought and life."<sup>27</sup> "Religious renewal is the magic effect of the rites performed during festivals."<sup>28</sup> The acts of the gods became important and the days on which they were enacted equally important and were sometimes observed as festivals. "The observation of days was the culmination of the tendency to count particular days of the year as specially lucky or unlucky, depending on what the gods had accomplished on those days."<sup>29</sup>

The Egyptians, says Herodotus, "assign each month and each day to some god; they can tell what fortune and what end and what dispositions of a man shall have according to the day of his birth."<sup>30</sup> Thus, "although various rites enacted in the temple out of sight of the people, the festivals and myths were open to all."<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> C.J. Bleeker, *Studies in the History of Religious*; (Leiden: W.M.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1968), P. 22.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid; P. 44.

<sup>29</sup> G. Steindorff, *The Religion of the Ancient Egyptians*. (New York: G.P. Putnam, s Sons, 1905), PP.111-113.

<sup>30</sup> Herodotus, 2.82.

<sup>31</sup> C.J. Bleeker, "Hathor and Thoth: Two Key figures of the Ancient Egyptian Religion," *Studies in the History of Religions* 26: (Leiden, 1973), PP. 73 – 76.

Therefore, the gods set the moral tone for the people. The worshippers of Seth would imitate his deeds although these acts might be considered an abomination by those devoted to other gods. The fact that negative assertions about homosexuality were contained in the Book of the Dead could mean that it was only before the judgment of the dead that public lewdness was being denied. Public homosexual activity in connection with a festival would not render one liable to judgment. However, if all the denials of wrong doing in the book are to be taken seriously as representing the character of the dead, then they would not have needed the magical charms and incantations of the book to see them through the hall of judgment.

The Book of the Dead mentions boys in both instances, which leads to the surmise that minors may have been protected but were nevertheless a source of temptation to some. Westendorf notes that Goedicke was convinced that homosexual intercourse with adults was not considered immoral in Egypt. He points to the "grave of the two friends" as perhaps a proof that an intimate relationship based on the grounds of mutual attraction could be maintained for eternity in Egyptian thinking without offence to the community.<sup>32</sup>

We conclude therefore that homosexual relationships were known in Egypt. Negative assertions may be simply part of a magical formula in the Book of the

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<sup>32</sup> Helck, Col. 1273.

Dead. The common people enjoyed hearing about if not practising homosexuality. At least the homosexual legends of Seth were written in a style for purely popular consumption, such as might be related by a village storyteller. The passive partner seems to have been the only one scorned. Regarding homosexuality, the syncretism of West Canaanite and Egyptian religions in the delta resulted in a much more morally degrading outlook than Egyptian religion of past eras had produced.

#### **4.1.2 Babylon and Assyria**

Sexual potency in ancient times was regarded as a great generative force, both venerated and worshipped. If the deity worshipped was female and the attendants also female, men would visit the temple to have intercourse with the "deity", that is, the attendants. From their point of view the experience was a religious one and even homosexuality could appear in a "good" light rather than a bad one. It was seen as a natural form of indulgence for the active partner, and if condemned at all it was only in situations analogous to those in which one might condemn gluttony, drunkenness, and other excesses.

Furthermore, marriage was primarily an economic association, frequently impermanent in character and not the exclusive source of sexual gratification. Sometimes a female deity might be served by male as well as female attendants. Usually, perhaps invariably, such males wore female costume and were considered to have adopted the life of women. When men resorted to the temple to perform ritual intercourse with the deity, if the attendant was biologically a

male, the intercourse was technically homosexual. However, simply to speak of these people as prostitutes or homosexual prostitutes does not convey to the modern mind an accurate picture of the motives or practices of the people involved.

Perhaps a more accurate term would be ritual intercourse. Such rites, whether heterosexual or homosexual, contravened the moral codes of Israel though not the moral practices of a large part of Israel, who repeatedly fell prey to the enticing forms of pagan worship. The Old Testament condemns this type of practice by the Israelites (Deuteronomy 23:17; I Kings 14:24; 15:12; 22:46; 23:7).

Sumerian and Middle Assyrian laws have little to say about homosexuality as such. The laws of Hammurabi 142, allow redress to a woman whose husband is a gadabout. It is possible that this implies a male prostitute or perhaps a homosexual.<sup>33</sup> Middle Assyrian laws 19.20, deal with accusations of homosexuality against a man:

1. If a man has secretly defamed (?) his neighbour, saying: "He is a (common) catamite or has spoken to him in a quarrel in the presence of (other) people, saying: "Thou art being used as a catamite" and saying: I myself will charge thee, "
2. If a man has defiled his neighbour (and) charge (and) proof have been brought against him, he shall be defiled (and) made a eunuch.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> J.J. Finkelstein, "Sex offences in Sumerian Laws," JAOA 86 (1966): 366, n.34.

<sup>34</sup> G.R. Driver and J.C. Miles, The Assyrian Laws Edited with translation and Comentary. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1935), P.391.

Miles and Driver ask why sodomy is treated as an offence at all in Assyrian laws. It is treated so only when the victim is the "equal" of the offender. They conclude that "it may be that a slanderous charge of unnatural vice and the commission of the offence were only regarded as criminal when the victim stood in a specially close relationship to the offender, and were not punishable in other cases."<sup>35</sup>

#### 4.1.3 Cult Prostitution

Sexual intercourse in the service of a god or goddess was a common practice, which was not regarded as criminal, but a sign of dedication or devotion. Priestesses who followed the custom apparently were highly respected in some manner since even kings dedicated their daughters to the temple. "Money was paid into the temple treasury for the service despite the fact that it was an act of dedication in glorification of a goddess."<sup>36</sup> On the other hand, temple prostitutes were not recommended as wives even by Babylonian authors:

Do not marry a prostitute (*harimtu*) whose husbands are legion (literally 3600), a temple harlot (*istaritu*) who is dedicated to a god, a courtesan (*Kulmasitu*) whose favours are many.<sup>37</sup>

The Males attached to the cult are sometimes considered to be eunuchs or homosexuals or both. "Some argue that the strong Biblical repudiation of

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid; P.71.

<sup>36</sup> E.M. Yamauchi, *Cultic Prostitution – A Case Study in Cultural Diffusion*: (Neukirchen: Butzon and Bercker, 1973) P. 215.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid; P. 71.

homosexuality refers to homosexual service in a pagan temple."<sup>38</sup> The wages of a temple servant were not to be paid into the house of God for the payment of any vow (Deuteronomy 28:13; Judges 19:22). "An argument is advanced that homosexuality is not involved at all, only male prostitution with female worshippers."<sup>39</sup> Others agree that "homosexuality was involved but hold that the Bible does not condemn the homosexuality as such, only idolatry is condemned."<sup>40</sup>

It is doubtful that the Israelites made the neat and rather modern distinction between sacred and secular. The cult of the covenant people and covenant morality were integrally bound together in Old Testament times. The Israelites were alone among the peoples of the ancient Near East in not separating the spheres of religion and morality. For the faithful Israelite a moral life was in itself a form of religious worship. Furthermore, Hebrews had been exposed to pagan cult and morality from the beginning of their history and had come to grips with the philosophy, theology, lifestyle, and world view involved in idolatry.

The translation of cuneiform inscriptions throughout recent decades has confirmed in substance the statements of Herodotus (1,182) and has made evident that the licentious rites of sympathetic magic described by various Greek historians, Strabo, Lucian, etc., were not confined to a late period in Syria, Asia Minor, or Greece, but that these ideas and practices may be found as early as the beginning of the historical period.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> O.J. Baab, "Homosexuality," IDB 2(1962):639.

<sup>39</sup> Bailey, P.53. Homosexual relations would be Meaningless in a fertility Cult, he argues. But no more than absolute chastity of the Entu in Babylonian religion and cult.

<sup>40</sup> J.Z. Englington, *Greek Love* (London: Neville Spearman Publications 1971), P.51.

<sup>41</sup> B.A. Brooks, "Fertility Cult functionaries in the Old Testament, JBL 60 (194): 232.

The basic idea behind ritual intercourse was the belief that greater productivity of fields and flocks and thus prosperity for the entire community could be brought about by the propagation of human life under certain conditions. This intercourse with the representative of a god was viewed as a way of controlling the universe by sympathetic magic.

Persons dedicated to the gods who were officials of the cult were sought, especially at festivals, by laity who sincerely believed that intercourse with these persons would cure sterility of human beings, of animals and of the land, and that by actual union with the human representatives of the deity one could assist the gods in bringing prosperity to mankind.<sup>42</sup>

We may safely assume that the Israelites would reject as idolatry and practice which claimed to control God automatically. No doubt some of the functionaries involved in these services were men. It is also highly probable that a good number of them eunuch-priests. That a eunuch-priest should have a part in religious fertility cults seems at first sight inconsistent. However, eunuch-priests are well attested in India, Egypt, the Near East, Greece, and Africa. According to the belief of the times, "such persons were more fittingly prepared to represent the deity, to function in phallic worship, or to secure fertility for the fields. They were accustomed to wearing female dress."<sup>43</sup> Albright suggests that they wore female dress because they functioned as women."<sup>44</sup> Again, magical ideas were at

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid; P. 243.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid; PP.247-248, N.2.

<sup>44</sup> W.F. Albright, "Historical and Mythical Elements in the Story of Joseph," JBL 37 (1917): 116.

work which suggested "the apotropaic value of disguising sex."<sup>45</sup> Kramer reproduces a text which suggests a similar idea.

Babylon a ruin, he turned to Erech," the city of hierodules, courtesans, and sacred prostitutes to whom ishtar (the goddess of love) was husband and master", the city of eunuchs and sodomites, the merrymakers of Eanna (Ishtar's temple), whose maleness Ishtar had turned to femaleness, in order to terrify man."<sup>46</sup>

In Mesopotamia as in Egypt it is the passive homosexual who is despised, especially one who is habitually passive. The Mesopotamians, however, seem to have made a virtue of necessity. The strange abnormality of the homosexual and the abhorrence felt toward the habitually passive homosexual were attributed to the power of the goddess Ishtar. It was she who had wrought this change in order to instil fear in man. Oddly enough the safest place for these individuals was under her protection.

This strange relationship is spelled out in detail by Bottéro and Petschow. They find ample evidence of homosexuality in Mesopotamia in figure drawings and treatises on divination by dreams, especially those dedicated to erotic dreams. They assume that homosexuality is normal practice without complications or condemnation.

Active homosexuality, if it is performed upon an individual of the same social level, does not constitute a crime except insofar as it involves force or violence; otherwise it seems perfectly permissible and outside of all legal restraint, and as we have

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<sup>45</sup> Sir J.G Frazer, *Adonis Attis Osiris: Studies in the History of Oriental Religion* 2 (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1935): 257-264.

<sup>46</sup> S.N. Kramer, "Mythology of summer and Akkad," *Mythologies of the Ancient World*, (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1961), PP. 130 – 131.



seen above,(par. 5) on the subject of C.T. 39,44, it is no more blameable or dishonouring than heterosexual love. On the other hand, passive homosexuality, whoever the "active" partners are, is degrading from the single fact that it is habitual, that it constitutes, after some fashion, a way of life. It will be noted in passing that the young age of the passive partners is mentioned nowhere in these texts.<sup>47</sup>

Those who, despite their masculine sex, behaved voluntarily and habitually as passive lovers opposite partners of the same sex and took on feminine habits and a sort of feminine nature lost status in society. They ceased to be "the equal" of others and joined, whether willing or not, a group of men who may be designated professionals of passive homosexuality, the most famous of whom were the *assinnu*. For the majority of these individuals, their lives consisted of a career or an art which was the object of a contract of apprenticeship. They may have played a role in the liturgy by disguising and masking themselves and bearing the distaff. "They played music and sang and danced and perhaps interpreted plays or pantomimes. Most often they were connected with ceremonies in honour of Ishtar."<sup>48</sup> Due to the bisexual nature of the goddess, their role was necessarily ambiguous; but certain texts allow their erotic nature to appear, and they are found more than once associated with other courtesans of high quality whose vocation as prostitutes has never been doubted. "Some texts like the *Summa alu 15-32* explicitly denote that the *assinnu* subjected himself sexually to men."<sup>49</sup> Some of these prostitutes were eunuchs or castrati, but what

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<sup>47</sup> J. Bottero, H. Petschow, "Homosexuality," RLA 4 (1975 - 1975): 1 - 4.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid; P.5.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid; P. 6.

characterised them more than real emasculation was their behaviour which is designated as *sinnisanu* ("effeminate") a synonym of *ur, sal,* and *assinnu*. "The Sumerogram *ul.sal/mi* is significant since it adds to the name "dog" (*ur*) which is used in Biblical texts (Deuteronomy 23:19), the word "woman" (*sal/mi*), and might be translated literally "female dog".<sup>50</sup>

As individuals, however, they were rejected and were the object of scorn because they had deviated from their fundamental destiny and norm. Ishtar transformed them from "men into women". Because of this fact, their destiny is so aberrant and exceptional that in order to gladden the heart of the goddess whom they serve, "they engage in sacrilege." In other words, in practices normally forbidden to others ... because they are not like others. "This is the cause of the scorn which surround them."<sup>51</sup> Contrary to some evaluations, Bottéro and Petschow emphasise the freedom allowed to practice homosexuality:

In itself, homosexuality was not at all condemned as profligacy, as immorality, as social disorder, or as transgressing any human or divine law: anyone could practise it freely, just as he could freely visit the (female) prostitutes, provided in both cases that it was without violence or force, and therefore preferably with "specialists" as passive partners. But the latter like the (female) prostitutes, were social outcasts and scorned (with a scorn that must of necessity have overflowed upon the "non professionals", as seen above (par. 8f), precisely because of the fact that they were beings to some extent mutilated, fallen from the primary destiny, and a-normal, in the etymological sense of this word.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid; P. 7.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid; PP. 8 – 9.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid; P. 9.

Individuals of the same sex could readily experience and express the same feelings for each other as individuals of the opposite sex without the opprobrium of society. The "Almanac of Incantations" consists of a series of prayers for assistance in love. First the love of a man for a woman, second the love of a woman for a man and third the love of a man for a man. The three prayers are on the same level, with the same verb "ramu" which marks a sincere and sentimental attachment to others. "Homosexuals in Mesopotamia felt free to turn to their gods for help with their homosexual love problems as heterosexuals did with theirs."<sup>53</sup>

While in Babylonia and Assyria homosexuality was not illegal except as accompanied by force or was perpetrated upon an equal with coercion, it may have been forbidden with relatives or close kin. Those who adopted a permanent passive homosexual role usually became *hieroduloi* in the service of Ishtar, dressing and acting as women and performing homosexual and other services in the temple. These priests may have been eunuchs. They were scorned as deviates. Ishtar had changed their sex to put fear into man. Homosexuals felt free to petition the gods for help. The Egyptian grave of the two friends and the homosexual prayers in the "Almanac of Incantations" may mean that the ancients were not totally ignorant of homosexual types approximating what modern parlance call "inverts".

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid; P. 10.

#### 4.1.4 Canaan and Hittite

The situation with respect to homosexuality in Canaanite and Hittite society does not appear to be very different from the general picture in the ancient Near East. "Hittite law did not condemn homosexuality as such. The only instance of condemnation is that of a man with his own son, which is in the same law with the interdiction of heterosexual relationship between near kin."<sup>54</sup> In addition, among the Hittites bestiality, like homosexuality, was susceptible to regulation but not complete interdict. A man became guilty of *Hurkel* ("abomination") because his partner was his son, not because they were the same sex. Homosexuality then was not outlawed among the Hittites. The main version of the Hittite law comes from about 1650 B.C. In it *hurkel* (abomination) refers to an offence against the culprit's city. By perpetrating such an act he brought impurity upon his fellow townsmen and made them liable to divine wrath."<sup>55</sup> The regulations concerning bestiality may possibly throw light on the laws about homosexuality. "Sexual intercourse with sheep and cows was forbidden in Hittite law. Infractions incurred the death penalty."<sup>56</sup> "But intercourse with horses or mules incurred no punishment."<sup>57</sup> Phillips offers the suggestion that the animals in the first category were considered sacred animals and that

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<sup>54</sup> E. Neufeld, *The Hittite Laws translated into English and Hebrew with Commentary*. (London: Luzac and Co., 1951), PP. 54 and 188.

<sup>55</sup> H.A. Hoffner, Jr., "Incest, Sodomy and Bestiality in the Ancient near East," (Neukirchen: Butzon & Berkcer, 1973): 85.

<sup>56</sup> Neufeld, P. 53, Laws 187, 188, Law 199 includes pigs and dogs in the interdict.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid; P. 57.

bestiality with them was an attempt at union with the deity through the sacred animal, after which the animal was sacrificed. Intercourse with these animals was in this case strictly limited to the cult."<sup>58</sup> Nevertheless, even the man who coupled with a horse or mule could not come before the king or become a priest (Hittite Laws 200A), although he was not guilty of abomination. "The man who had committed abomination was killed or banished, and the townsmen bathed themselves to remove the impurity."<sup>59</sup> It is possible that, although homosexuality did not incur abomination it may have restricted the individual in some other way.

#### 4.1.5 Canaanite practice

In Canaanite religion and society the same elements prevailed as in other ancient societies of the Near East. "Among them were sacred prostitution, male and female as well as homosexual. Transvestite behaviour for magical purposes and even bestiality were part of the cult,"<sup>60</sup> "self-mutilation and child sacrifice also were known in the Canaanite religion."<sup>61</sup> As with many other fertility cults, Canaanite ritual employed hosts of male and female prostitutes as an integral part of the temple personnel. These and other *hieroduloi* acted out the mythical

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<sup>58</sup> A. Phillips, *Ancient Israel' criminal Law: A new Approach to the Decalogue*. (New York: Schocken Books, 1970), P. 121.

<sup>59</sup> Hoffner, "Incest, Sodomy and Bestiality....," P. 85.

<sup>60</sup> W.F. Albright, *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan: Historical Analysis of two contrasting faiths*. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1968), P. 128.

<sup>61</sup> F.M. Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic, Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973), P. 25.

stories that provided a rationale for the status quo. "The cultic rites sought to maintain the status quo by seeking magically to strengthen man's relationship with nature and the spirit world."<sup>62</sup> The gods and goddesses of Israel's neighbours were organically related to nature. For the most part they appear in pairs and were depicted in myths and legends as creating the world by copulation. Cole surmises that their worship consisted of an imitation of their creative acts, "their worship apparently required a kind of imitative magic in which male and female devotees yoked their bodies sexually and spilled their seed upon the fields they desired to yield bounteous crops."<sup>63</sup> In the milieu of the Canaanite fertility cult, "the woman became a symbol for the ground which had to be ploughed and sowed, and an object of the lust and conquest of man."<sup>64</sup>

Like Ishtar who changes men into women, the Canaanite Anath takes away men's bows. Hillers concludes that this means the same thing, that is, changing men into women. He quotes the Ishtar episode but also a Hittite prayer "Take from (their) men masculinity, prowess, robust health, and swords (?) battle axes, arrows, and dagger(s)! And bring them to Hatti! Place in their hand the spindle and mirror of a woman! Dress them as women."<sup>65</sup> Both the bow and the spindle are mentioned in Canaanite mythological contexts. Baal's only recorded use of

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<sup>62</sup> G.H. Livingston, *The Pentateuch in its Cultural Environment*: (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1974), PP. 130 – 131.

<sup>63</sup> W.G. Cole, *Sex and Love in the Bible* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1960), P. 181.

<sup>64</sup> T.C. Dekruif, *The Bible on Sexuality*, (De pere, WI: St. Norbert Abbey Press, 1966), P. 64.

<sup>65</sup> D.R. Hillers, "The blow of Aghat: The meaning of a Mythological Theme," *Orient and Occident Essays presented to Cyrus H. Gordon*, P. 74.

the bow results in an orgy in which he copulates with a heifer and sires a calf. Hoffner sees "unmistakable marks in style and content between Hittite and Canaanite texts whose symbols for male and female are used in major rituals, especially in cases of impotency."<sup>66</sup> The evidence points to the idea that symbols of masculinity and femininity, the wearing of clothes of the opposite sex and the carrying of implements associated with the opposite sex were used in Canaanite rituals, these activities again probably involving eunuch-priests clad in female garb as well as male and female prostitutes. "Homosexual activity and bestiality were considered ways of having intercourse with the gods and thus affecting the course of nature."<sup>67</sup> It is significant, therefore, that the Old Testament opposes all of these activities. Deuteronomy 22:5 reads: "The implement of a man shall not be borne by a woman, nor shall a man clothe himself in the attire of a woman, for whoever does this is an abomination to Yahweh your God." (Hoffner's translation) Deuteronomy 27:21, Exodus 22:19; and Leviticus 18:23 all forbid copulation with animals by men or women and Leviticus 18:24 states that the Canaanites did such things. In the light of the extant texts, there is no reason to doubt the Biblical records on these matters.

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<sup>66</sup> H.A. Hoffner Jr. "Symbols for masculinity and femininity: Their use in Ancient near Eastern Sympathetic Magic Rituals," JBL 85 (1966): 330.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid; PP. 332 – 333.

## **Conclusion of the Historical Background.**

The evidence from the extant literature of the ancient Near East does not support the thesis that homosexuality was unknown among Israel's neighbours. On the contrary, it suggests that cultic homosexual practices were entirely legal. Furthermore, private homosexual practices were not forbidden but regulated by cultic and civil laws. Consequently the practice was regarded as criminal, sinful, or personally degrading only when it contravened these specific regulations; otherwise it seems to have been practised freely without hindrance. Israelite law is the exception in that it banned all homosexual practice and excluded anyone who practised it from participation in the cult of Yahweh.

## **4.2 The texts of the Old Testament**

### **4.2.1 The Use of Scripture**

For conservative Christians the Bible and the Bible alone is central in any formulation concerning homosexuality, whether theological or ethical. How one handles the scriptural material determines the answers received. In fact one's view of Scripture at the outset influences the questions asked. Although considerations of space require us to opt for a proof text approach in this book, the vital concerns dealt with here can be answered satisfactorily only by developing a coherent theology of sex. Scriptures set forth certain values as an integral part of the Christian's self-understanding. Love is a central value and virtue, for example, but it must be understood in the context of Biblical anthropology. "That is, love is not self-authenticating; love is not allowed to



discover or dictate its own standards or patterns of conduct."<sup>68</sup> Love, which is the fulfilling of the law, always has existed and operated in context of the revelation from God that concerns His will. Love is not its own law, nor is the renewed consciousness its own moral monitor. Homosexuality, therefore, cannot be rendered acceptable simply by labelling it "loving" any more than any other controversial activity could be condoned this way. On the other hand, the acceptance of scriptural authority on questions of ethics and morals does not mean the natural and social sciences may be ignored in favour of strict biblicism. Many specific contemporary ethical dilemmas were unknown or ignored in the ancient world. The modern phenomenon must be studied carefully before Biblical principles can be applied and judgment made. In recent years arguments have appeared all over attempting to negate Biblical authority in the discussion of homosexuality. "At times the Scriptures are looked upon merely as the word of humans, not as expressing the mind of God the creator of man, and are held to be no more authoritative than anyone else's "word"."<sup>69</sup>

Others question their relevance for today. Homosexuality, it is argued, is not condemned as such. "It was condemned because of its association with idolatry. That is, it had a cultic or symbolic significance due to its use by pagans, which it

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<sup>68</sup> J. Murray, *Principles of Conduct: Aspects of Biblical Ethics*. (Grand Rapids: WM.B Eerdman's Publishing o., 1964), P. 24.

<sup>69</sup> R.L. Treese, "Homosexuality, A contemporary view of the Biblical perspective," *Loving Women/Longing Men: Gay Liberation and the Church*; (San Francisco: Glide Publications, 1974), P. 28.

does not now have."<sup>70</sup> Coupled with this argument, although sometimes found in isolation from it, is the contention that the Scriptures are historically conditioned, that the Biblical authors knew nothing about the condition of homosexuality. They knew nothing about the modern "invert". Furthermore, the contention is that in the Scriptures homosexuality is condemned as rape, perversion or exploitation. "The loving relation of two constitutional homosexuals is not condemned because such was not known in Biblical times or at least not understood."<sup>71</sup>

"Two main positions are present among these views; either that the Bible opposes homosexuality or that it does not. Scroggs has given a clear outline of these positions."<sup>72</sup> To provide the substance of the main arguments pro and con, we give a condensation of his material.

#### **4.2.2 The Bible as Opposed to Homosexuality**

1. The Bible opposes homosexuality and is definitive for what the church should think and do about it. Here the Bible stands as the objective revelation of God's eternal will. God is completely opposed to homosexuality.
2. The Bible opposes homosexuality, but it is one sin among many.

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<sup>70</sup> H.K. Jones, *Toward a Christian understanding of the Homosexual* (New York: Association Press, 1966), P. 69.

<sup>71</sup> R. Woods. *Another kind of Love: Homosexuality and Spirituality* (Chicago: Thomas More Press, 1977), P. 103.

<sup>72</sup> R. Scroggs, *The New Testament and Homosexuality: Contextual Background for contemporary Debate* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), PP. 7 – 11.

There is no justification for singling it out as more serious than other sins castigated in the Bible. In this case homosexuality is a sin but not a unique sin - nor worse than that of liars, thieves, or drunkards.

3. The Bible opposes homosexuality, but specific injunctions must be placed in the larger Biblical context of the theology of creation, sin, judgement, and grace. Here we have in essence the "analogy of faith" argument. It goes something like this. The heart of the Bible is its central message. This central message becomes a principle to evaluate other less specific or less essential parts of Scripture. The actual application of the principle can take many directions since the interpreter decides what is central. Here homosexuality will be viewed in different lights depending on the central principle selected, for example, creation, love, justification or others.
3. The Bible opposes homosexuality but is so time and culture bound that its injunctions may and should be discarded if other considerations suggest better alternatives. Here contemporary biological, psychological, theological, or sociological considerations may outweigh the Biblical material as authority in forming a judgement about homosexuality.

#### **4.2.3 The Bible as Condoning Homosexuality**

Arguments which claim that the Bible does not oppose homosexuality are outlined by Scroggs as follows:<sup>73</sup>

1. The Bible does not oppose homosexuality because it does not describe true or innate homosexuality, but homosexual acts by people who are not homosexuals. This is basically the "invert" versus "pervert" argument.
2. The Bible does not oppose homosexuality because the texts do not deal with homosexuality in general. Here the key phrase is in general. The Bible opposes prostitution and idolatry. In conjunction with homosexuality, not homosexuality, as such. Whenever the Bible appears to condemn homosexuality, related evils are really being condemned, not homosexuality.

On both sides of the issue arguments surface to cast doubt on the authority, historicity, inspiration and relevance of the Scriptures to the homosexual question. Some propose that the time conditioned statements of Scriptures with phenomena that no longer exist or are based on obscure and uninformed views of homosexuality. This disqualifies them from current debate. To a great extent the way the Biblical exegete relates to homosexuality depends upon how he or she relates to these arguments. The researcher position on the inspiration and

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid; PP. 11 – 16.

authority of the Scripture would result in a position similar to the first cited in the previous section. It might be necessary to ask, however, what is meant by "God is completely opposed to homosexuality." Is the Bible opposed to the condition, the acts, or both? Is God opposed to any individual who has a homosexual orientation? If not, under what circumstances can one say that God is "completely opposed to homosexuality? The answers to these and other questions will emerge as we proceed to analyse our subject more fully.

#### **4.3 Old Testament Texts Cited With Reference to Homosexuality**

As Smedes has observed, "for many thoughtful Christian believers how to feel about sexuality is part of a larger question, that is, how to feel about creation."<sup>74</sup> If our sexuality is part of creation, our feelings about it can reflect God's feeling about what He made.

Writers who begin a discussion of homosexuality with Genesis chapters 1 and 2 are not necessarily adopting the "analogy of faith" argument. These chapters are not seen as the primary revelation in Scripture by which all else is to be scrutinised, but as the essential starting point in any scriptural discussion of sex. Both Jesus and Paul discuss sexual relationships in the light of Genesis (Matthew 19:7-10; Mark 10:2-9; and Romans 1: 18-25), making it a reference point and even more critical for the Christian interpreter.

Genesis 1:27. So God created man in His image, in the image of God He created him, male and female He created them.

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<sup>74</sup> L.B. Smedes, *Sex for Christians, the limits and liberties of sexual living* (Grand Rapids: WM.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1977), P. 26.

Genesis asserts that God created them male and female. Therefore sexual distinction is created. As Von Rad comments, "By God's will man was not created alone but designated for the thou of the other sex."<sup>75</sup> "The passage, when properly understood, makes each partner the complement of the other, enjoying spiritual equality."<sup>76</sup> There is no suggestion in Genesis of any division of a bisexual or sexually undifferentiated creature into two different sexes. Sex is not deified but neither is it denied. It is firmly rooted within the good creative purposes of God. "The essential need of male and female for each other is recognised and underlined. Together they form the unity which is mankind."<sup>77</sup> The much debated "image of God" in this verse has been explained by Barth as "consisting in man's being in fellowship."<sup>78</sup> Kubo also finds the male-female duality essential to a complete understanding of the image of God in man:

What the verse primarily means is that not mankind as male but male and female together make up the image of God. It must denote more than the fact both male and female have the image of God. While that fact is true, it is also true that one sex alone does not constitute the image of God in its totality. The sexual duality of male and female is necessary for our full understanding of the image of God.<sup>79</sup>

To reflect fully the image of God, man and woman not only stand in relation to each other but to God. As Smedes puts it, "personal communion is what the

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<sup>75</sup> G. Von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, tr J.H. Marks (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1961), P. 58.

<sup>76</sup> D. Kidner, *Genesis: A Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL; Inter-Varsity Press, 1973), P. 52.

<sup>77</sup> R. Davidson, *Genesis 1 – 11 Commentary* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 25 – 26.

<sup>78</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* 111, 4, tr, A.T. Mackay, et al. (Edinburgh: T. and T Clark, 1978), 117.

<sup>79</sup> S. Kubo, *Theology and Ethics of Sex* (Washington DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1980), P. 24.

image of God is about."<sup>80</sup> "The primal form of humanity is the fellowship of man and woman."<sup>81</sup> "To be human is to share humanity with the opposite sex."<sup>82</sup> But we are not necessarily speaking about marriage. The blessing of procreation is quite distinct from being male in the image of God as male and female, as our next text illustrates.

Genesis 2:18,24. Then the Lord God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him."... Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh.

God made "a helper fit for him", literally " a help as opposite him," that is corresponding to him."<sup>83</sup> "Mankind as male and female are not created simply for the purpose of procreation."<sup>84</sup> Procreative ability is carefully removed from God's image and shifted to a special word of blessing. "Consequently, sexual ability is not an emanation or manifestation of the divine image as in the fertility cults."<sup>85</sup> "Sexuality as such does not intrude into man's relationship with God."<sup>86</sup> "Man and woman become one flesh, one personality, for flesh here means more than the physical side of life, it is the medium through which the whole personality communicates."<sup>87</sup> Williams sums up the Genesis material in the same

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<sup>80</sup> Smedes, P. 33.

<sup>81</sup> P.K. Jewett, *Man as Male and Female: A study in Sexual relationships from a Theological point of view* (Grand Rapids: WM.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1975), P. 36.

<sup>82</sup> D. Williams, *The Bond that Breaks: Will Homosexuality Split the Church?* (Bim, 1978), P. 53.

<sup>83</sup> Kidner, PP. 65 – 66.

<sup>84</sup> McNeill, P. 60.

<sup>85</sup> Van Rad, PP. 58 – 59.

<sup>86</sup> W. Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament 1* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1967): 128.

<sup>87</sup> Davidson, P. 38.

way, contending that male or female alone does not adequately represent the divine image.

Here we come to see that man is created in the image and likeness of God as male and female. Male alone does not fully represent the divine image. Female alone does not fully represent the divine image. A community of simply one sex does not reflect God's intention for us or His character in the world.<sup>88</sup>

Therefore the actual manner in which man exists in the image of God is as male and female together. This line of reasoning, particularly as presented by Barth and Thielicke, has been rejected by many other scholars. Thielicke sees the differentiation of the sexes as so constitutive of humanity that it appears in Genesis as a primal order which endures as a constant despite human deprivation in the fall. Others do not believe the text teaches an ontological unity of biological sex difference and psychosexual expressions. Such unity is not inherent in creation, they say; and therefore, does not define man as made in the image of God. This means that:

Male and female at birth may be no more than a physical differentiation ...The potentiality for sexual expression may simply be an undifferentiated potential at birth, and the direction which the sex drive takes in seeking expression ... the choice of another human being to which the drive shall ultimately be attached – may be truly conditioned learning.<sup>89</sup>

Humanity has no choice but to be "fellow-human" in relation to "fellow-human."

"The question is, but must the fellow-human be in relationship to a "fellow-

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<sup>88</sup> Williams, PP. 56 – 57.

<sup>89</sup> Treese, P. 47.



human of the opposite sex."<sup>90</sup> These considerations raise serious questions. What about biological sex distinction and psychological sex identity – how are they related? Can a male be a whole person without a personal relationship with a female, and vice versa? This suggestion that there is a kind of dualism between the obvious physical sex and the psychosocial expression of it emanating from the inner being needs to be measured against Biblical anthropology.

Biblical anthropology tends to be holistic. It allows for a dialectic between inner and outer man but hardly a dualism between sexual morphology and sexual expression. Such a dualism may occur in Scripture as an aberration due to the fall of man, but not as the intent of the creator. It would be extremely useful if the dynamics of sexuality and personality were spelled out from the Biblical perspective. Such a study would supply a fitting background for these remarks and provide a necessary context for them. However the brief remarks above must suffice and we must turn now to the most discussed passage in Scripture with respect to homosexuality.

#### **4.3.1 The Case of Sodom**

Genesis 19:4-10

But before they lay down, the men of the city, the men of Sodom, both young and old, all the people to the last man, surrounded the house; and they called to Lot, "where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us, that we may know them." Lot went out of the door to the men, shut the door after him, and said, "I beg you, my brothers, do not act so wickedly. Behold, I have two daughters who have not known man; let me bring them out to you, and do to them as

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid; P. 48.

you please; only do nothing to these men, for they have come under the shelter of my roof." But they said, "Stand back!" And they said, "These fellows came to sojourn, and we would play the judge! Now we will deal worse with you than with them." Then they pressed hard against the man Lot, and drew near to break the door. But the men put forth their hands and brought Lot into the house to them, and shut the door.<sup>91</sup>

Throughout the history of the Church this passage has been used to show God's displeasure with homosexuals.

In this instance, it was claimed, homosexuality caused the destruction of the cities in the plain. In 1975 the first extensive and radically new interpretation of this passage was published by D.S. Bailey, whose ideas have been repeated in numerous books. Bailey is an Anglican clergyman who was a member of an informal group of Anglican clergy and physicians that produced a report called "The Problem of Homosexuality", published by the Church of England Welfare Council. Bailey, the main lecturer for the council, later published his own book, *Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition*. Bailey was also instrumental in inaugurating a government committee to investigate law and practice relating to homosexual offences. This report, the Wolfendon Report, named after the Committee Chairman, recommended that homosexual behaviour between consenting adults in private no longer be considered a criminal offence in England. The recommendation of the committee was adopted legally by Parliament in 1967. Crucial to their decision was Bailey's thesis that Christian tradition has misread the account of the judgement of Sodom in Genesis 19. This

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<sup>91</sup> Bible, The King James Version: Genesis 19: 4 – 10.

undercut the notion that toleration of homosexual behaviour is a sign of national decay and paved the way for relaxing legal sanctions.

Bailey, considered by many the high priest of pro-homosexual interpretation of Scripture, raises numerous questions about this passage. "What ground is there", he asks, "for the persistent belief that the inhabitants of the city were addicted to male homosexual practices, and punished accordingly?"<sup>92</sup> He finds little evidence. Beginning with verse 5, "Bring them out to us, that we may know them", he suggests that the word "know" (*yada*) occurs some 943 times in the Old Testament; but in only twelve instances, without qualification does it mean coitus. On the basis of these statistics, he adopts Barton's<sup>93</sup> view that there is no actual necessity to interpret "know" in Genesis 19:5 as equivalent to "have coitus with" and that it may mean no more than "get acquainted with".

"Few Biblical scholars agree with this restricted interpretation of (*yada*)."<sup>94</sup> Many point to verse 8 which is manifestly sexual in connotation. "Even McNeill, a Catholic Priest who advocates responsible homosexual behaviour, admits that the case has been overstated here."<sup>95</sup> However, many scholars who admit that this interpretation is weak still point out that it is clearly violent homosexual rape that is intended and which is being condemned here. Therefore if this text does

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<sup>92</sup> D.S. Bailey, *Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition* (Hemden, CT: Shoe String Press, 1975), P. 1.

<sup>93</sup> G.A. Barton, "Sodomy," in *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, ed. J. Hastings (New York, 1928), 672.

<sup>94</sup> J.P. Lewis, "Yadha" *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, ed, Chicago: Moody Bible Institute, 1981): 366 – 367.

<sup>95</sup> McNeill, P. 47

not speak negatively about a loving homosexual relation between consenting adults, it cannot be used to condemn it, they claim. Those who accept this new interpretation, however, have to explain why the mere request to get acquainted with the visitors is made in such a violent manner. The suggested answer proposes that Lot was a sojourner (*ger*), and as a resident alien, he did not have the right to bring other aliens into his house, especially those whose credentials were unknown to the citizens. Furthermore, he was unpopular. The citizens of the place might be accused of boorish inhospitality, but there is no evidence that homosexual vice was prevalent there.

In trying to explain why, under these circumstances, Lot offered his virgin daughters to the citizenry to do as they pleased with them, Bailey's argument is at its weakest.

He suggests, "that it was simply the most tempting bribe that Lot could offer on the spur of the moment to appease the hostile crowd."<sup>96</sup> This assumes that the crowd was bent on violence, perhaps rape. But Bailey has assured us already that they are just concerned citizens who want to clarify the status of Lot's visitors. If this is so, Lot's offer of his daughters is most incongruous and calculated to heighten the suspicions of the citizens about his visitors. If "know" in verse 5 simply means "get acquainted with", Lot grossly misunderstood the citizens. His best course of action would have been to acquaint them with the visitors. In

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<sup>96</sup> Bailey, P. 6.

addition, this interpretation finds the Biblical account to be influenced by later legends dealing with punishment for inhospitality. But this entire reconstruction throws a serious question on the justice of God, for we are presented with God destroying the city by fire for their lack of hospitality, first and foremost, as well as undefined general wickedness. Bailey points out that no Old Testament citation of this passage explicitly identifies the sin of Sodom as homosexuality. (See Genesis 13:13; 18:20; Jeremiah 23:14; Ezekiel 16:49,50). It is only in the post-canonical literature relating to Hellenism that these passages are interpreted of homosexuality, he suggests, and in the New Testament books influenced by Hellenistic literature and pseudepigrapha – 2 Peter and Jude.

The Old Testament depicts the people of Sodom as a symbol of utter wickedness and grievous sin, who committed adultery, walked in lies, were haughty, and committed abomination. Sodom was also a symbol of complete destruction (See Isaiah 1:9; 13:19; Jeremiah 49:18; 50:40; Amos 4:11; Zachariah 2:9). True, there is no explicit mention of homosexuality here. The further claim is made that this witness, that is, that Sodom was destroyed for inhospitality, folly, and pride, is continued in the apocrypha. Especially quoted are Wisdom 10:8 and 19:8 and Ecclesiastics 16:8.

In Wisdom 19:13,14 (Bailey cites Wisdom 19:8 but quotes 19:14) neither the words of "Sodom nor "Egyptians" appear in the text though they are implied. The Egyptians are being compared with Sodom and seem to be declared the more wicked. In Wisdom the Egyptians are accused of "hatred of strangers"

(*Misozenia*, verse 13); and this is construed, along with verse 14, as a testimony to inhospitality.

This particular argument has not reckoned with the fact that in the Hellenistic world *Misozenia* was a loaded word. As Radin points out, it had within its broad range of meaning not only inhospitality and a social behaviour but also abuse of strangers and, in extreme cases even cannibalism."<sup>97</sup> This particular passage does not support the new thesis as thoroughly after careful inspection. We can agree with those who contend that it is nonsense to assume that Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed solely because of homosexuality. The Old Testament clearly states that the sins of the cities were many and grievous. On the other hand, we cannot agree with attempts to exclude homosexuality as one of these sins. Therefore, we conclude that Genesis 19 is clearly a reference to an attempted homosexual rape of Lot's visitors. The question of whether this text condemns all homosexual activity does not seem to be answered here but perhaps comes within the scope of the next reference.

#### 4.3.2 The Mosaic Laws

Leviticus 18:22. You shall not lie with a male as with a woman, it is an abomination.

Leviticus 20:13. If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall be put to death, their blood is upon them.

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<sup>97</sup> M. Radin, *The Jews Among the Greeks and Romans* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1915), P. 186.

These texts unquestionably prohibit and condemn male homosexual genital activity. But a number of reasons are put forth to negate their impact. They are seen by some as part of a cultic taboo in primitive Judaism. Homosexuality is condemned, it is claimed, because of its association with the religious practices and licentious behaviour of the gentile idolaters. Others think "these laws applied only to priests at any rate and none of them applies to Christians since the early church had been released from the necessity of keeping the Levitical laws."<sup>98</sup>

McNeill finds an interesting social reason for these laws, that is, it was necessary for Israel to increase her population, therefore homosexuality was discouraged. A more cogent reason for McNeill, however, is the connection between idolatry and homosexuality. As he states, "whenever homosexual activity is mentioned in the Old Testament, the author usually has in mind the use of male worshippers made of male prostitutes provided by the temple authorities."<sup>99</sup> Others find little homosexuality among Israel's neighbours and none in pagan temples. For them "homosexual acts are an abomination, not because of pagan cults, but because they reverse the natural order of sexuality, which in doing they show the spirit of idolatry."<sup>100</sup> Homosexuality itself is a fundamental subversion of the true order of things. This is a creation order of things, as Bailey implies by following up this argument with an examination of Romans 1.

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<sup>98</sup> M. Olson, *Untangling the web: A Look at what Scripture does and does not say about Homosexual behaviour*, *Other side* (April 1984), P. 25.

<sup>99</sup> McNeill, PP. 57 – 58.

<sup>100</sup> Bailey, . 60.

To be properly appreciated, the Levitical laws need to be seen in the context of chapters 18-20. They were not merely for the priests but for all the people of Israel (Leviticus 18:1). Israel was to live according to God's laws to show contemporary Near Eastern nations the true nature of holiness.

A special responsibility lay on the priests. "Not merely are the priests to observe the cultic regulations for ceremonial holiness, but they are required to live lives of moral purity and spiritual dedication, so that they will be examples to Israel of divine holiness."<sup>101</sup>

Chapters 18-20 deal with various laws and punishments. In 18, various sexual relationships are predominant: incest, adultery, and homosexuality, as well as child sacrifice and bestiality. Few Christians would be prepared to say that all of these are now acceptable because the early church was freed from the Levitical law, or that if it is done in loving relationships, it is not to be condemned.

But what about commands such as in Leviticus 19:19 – "you shall not sow your field with two kinds of seed; nor shall there come upon you a garment of cloth made of two kinds of stuff". Surely this places these laws in the cultic taboo category. Not necessarily. As the covenant people of God, the Israelites were expected to maintain ceremonial and moral holiness. "The book of Leviticus is a compendium of both ritual and moral enactments, an ideal manual for the purpose. Whether certain enactments were moral or ritual it is sometimes

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<sup>101</sup> R.K. Harrison, *Leviticus: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1980), P. 27.



difficult to tell. The Presbyterian Blue Book"<sup>102</sup> "here relies heavily on Mary Douglas' "Purity and Danger,"<sup>103</sup> in which the criteria cited for holiness are (1) Holiness is a whole body (2) Holiness is internal peace and social order (3) Holiness is unmixed classes and categories of creation. Homosexuality is condemned on this thesis because it violates the integrity of primary categories of creation.

As to seeds and cloth, this text is difficult to interpret at best. We do not really know what is meant here. But to throw out all of chapters 18 and 19 on the basis of one verse is surely throwing out the baby with the bath water. Leviticus 19:18 reads "you shall love your neighbour as yourself". The application of the all or nothing principle in relation to the Levitical laws was not applied by Jesus in His ministry.

The great majority of Christians have always recognised the continual ethical significance of much of the material in Exodus 20-40 and Leviticus. The practices listed in chapter 18 have been considered particularly abhorrent to Christians throughout the ages. In addition, the New Testament reiterates the negative attitude toward homosexual acts found in Leviticus. This endorsement by the New Testament is perhaps the best criterion we have at present that any

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<sup>102</sup> B.E. Shafer, Blue Book 1, "The Church and Homosexuality" (San Diego: 190<sup>th</sup> General Assembly(1978), OO. D-39-D-43.

<sup>103</sup> M. Douglas, Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo (London: Routledge and Kegan, 1978).

particular part of the Levitical law is still an element of God's will for His people.

#### 4.3.3 The Idolatry Thesis

The most repeated argument attempting to negate the force of the Levitical statements is that homosexuality is condemned here because of its relation to idolatry. A man is condemned as an idolater, not as a homosexual. The unstated assumption implies that a homosexual who is not an idolater would not be condemned. Dr. John Boswell, a homosexual and professor at Yale University, argues that "the Hebrew word to *'ebah* ("abomination") as in Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 does not usually signify something intrinsically evil, such as rape or theft, but something ritually unclean."<sup>104</sup> The point is frequently emphasised that the prohibition of homosexual acts follows immediately upon a prohibition of idolatrous sexuality. "And thou shalt not let any of thy seed pass through the fire to Molech" (Leviticus 18:21, KJV). The implication here is that the Molech text and the text following homosexuality are both ritual in nature, not ethical or moral.

Although both chapters 18 and 20 contain prohibitions against incest and adultery that might stem from moral absolutes, some contend that their function in Leviticus 18 and 20 is to serve as symbols of Jewish distinctiveness. What appears to clinch this argument is the claim that the Septuagint, a Greek

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<sup>104</sup> J. Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality: Gay People in western Europe from the beginning of the Christian Era to the fourteenth century.* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), PP. 100 – 101.

translation of the Hebrew Scriptures, draws the distinction between intrinsic wrong and ritual impurity by translating *‘ebah* sometimes as *anomia* (violation of law and justice) and sometimes as *bdelugma* (infringements of ritual purity or monotheistic worship). In the Septuagint homosexuality is characterised as *bdelugma* in both texts.

The conclusion drawn here, apparently, is that homosexuality was not considered a violation of law and justice, or itself intrinsically wrong, but rather was a matter of ritual purity and monotheistic worship, that is, idolatrous. It was related to Jewish cult and culture but was not something immoral or unethical. This argument is more subtle, but it contains the same kind of logic as Bailey's statistical reasoning concerning *yada*<sup>c</sup> ("know").

It is true that in the majority of instances, to *‘ebah* refers to ritual infringements of the law. "But just as *yada*<sup>c</sup> is sometimes used in a sexual sense meaning coitus, so to *‘ebah* is occasionally used in an ethical sense concerning truth and justice (Deuteronomy 25:16; Proverbs 8:7; 16:12; 29:27; Jeremiah 16:15)."<sup>105</sup>

Although there is a tendency in the Septuagint to ethicize *‘ebah* as do the prophets and Proverbs, the Septuagint is not consistent in its treatment of *‘ebah*. Deuteronomy 25:16, a clearly ethical statement, is described as *bdelugma* in the Septuagint. "Fundamental to this issue is the fact that God has a contrary mind to the practice involved and rejects it."<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> See F. Brown, S.R. Driver, and C.A. Briggs, A.

<sup>106</sup> W. Foerster, "Bdelussomai, bdelugma, bdeluktos" in TDNT 1 (1968): 598 – 599.

Furthermore, the ancients were not in the habit of dividing their thought and action into the neat modern categories of sacred and secular. For Jew and pagan alike the sacred covered all of life, as the books of Leviticus and Deuteronomy testify. This means that some ideas and activities of their pagan neighbours were acceptable to the Jews. In significant aspects the cult and literature of Israel and its neighbours were similar, with Israel clearly the borrower.

It is not enough, therefore, to state that homosexuality was condemned merely because it was a product of pagan society and a part of pagan cult. "The reasons why Israel borrowed ideas and practices from pagan neighbours, which she did, are more complex than this simple formula suggests."<sup>107</sup> Consequently, when she did not borrow or even forbade the assimilation of pagan thought and practice, the reasons are likewise more complex than the abhorrence of idolatry. Idolatry, the bowing down to images or performing certain cult acts, was simply a part of an entire lifestyle, philosophy, theology, and cosmology fundamentally inimical to Israel's self-understanding as proclaimed to them by God in covenant relationship with Him.

"Separation from pagans involved more than mere avoidance of idolatry. Israel mediated the presence of the divine to her neighbours."<sup>108</sup> Hence the outward form of Israel's life was not a matter of indifference. The visible community was

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<sup>107</sup> J. Jensen, *The Relevance of the Old Testament 1: A Different 'Methodological Approach' Dimensions of Human Sexuality*, (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1979), P. 5.

<sup>108</sup> Elchrodt, P. 404.

to be clearly distinguishable from the surrounding nations, their pagan gods and immoral practices.

The fact that idolatry and homosexual practice were found together in pagan religion does not mean that they are one and the same thing. In our texts we have a simple prohibition against homosexual acts. "The fact that those acts were sometimes practised in pagan rituals also compounded the abomination rather than detracting from it. Some commentaries, however, see idolatry as the main problem."<sup>109</sup>

One Old Testament commentary concludes that the "ban on homosexuality is merely cultic by interpreting Leviticus 18:22 in the light of the previous verse (18:21, devoting children to Molech)."<sup>110</sup> It observes that "by fire" is not in the Hebrew text. This law then is not dealing with child sacrifice by fire to Molech, but in fact prohibits giving children to Molech as temple prostitutes. Then it interprets verse 21 and 22 both as reflecting cultic sexual violation. Therefore homosexuality is condemned because of its association with idolatry. There are a number of problems with this interpretation. First, if any verse is out of context in chapter 18, it is verse 21 concerning Molech. "All other salient verses clearly refer to sexual practices; it does not. Noth speaks of the Molech law as "striking" since it is out of context."<sup>111</sup> He suggests that "it was only the key word 'seed'

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<sup>109</sup> S.H. Kellogg, "The Book of Leviticus," *The expositor's Bible 1*. (Grand Rapids: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1943): 334.

<sup>110</sup> N.H. Snaith, *Leviticus and Numbers* (Greenwood, SC: Attic Press, 1977), PP. 125 – 126.

<sup>111</sup> M. Nott, *Leviticus: A commentary*, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1965), P. 136.

[children', RSV] which brought this verse into the present context." Furthermore, giving children to Molech does not necessarily imply sexual or homosexual behaviour on their part. Finally, in the light of clear Biblical reference to human sacrifices to Molech (2 Kings 23:10; 1 Chronicles 28:3; Jeremiah 7:31), the observation of Noth that verse 21 is out of context is preferred. The verse does not have to mean devotion to Molech as a prostitute or as a sacrifice but may mean that the child was dedicated to the cult as Samuel was to the temple.

Sapp concludes that "the laws against bestiality and homosexuality were based on three major concerns."<sup>112</sup> First, that such relations were "simply unnatural". Moral law and natural law – both products of the one God could not conflict. Thus to defy nature's law is to violate the revealed law of morality. What nature abhors the law prohibits."<sup>113</sup> Second, and integrally related to the first, is the concern for wasted seed. Finally, the Israelites saw a link between these types of sexual misconduct and idolatry.

Homosexuality was not a widespread problem in Israel and these laws were promulgated to assure that it could not be. At the very least, these laws are the best available evidence for determining the established Jewish legal position on homosexual activity between men. Presumably the attitude of Jesus and the early church toward it was the same.

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<sup>112</sup> Sapp, P. 31.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

Homosexuality was not a major problem among Jews in Christ's time, and His silence on the subject can also be construed this way: It simply was not an issue. The Talmud considered the laws prohibiting copulation with beasts and sodomy to be universal in nature and part of the seven moral laws applicable to Noahides as well as Jews. Epstein notes that "in talmudic as well as in Biblical times, the heathen was held under suspicion of committing this crime when the opportunity was afforded him."<sup>114</sup> In addition, "Jews are above suspicion of committing sodomy. If the law prohibits an unmarried man to be a teacher of boys, it is because of the visits of their mothers to the school house, not because of his association with the boys themselves."<sup>115</sup> The plain meaning of Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 is a prohibition of male genital homosexual acts. Since no provisional or exception clauses are included, as is the case with some of the laws, we can only conclude that they prohibit and condemn such acts. At least the onus or burden of proof is on those who would interpret these texts to mean something else. We cannot accept the premise that morality was not an issue here, although we recognise that other factors were linked to the prohibition.

Deuteronomy 23:17-18. There shall be no cult prostitute of the daughters of Israel, neither shall there be a cult prostitute of the sons of Israel. You shall not bring the hire of a harlot, or the wages of a dog, into the house of the Lord your God in payment for any vow; for both of these are an abomination to the Lord your God.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> L.M. Epstein, *Sex laws and customs in Judaism* (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1967), pp. 134 – 136.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid*; P. 137.

<sup>116</sup> Bible, The King James Version: Deuteronomy 23:17 – 18.

1 Kings 14:23-24. For they also built for themselves high places, and pillars, and Asherim on every high hill and under every green tree; and there were also male cult prostitutes in the land. They did according to all the abominations of the nations which the Lord drove out before the people of Israel.<sup>117</sup>

In the Deuteronomy passages the key phrases in these texts "cult prostitutes of the sons of Israel", "a dog", and "male cult prostitutes. Some readers claim "that in 1611 "sodomy" was not restricted to sexual intercourse with the same sex and with beasts, but was applied to intercourse between unmarried human being also."<sup>118</sup> The Oxford English Dictionary, however, clearly shows that the meaning of this word was reserved for homosexual intercourse; for example, 1601 – "which if he wanted he would hire a boy sodomitically to use," 1677 – "two noble youths being sodomitically abused by this infernal goat." The dictionary presents examples ranging in date from 1300 to 1705 which are references to same-sex relations."<sup>119</sup> The text reading "whore" in the AV for "sodomites" in the margin is the only evidence favouring the above argument. Others find the influence of the vulgate at work here. Sometimes *qadesh* is translated with the Latin *scortator* ("fornicator") and sometimes *effeminatus* a synonym of *pathiaus* which denotes the male homosexual prostitute, especially one who plays the passive role in sodomy by permitting anal intromission. Such authors reject the vulgate translation because supposedly it does not express the

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<sup>117</sup> Bible, The King James Version: 1 Kings 14:23 – 24.

<sup>118</sup> Barton, P. 672.

<sup>119</sup> Oxford English Dictionary 9 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933): 366.



sense of the Hebrew. Neither, it is claimed, do the five words used in the Septuagint (LXX) strictly translate the Hebrew. For example, in Deuteronomy 23:17 the Septuagint translates *qadesh* with a participle meaning to prostitute.

I Kings 14:24 translates the Hebrew as *sundesmos*, a noun meaning to bind together. The word originally had no sexual meaning. In 1Kings 15:12 *qadesh* is translated as *telete*, meaning an "initiate" or a *hierodulos* ("temple-servant"). In 2 Kings 23:7 the term is simply transliterated into Greek. Finally, 1 Kings 22:46 reads *endiellagmenos*, a derivative of *allasso*, meaning to alter or change. Some suggest "the expression may mean one who has changed his nature by becoming a homosexual or one who has become an apostate by leaving the religion of Yahweh."<sup>120</sup> In fact any reading which implies homosexuality is immediately rejected by some.

Consequently, in this text certain readers find nothing but ritual prostitution between male and female. For them the "hire of a harlot" or "wages of a dog" refer to the same thing, the "harlot" (Hebrew, *zonah*) who cohabited with males in the temple and the "dog" (Hebrew, *keleb*) being those who had intercourse with women devotees. In this interpretation the term "dog" or "servant" simply refers to the male who served as a temple prostitute. Bailey, who finds no reference to homosexuality in these texts, finally comments "Homosexual coitus

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<sup>120</sup> Bailey, PP. 50 – 51.

would be meaningless in the ritual of a fertility cult, with its exclusively heterosexual rationale."<sup>121</sup>

Although the term "dog" could be used as equivalent to the word "servant", as found in Aramaic inscriptions, "who is your servant (if not) a dog", <sup>122</sup> we have suggested earlier that "dog" implies more than simply a cult servant or " a cultic functionary dressed like a dog", <sup>123</sup> but rather a group of eunuchs (Deuteronomy 23:17) or effeminate, who dressed like women (cf. Deuteronomy. 22:5 and subjected themselves sexually to other men.

Since many gods or goddesses were considered bisexual and were involved in such activities themselves, this would not be an unusual practice in a fertility religion. "These types were well known in Assyria and in Syria, as in Lucian's description of the priests of Cybele,"<sup>124</sup> and they are not unknown in the modern world."<sup>125</sup> Concerning these texts we lean to the view that homosexual activity was sometimes involved in the meaning of the words *qadesh* ("cult prostitute"), or *keleb* ("dog") and cannot be entirely ruled out as a part of their meaning.

#### 4.3.4 The Outrage in Gibeah

**Judges 19:22-25.** As they were making their hearts merry, behold, the men of the city, base fellows, beset the house round about, beating on the door; and they said to the old man, the master of the house, "Bring out the man who came into your house, that we may know him." And the man, the

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid; PP. 52 – 53.

<sup>122</sup> H. Donner, W. Rolling, *Kanaanaische Und Aramaische Inschriften*, BD. 1., Text. Pto Harrassowitz Wiesbaden, 1979), PP. 190 – 1991.

<sup>123</sup> M.H. Pope, "Homosexuality" IDB Supp (1976): 417.

<sup>124</sup> Lucian, *The Goddesses of Syria*, P. 15.

<sup>125</sup> J.G. Frazer, *Adonis, Attis, Osiris: Studies in the History of Oriental Religion 2* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1935): 253 – 264.

master of the house, went out to them and said to them, "No, my brethren, do not act so wickedly; seeing that this man has come into my house, do not do this vile thing. Behold, here are my virgin daughter and his concubine; let me bring them out now. Ravish them and do with them what seems good to you; but against this man do not do so vile a thing." But them men would not listen to him. So the men seized his concubine and put her out to them; and they knew her, and abused her all night until the morning. And as the dawn began to break, they let her go.<sup>126</sup>

The story related in Judges, chapters 19-21 is from the period of the tribal leagues in Israel, that is, twelfth to eleventh century BC. The events took place before the days of Samuel or Saul. The story is about a Levite sojourning in the country of Ephraim.

He has a concubine who becomes angry with him and leaves him, returning to her father in Bethlehem. After four months the Levite journeys to Bethlehem seeking his concubine. He is well received by his father-in-law who wines and dines with him and begs him to extend his visit. The Levite finally decides to leave, taking his concubine with him. They get a late start and it begins to get dark so they looked for a safe city to stay in for the night. The narrator points out that they bypassed Jerusalem, which was at that time a Canaanite city, and pass on to Gibeah or Ramah, an Israelite city. Here, apparently, they expected hospitality but received none.

After sitting in the open square of the city for some time, a resident alien, an old man from Ephraim, spots them as he is returning from a day in the fields and

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<sup>126</sup> Bible, The King James Version; Judges 19:22 – 25.

extends hospitality to them. While the old man is entertaining his guests, the men of the city, Benjaminites, beat on the door and demanded to "know" the man. The conclusion of the story, following our text, is that the Levite's concubine dies, which becomes the immediate cause of a war between the tribes of Israel and the Benjaminites, with dire consequences for the latter. The Book of Judges, as well as this episode, concludes with the line, "In these days there was no king in Israel; every man did what was right in his own eyes" (Judges 21:25). Similarities between Genesis 19 and Judges 19 are obvious. Many commentators assume one of the authors heard about or was looking at the other author's work. The Sodom and Gomorrah story usually is considered older. In that case possibly we have a commentary on the sin of Sodom.

Looking at the text under discussion, the base fellows (literary, sons of belial), a term for worthless scoundrels, beat (knock) upon the door. They demand to "know" the man who is the guest (*yada<sup>c</sup>*). But Bailey insists that even here the word *yada<sup>c</sup>* means simply "get acquainted with", despite the fact that the text states concerning the Levite's concubine that "they knew (*yada<sup>c</sup>*) her, and abused her all night." He says,

As in the case of Sodom the story, the view that the Gibeathites were prone to homosexual practices and desired the Levite for the satisfaction of their unnatural lusts is nothing more than an inference from the words: "Bring forth the man... that we may know him" - the verb *yada<sup>c</sup>* ("to know") being again construed in a coital sense.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Bailey, P. 54.

Commenting on the same word in our text, "*yada*<sup>c</sup> a recent commentator observes that *yada*<sup>c</sup> is never used unambiguously of homosexual intercourse."<sup>128</sup> Here the author sees the first use of *yada*<sup>c</sup> as deliberately ambiguous, but with the offer of the young women, the ambiguity disappears. We may agree with the commentator that here, as in Genesis 19, the initial and determinative offence is a violation of the law of hospitality. But homosexual overtures played a clear part in it. It is scarcely possible for *yada*<sup>c</sup> to be used twice in such close proximity in the same context and to be completely unambiguous in one instance and completely unambiguous in the next. For in this case the first use of *yada*<sup>c</sup> never means homosexual intercourse. If it means that the second use of *yada*<sup>c</sup> takes away the ambiguity of the first occurrence in the context, his point makes better hermeneutical sense. As it is, the comment itself is rather ambiguous and may be interpreted either way.

"The host at Gibeah implores them not to do this "foolish" thing (*nebalah*)."Cundall, makes two pertinent comments on this situation. First he notices that no attempt was made by the rulers of Gibeah to punish the offenders or to repudiate their actions. So it appears that the men of the city generally were involved, not just a lewd minority. Second, his study of the word *nebalah* leads him to conclude that the interpretation "foolish" is not strong enough here. The word denotes "an insensibility to the claims of God or man." Better translations

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<sup>128</sup> R.G. Boiling Judges: Introduction, Translation and Commentary. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1969) P. 276.

would be "impiety" or "wantonness". These men were not about to recognise any moral or religious claims upon them."<sup>129</sup>

"Bailey is aware of the thrust and import of *nebalah* but brushes it aside as an editorial addition introduced to bring this story into line with the Sodom story."<sup>130</sup> The word has other meanings, he suggests, such as inhospitable, churlishness, and need be seen as nothing more than "a rhetorical addition designed to emphasise the deplorable lack of courtesy shown by the Gibeathites towards the visitor." Currie, however, following Noth and Von Rad, see the word as a technical term involving a violation of covenant obligations. "But all uses thus listed clearly point at a violation of covenant obligations to the Lord and especially to wanton sexual conduct out of keeping with allegiance to YHWH."<sup>131</sup> Collins also sees human sexuality in the Old Testament as lying in the sphere of human responsibility, a sphere in which man has dominion but within covenant obligations to Yahweh.

Human sexuality was indeed a dimension of human experience which fell within the parameters of Yahweh's hegemony and the covenant relationship. The presence of "Thou shalt not commit adultery" within the covenant clauses of the Decalogue (Exodus 20:14; Deuteronomy 5:18) serves as a clear reminder that the fashion in which man lived his sexuality was not independent of his relationship to Yahweh, God of His people. Similarly, the different outcomes of the encounter between Joseph and Potiphar's wife (Genesis 39) and that between David and Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11)

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<sup>129</sup> A.E. Cundall, *Judges: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-varsity Press, 1973), pp. 196 – 197.

<sup>130</sup> Bailey, p. 55.

<sup>131</sup> S.D. Currie, "Biblical Studies for a Seminar on sexuality and the human community," *Austin Seminary Bulletin* 87 (1971): 19.

indicate well that human sexuality is not an awesome force over which man has no control. These stories, told so often in Jewish tradition, clearly proclaim that man is responsible for the way in which he uses his sexuality, that God-given gift over which he exercise dominion in Yahweh's name and by Yahweh's power.<sup>132</sup>

Bailey's interpretations have been extremely influential, being repeated in much of the pro-homophile literature despite the fact that most Biblical commentators do not agree with him. His interpretations do not do justice to the context and do not place the same gravity on the recorded events that the narrators themselves sense. Consequently, Bartlett's criticism seems fair when he says, "it takes special imaginative power to believe, as Bailey does, "that what the men of the city of Gibeah were after was the acquaintance of the visiting man, or that the old man of Gibeah offered his virgin daughter and the other's concubine only to protect his rights of hospitality."<sup>133</sup>

The idea that the accepted codes of hospitality allowed a man to sacrifice women instead of guests is far removed from modern western concepts of behaviour and ethics. "But womanhood was lightly esteemed by some in the ancient world, as evidenced by the action of the Levite whose greater concern was to save his own skin."<sup>134</sup>

As in Genesis 19, so also in Judges 19, it would be over - simplification to say that the sin of Gibeah was homosexuality alone. The wrong doing of the

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<sup>132</sup> R. Collins, "The Bible and Sexuality," BTB 7 (1977): 158.

<sup>133</sup> D.L. Bartlett, "A Biblical Perspective on Homosexuality," Homosexuality and the Christian faith: A Symposium, ed. H.L. Twiss (Valley Forge, PA, Judson Press, 1978), P. 25.

<sup>134</sup> Cundall, P. 197.

Gibeathites, as with the inhabitants of Sodom, was far more than homosexuality. In our view, however, one goes too far to claim that the Sodomites and Gibeathites had no proclivity to homosexuality. In this passage there is a clear reference to attempted homosexual rape, actual heterosexual gang rape, and murder.

As in the Genesis account, so also here we cannot agree with Bailey that this is merely a gentlemanly disagreement and inhospitality. The text and context suggest far more than that. Furthermore, none-of this is connected with idolatry or pagan ritual; and it took place in an Israelite city in a period of general anarchy of which it serves as an example.

#### **4.4 Secondary Old Testament Texts Cited With Reference to Homosexuality**

Other texts are cited as records of homosexual conduct in the Old Testament. All of them will not be dealt with in detail here since, in our opinion, there is insufficient evidence that they contain homosexual overtones at all. "Narratives alleged to recount homosexual experiences are said to be those about David and Jonathan (1 Samuel 18:1; 19:1; 20:30; 2 Samuel 1:26), Ham and Noah (Genesis 9:21-27, Ishmael and Isaac (Genesis 21:9), Ruth and Naomi (Ruth 1:16,17), Joseph and Potiphar (Genesis 39)."<sup>135</sup> Some claim that Nebuchadnezzar kept Daniel for homosexual purposes. We will consider the cases of David and Jonathan, Ham and Noah, and Ruth and Naomi.



#### 4.4.1 The case of Jonathan and David.

1 Samuel 18:1. When he had finished speaking to Saul, the son of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David and Jonathan loved him as his own soul.

1 Samuel 19:1. And Saul spoke to Jonathan his son and to all his servants, that they should kill David. But Jonathan, Saul's son, delighted much in David.

2 Samuel 1:26. I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan; very pleasant have you been to me; your love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women.

The episode most frequently mentioned as homosexual love affair in the Old Testament is the relationship of David and Jonathan. T.M. Homer speaks of it as "the only example of and unabashed homosexual love of one well known character for another."<sup>136</sup> He quotes 1 Samuel 18:1-3 where Jonathan makes a covenant with David, strips off his clothes and gives him his armour. He also makes reference to 1 Samuel 20:30 where Saul berates Jonathan for having chosen to be his own shame and the shame of his mother's nakedness. In 1 Samuel 20:41 he points out that David and Jonathan kiss one another and weep with one another. Then in 2 Samuel 1:26 David tells how he valued the love of Jonathan. Homer concludes that "they must have been bisexual since they both married and had children."<sup>137</sup> Homer does not find it surprising at all "that homosexuality existed in Israel, for the influence of all the nations around them,

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<sup>135</sup> J. Brim, *Medicine in the Bible*. (New York: Froben Press, 1936), P. 362.

<sup>136</sup> T.M. Homer, *Sex in the Bible*: (Rutland, VT: Charles E. Tuttle Co., 1974), P. 85.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid*; P. 87.

particularly the Philistines, was bound to have been felt."<sup>138</sup> Other factors that point to a homosexual relation are the aristocratic, heroic station of Jonathan and the later heroic stature of David himself, "the two heroes gravitated toward each other."<sup>139</sup> Could the two men be friends without raising the issue of homosexuality? Homer answers:

Yes, they can. But when the two men come from a society that for two hundred years had lived in the shadow of the Philistine culture, which accepted homosexuality; when they find themselves in a social context that was thoroughly military in the eastern sense, when one of them, who was the social superior of the two, make a public display of his love; when they meet secretly and kiss each other and shed copious tears at parting; when one of them proclaims that his love for the other surpassed his love for women — and all this is present in the David Jonathan liaison — we have every reason to believe that a homosexual relationship existed.<sup>140</sup>

Dr. G.W. Henry, a psychiatrist of some 30 years' experience, examined the story of David and Jonathan. He found that the influence of women on David seems negligible. David's name is not even associated with women until after the slaying of Goliath when Saul presents him with a wife. However, by this time he had developed a strong friendship with Jonathan. In this friendship Jonathan was the aggressor and David unreservedly responsive. "David's homosexuality is looked upon as a passing in the young lad's experience."<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> T. Homer, *Jonathan Loved David: Homosexuality in the Biblical Times* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1978), PP. 20 – 21.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid*; P. 29.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid*; P. 27 – 28.

<sup>141</sup> G.W. Henry, *All the sexes: A study of Masculinity and Femininity* (New York: Rhinehart and Co., 1955), 498.

Quite a different interpretation emerges from the text as Johnson reads it, for he advances the theory that David was a constitutional homosexual who only consorted with women under pressure.

King Saul persecuted his very own son, referring to Jonathan's love for David as a perversion. He screamed, "you are an intimate lover to that son of Jesse." Jonathan made a beautiful love covenant with David, promising undying devotion. In 1 Samuel 18:3 these two young men took the Bereeth love oath, used in ancient marriage vows. (Malachi 2:14). These two lovers secretly met in the bushes, kissed, embraced and performed *gadal* (sexual intercourse). They were even married to each other (*laeuach*, 1 Samuel 19:2). David publicly declared: Jonathan, beloved and lovely, very pleasant have you been to me, your love to me was very wonderful, passing the love of women. (2 Samuel 1:23). This statement is exactly the definition of a homosexual according to Sigmund Freud. David also lead [sic] the young men in dancing naked and after Jonathan's death developed a love relationship with Jonathan's only son.<sup>142</sup>

The key words in the story are "love (*ahab*)" "covenant" (*berith*), and sexual intercourse(?) (*gadal*). Of course the words cannot be taken in isolation since they are an integral part of a context. The verses cited at the beginning of this section as well as those mentioned since must also be interpreted in their respective contexts, not independently.

1Samuel 18:1 states that "the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul." The verb "was knit" or "bound" also

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<sup>142</sup> P. Johnson, *The Gay Experience* (Lambdas, 1978); P. 7 Quoted in P.R. Johnson, T.F. Eaves sr., *Gays and the new Right* (Los Angeles: P.R. Johnson, 1982), P. 107.

meaning "to league together" has no sexual connotation in the Old Testament. The verb *qashar* ("to knit", "bind") carries more the meaning of treason or conspiracy than "love affair."<sup>143</sup> The verb "love" (*ahab*) has a wide range of meanings referring to affection between members of the opposite sex (Genesis 24:67), sexual intercourse (Hosea 3:1), and affection between mother and child (Genesis 25:28). "It refers to affection between adults of the same sex (Ruth 4:15; 1 Samuel 16:21), and between teacher and student (Proverbs 9:8), servant and master (Exodus 21:5), and between a whole people and a military leader (1 Samuel 18:16,22)."<sup>144</sup> When referring to sexual love it refers to the marital relationship as something given at creation in a positive sense. For the act of sexual intercourse a different root *yada'* (to know) is used. Thus emphasis suggested by the word '*ahab*' "is not really on sexual love but more on experiencing and desiring love."<sup>145</sup> By observing only a verse here and there, it is possible to emphasise the personal dimension of the "love" between David and Jonathan. The inclusion of the wider context of 1 and 2 Samuel, however, draws attention to what may be called the political overtones of the world. The word may be used in a political sense, as seen by the reference to 1 Kings 5:1 — "Now Hiram King of Tyre sent his servants to Solomon, when he heard that they had anointed him King in place of his father; for Hiram always loved David." David and Hiram were involved in diplomatic and commercial arrangements for a

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<sup>143</sup> CF Genesis 44:30 – 31.

<sup>144</sup> J. Begman, A.O. Haldar, G. Wallis "ahabh" in TDOT 1 (1974): 104.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid; P. 107.

number of years. The word "love" here describes the political amity between the states.

Thompson has suggested that "another context where the political meaning of the word is found are David-Jonathan narratives in 1 Samuel."<sup>146</sup> The word describes the various covenants and friendships which David made en route to the throne. Saul "loved" David greatly, made him his amour bearer and even gave him his armour (1 Samuel 16:21; 17:38,39). Here the narrator is preparing his readers for the later political use of the term. Jonathan did a similar thing after the battle with Goliath (1 Samuel 18:4). The passing of arms and armour from the lesser to the greater seems to have had political implications in the ancient Near East. Jonathan seems well aware that David will inevitably become king (1 Samuel 20:13-16), and makes David swear by his "love" for him (1 Samuel 20:17). Saul was also aware of the popularity of David with the people and himself declared, "what more can he have but the kingdom?" (1 Samuel 18:8).

It must have been clear to Saul and Jonathan that "all Israel and Judah loved David; for he went out and came in before them" (1 Samuel 18:16). Thompson remarks, "In this context, the verb love expresses more than natural affection. It denotes rather the kind of attachment people had to a king who would fight their battles for them."<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> J.A. Thompson, "The significance of the verb Love in David-Jonathan narratives in I Samuel," VI 24 (1974): 334 – 335.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid; P. 337.

A similar connotation may be seen in the message Saul sends to David, "Behold, the king has delight in you, and all his servants love you"(1Samuel 18:22). David is offered Saul's daughter in marriage but he refuses on the grounds that he is poor and cannot afford the bride price. Saul asks for one hundred foreskins of the Philistines as the bride price and David brings two hundred. Saul realises "that the Lord was with David, and that all Israel loved him" (1 Samuel 18:28).

In this context, "it is not out of place to suggest that the word love has political rather than sexual overtones."<sup>148</sup> "The transferring of clothes from Jonathan to David has royal overtones suggesting a legal symbolism relegating the privilege of succession willingly to David."<sup>149</sup> In this setting "Jonathan moves beyond personal feelings of a friendly disposition and makes a solemn "covenant" concluded under the eyes of Yahweh in a fixed cultic form."<sup>150</sup> We also see in this passage that covenant, league, agreement (*berith*) is not necessarily a marriage covenant but simply a pact or agreement between the two men, each protecting the life of the other. Jonathan protected David from his father whereas David protected Jonathan, or rather, his descendants, as he had promised. "Due to the changing political fortunes of both men, the solemn vow was a necessary assurance for both of them."<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> P.K. McCarter Jr., I Samuel: A New Translation with Introduction, Notes and commentary, AB 8 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1980), P. 305.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

<sup>150</sup> H.W. Hertzberg, I and II Samuel: A commentary. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1964), PP. 154 – 155.

<sup>151</sup> Josephus, Ant. VI. 229-231, Interprets the entire episode in a clearly political light.

Finally, the claim that David and Jonathan has sexual intercourse (*gadal*) appears to be more an assertion than an interpretation. 1 Samuel 20:14b reads, "and they kissed one another, and wept with one another, until David recovered himself." The expression "recovered himself" is a translation of the hiphil perfect of *gadal*. It is an obscure expression at best as evidenced by the various translations of it — recovered, exceeded, etc. "The lexicons do not give a sexual meaning for this verb. Holladay gives the translation, "take courage."<sup>152</sup> Gesenius, followed by Brown, Driver and Briggs sees an ellipsis with an implied infinitive and translates. "they both wept — until David wept most violently" (Brown, Driver, and Briggs, "wept greatly")."<sup>153</sup> The Septuagint translates into Greek with a similar idea using the word "*sunteleia*"<sup>154</sup> which Delling interprets in this context as "satiety."<sup>155</sup> Based on this interpretation the text means that David wept violently or until he could weep no more. There is neither philological nor contextual warrant for the translation of *gadal* as "sexual intercourse."

The larger context supports a socio-political interpretation of the particular verses involved, rather than personal or sexual. Upon examination we conclude that the homosexual interpretation of David and Jonathan's relationship is read

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<sup>152</sup> W.L. holladay, A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament (Leiden: E.J. Brill Publications; 1971), P. 56.

<sup>153</sup> W. Gesenius, Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament Scriptures tr. S.P. Tregelles (Grand Rapids: WM.B. Eerdman Publishing Co., 1964), P. 159.

<sup>154</sup> A. Rashfs, ed. Septuaginta I (Stuttgart: Wurtembergische Biblelandstatt, 1962), P. 544.

<sup>155</sup> G. Delling, "Sunteleia," TDNT 8 (1977):65.

into the text rather than out of it. There simply is no warrant for the assumption that David and Jonathan had a homosexual love affair. Consequently, neither is there evidence inferring that, since this alleged homosexual affair stands uncondemned in the Bible, all loving homosexual relationships can be justified on the basis of the Scripture.

#### **4.4.2 The Case of Noah and Ham**

Genesis 9:20-24. Noah was the first tiller of the soil. He planted a vineyard; and he drank of the wine, and became drunk and lay uncovered in his tent. And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brothers outside. Then Shem and Japheth took a garment, laid it upon their shoulders, and walked backward and covered the nakedness of their father; Their faces were turned away, and they did not see their father's nakedness. When Noah awoke from his wine and knew what his youngest son had done to him, he said, ...<sup>156</sup>

Bruns interprets this event "in the light of the contendings of Horus and Seth."<sup>157</sup> Parts of that story already have been narrated. The essence of the Seth-Horus story, as Bruns interprets it, is that while Horus slept, Seth commits an act of sodomy upon him. Subsequently in the council of the gods, he claims superiority over Horus due to his "doughty deeds of war" against Horus. According to Bruns,

It would seem that the original story of Noah and Ham followed the same lines. By committing sodomy upon his

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<sup>156</sup> Bible: The King James Version. (Genesis 9:20 – 24).

<sup>157</sup> J. Edgar Bruns, "Old Testament History and the Development of Sexual Ethics," *The New Morality: Continuity and Discontinuity*, ed. W. Dunphy (New York: Herder, 1967), P. 75.



father — who was the ancestor of all men after the flood — Ham (Egypt) could also claim the right to dominate all mankind. Both Ham and Seth take advantage of the unconscious condition of their victim.<sup>158</sup>

He thinks the Biblical editor's revision of the story omits explicit mention of a sexual act and makes Canaan rather than Ham the recipient of Noah's curse. This was done because "the Canaanites were the most immediate threat to Israel's political and religious survival. Ham, however, was retained as the sexual aggressor because the editor realised that the Canaanites never had been a real threat to Israel."<sup>159</sup>

Although, as Bruns concedes, there is no explicit mention of a sexual act here, is such an act implicit in the narrative, as some seem to think? The story relates how Noah became intoxicated and lay "uncovered" (*galah*) in his tent. Here the verb is in the hithpael imperfect form; that is, Noah exposed himself. Although the verb *galah* can be a euphemism for sexual intercourse (cf. Leviticus 18:7), it must be in the Hebrew piel construction to have this meaning. Even in the piel to "uncover the nakedness" of someone, is not necessarily to have intercourse with them. This was especially true where the other person was also male. In this case the Levitical code is careful to explain what is meant, meaning to "uncover the nakedness" of a male was to have intercourse with his spouse. For example we read:

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<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid; P. 76.

Leviticus 18:7. You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father, which is the nakedness of your mother; she is your mother, you shall not uncover her nakedness.

Leviticus 18:14. You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father's brother, that is, you shall not approach his wife, she is your aunt.

The Law in Leviticus 18:7 is rephrased in Deuteronomy 27:20, cursed be he who lies with his father's wife, because he has uncovered her who is his father's<sup>160</sup>

Here the verbs "lies with" and "uncovered" both are euphemisms for sexual intercourse. The verb "uncovered" is not used in the Old Testament to describe sexual intercourse with males; for this the terms "lie with" and "know" are employed. These observations raise the possibility that Ham had intercourse with his mother; which in the technical language of Leviticus would be termed "uncovering the nakedness" of his father, the text says, however, that Ham saw the nakedness of his father, an expression used only once in the Old Testament for sexual intercourse in Leviticus 20:17, that being with one's sister.

Some have suggested that Ham's sin was the invasion of the privacy of his father while he was having intercourse, that is, he watched them during the act. If so, there is no suggestion of that in this particular word. The clear meaning of *galal* here is that Noah exposed himself in his tent. Even here, some read "her tent", assuming that Noah was about to or more likely had just completed intercourse with his wife and fallen asleep. In antiquity it was possible for wealthy wives to

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<sup>160</sup> Lev. 18:7, 18:14, Deuteronomy 27:20, cf Lev. 20:11, 20.

own their personal tent. However, the reading "her tent" rather than "his tent" requires a change in the vowel pointing of the Masoretic text. The story continues by relating that "Ham the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brothers outside." "To see the nakedness of another was a great humiliation to the one seen."<sup>161</sup> The nakedness ('*erwah*) of Noah was seen by Ham. Wood comments:

Uncovering the nakedness usually meant displaying the genitals and was almost akin to sexual intercourse, and therefore where a parent or relative was concerned, to incest. Ham, it will be remembered, was cursed for seeing the genitals of his father when the latter was drunk.<sup>162</sup>

In Leviticus 20:17, the expression "to see the nakedness of" appears to be synonymous with the phrase "to uncover the nakedness of", in which case it means sexual intercourse.

If a man takes his sister, a daughter of his father or a daughter of his mother, and sees her nakedness, and she sees his nakedness, it is a shameful thing, and they shall be cut off in the sight of the children of their people; he has uncovered his sister's nakedness, he shall bear his iniquity.<sup>163</sup>

Ryle suggests "a want of delicacy and uncalled-for levity on the part of Ham who had no regard for his father's honour."<sup>164</sup> He emphasises the carefulness and modesty of the two brothers as contrasted with immodesty of the young son and

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<sup>161</sup> It was customary for ancient conquerors to humiliate their captives by marching them naked into exile. See Isaiah 20:4; 47:2 – 3; Jeremiah 13:22, 26 and Ezekiel 23:29.

<sup>162</sup> L.R. Wood, "Sex life in Ancient Civilizations." In the Encyclopedia of sexual behaviour 1 ed. (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1961), P. 127.

<sup>163</sup> G. Von Rad, Genesis: A commentary, tr, J.H. Marks, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1961), P. 133.

<sup>164</sup> H.E. Ryle, The book of Genesis: With Introduction and notes. (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1921), P. 127.

adds, "possibly the narrator suppressed something even more repulsive than mere looking (cf. verse 24: 'what his youngest son had done to him')"<sup>165</sup>

If the expression, "saw the nakedness of his father" is used in Genesis 9:22 as a euphemism for sexual intercourse, it would be the only such instance in Scripture where this term is used for male-with-male intercourse. However, it cannot be absolutely ruled out as a possibility on that account alone. Consequently, this text could be interpreted to mean that Ham made a homosexual assault on his father. On the other hand Ham may have seen his father lying uncovered in the tent and instead of discreetly covering up his exposed body, took his garment so that he was left naked. The text may suggest this by saying, "Shem and Japheth took a garment, laid it upon both their shoulders, and walked backward;" here the passage refers to something specific, in this case the garment that Ham took from his father as evidence that he had seen the nakedness of his father with all that it implied. Whatever Ham did to his father, whether he only saw him and made light of the matter or whether he physically assaulted him, it is difficult to see how this text could be seen as condoning homosexual acts in any way. The withering curse of Noah against Canaan scarcely commends the act. That the curse is directed against Canaan, a descendant of Ham (Genesis 10:6) suggests that "Noah saw this act as marring the inheritance of Ham. This flagrantly unfilial act is the obverse of the fifth

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<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

commandment; which makes the national destiny pivot on the same point"<sup>166</sup>

Although there may be a hint of homosexual conduct in the Ham-Noah account the entire episode is denounced and the perpetrator severely cursed as one who has dishonoured a parent. Contrary to condoning homosexual acts this suggests instead a strong condemnation of them, especially here where a father/son relation is also involved.

#### 4.4.3 The Case of Ruth and Naomi

Ruth 1:16-18.

But Ruth said, "Entreat me not to leave you or return from following you; for where you go I will go and where you lodge I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God; where you die I will die, and there will I be buried. May the Lord do so to me and more also if even death parts me from you." And when Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more.<sup>167</sup>

Johnson, referring to this passage, comments: "The most beautiful love song ever written was composed by one woman to another and is still sung at weddings (Ruth 1:16)."<sup>168</sup> Foster refers to the account as a great short story, a masterpiece of a narrative act. Concerning the details of the story she says, "the author, however, was ... seemingly blind to their full significance, of an attachment which, however innocent, is nevertheless still basically variant."<sup>169</sup> The story, she believes, must be read against the background of a primitive tribal custom.

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<sup>166</sup> D. Kidner, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary*. (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1973), P. 103.

<sup>167</sup> The Bible King James Version (Ruth 1:16 – 18).

<sup>168</sup> P.R. Johnson, T.F. Eaves Sr., P. 107.

<sup>169</sup> J. Foster, *Sex variant women in Literature*: (Baltimore: Diana Press, 1975), P. 22.

Ruth was willing to abandon not only her native soil, her own family and burial with her ancestors, but even her god. Alongside these considerations, the emotional force of the story is clarified by three other factors. First of all Ruth had been married about ten years at the time of her widowhood and must have been in her mid-twenties. Consequently, her clinging to Naomi,

Cannot be counted as clinging of a bereaved adolescent to the bridegroom's mother. Furthermore, it was Naomi who schemed to get Ruth married to Boaz at which time the woman said to Naomi, "...he shall be unto thee a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age; for thy daughter-in-law who loves you, who is more to you than seven sons, has borne him" (Ruth 4:14,15).<sup>170</sup>

Finally, Orpah, who remained in Moab apparently had every prospect of finding a second husband there. Foster summarises the narrative as follows:

Viewed without prejudice, this is a masterly portrait of a somewhat passive young woman, twice playing the heterosexual role with success, but dominated by another love at least as compelling as that for the men she successively married.<sup>171</sup>

Homer finds it impossible to demonstrate a relationship of physical love between them, but "all the right words are there" he says. "Certainly no other sexual relationship was possible for either of them at the time these words were expressed."<sup>172</sup>

The difficulty with this interpretation is that any similar close relationship would allow some speculations about a homosexual bond. Close friendships, however,

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<sup>170</sup> The Bible King James Version (Ruth 4: 14, 15).

<sup>171</sup> Foster, *sex variant women in Literature* (Baltimore: Diana press, 1975), P. 22.

<sup>172</sup> Homer, *Jonathan Loved David*, P. 20.

need not be necessarily homosexual. Furthermore, the difficulty is compounded by Foster's suggestion that "the author was seemingly blind to the full significance of the events related."<sup>173</sup> Indeed, not only did the Bible writer miss the deviant significance, but almost everyone else since has missed it also. The homosexual interpretation appears to be a speculation read into the text rather than an interpretation arising from or suggested by the text and context of the book itself. This is even more apparent when the passage is placed in context and the purpose of the author taken into consideration.

In part, the aim of the author was to portray the idyllic scene of a God-fearing pastoral community. The main character stands out against this background. Further points the author was trying to make were, "(1) the fact that a Moabite woman could be a pattern of the highest virtues and faithful to the laws and customs of her adopted country; (2) that marriage within kin was a commendable piety; (3) that Ruth became the grandmother of the great King David himself."<sup>174</sup> It seems that the last thing the author would wish to do here is to introduce a foreign person whose character could be questioned in any way in the light of Jewish morality.

The theological context of the narrative portrays the activity of God not by intervention, "but by a lightly exercised providential control."<sup>175</sup> There is also an

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<sup>173</sup> V.L. Bullough, *Sexual Variance in Society and History* (New York: John Willey & Sons, 1976), P. 86.

<sup>174</sup> G.A. Cooke, *The book of Ruth* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1918), P. XII.

<sup>175</sup> E.F. Campbell, Jr., *Ruth: A new Translation with Introduction notes and commentary* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1975), P. 29.

emphasis on *chesed* living. *Chesed* living meant a life lived in the light of God's covenant loyalty by the individual. This lifestyle of caring responsibility appears not as a forgone conclusion among God's people but something to be strived after. "Living out a righteous and responsible lifestyle is a matter of determination to do so."<sup>176</sup> The story of Ruth is the quiet commendation of a lifestyle that can be blessed by God. It is especially effective because it is not preached but lived out by the characters in the story. Campell argues that the narrative portrays covenant life as applied to a particular social situation in a way that custom is adapted and given new applications to meet arising needs. However, "All of the decisions to be made and acts to be taken are governed by the overarching commitments of honouring God by caring for neighbours."<sup>177</sup>

The immediate context of our passage becomes clearer when seen against the purpose and context of the book, Naomi has lost her status as a wife and mother of sons. In itself this was a serious, devastating turn of events for an older woman in the ancient Near East. She was forced to return to her home bereft of almost everything, reduced to the position of a beggar. Ruth's presence with her meant that at least the two destitute women could look after each other. "In the narrative Naomi well understands the difficulties Ruth will face in a strange land

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<sup>176</sup> Ibid; P. 30.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid; p. 31.



and discourages her from following. This lead into the famous passage quoted above. It is unfortunate, however, that the context frequently is ignored."<sup>178</sup>

Although the passage is a perfect expression of human devotion, it also exemplifies *chesed* and covenant loyalty. Ruth determines to go, that is, to leave her nation and country. She determines to stay in her newly adopted country. The change is permanent. She will become totally identified with a new people and a new God. "It is notable that Ruth does not say '*Elohim* (God), as a foreigner might, but Yahweh. Thus the author emphasises that the foreigner is a follower of the true God."<sup>179</sup>

Proselytism and conversion are not obvious in the narrative, "although Ruth's pledge to become one people with Naomi and to accept one God cannot be ignored."<sup>180</sup> Human devotion and religious fervour combine in the moving statement made by Ruth. No injustice is done to Scripture by the conclusion that Ruth's statement, seen against the background of the book as a whole and in its immediate context, does not require a homosexual interpretation. Indeed we found sincere human devotion informed by covenant loyalty and religious fervour, the idea of *chesed* in practice.

## Conclusion

As we have seen, if the Old Testament Scriptures are to be treated as an accurate

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<sup>178</sup> W.F. Fuerst, *The books of Ruth, Esther, Ecclesiastes, Song of songs, Lamentations* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1975); P. 14.

<sup>179</sup> L.P. Smith, J.T. Cleland, "The book of Ruth," *IB* 2 (1953): 837.

<sup>180</sup> Except in the Targum, which reads like a catechism on verses 16 and 17.

historical record of God's dealings with His people in the past, and if they are considered to be a reliable guide in morals and ethics, then homosexual acts stand condemned in them both directly and by implication. The primary Testament texts, those that describe or imply homosexual acts, never condone those acts but condemn them as an infringement of covenant morality. Nevertheless the Old Testament does not present homosexual acts as the sole mark of decadence and iniquity that merits the direct punishment of God. Sodom witnessed many grievous sins besides the attempted homosexual acts in Genesis 19. Homosexual acts in antiquity frequently were connected with exploitation, violence, or idolatry, but such circumstances only compounded the problem. Secondary Old Testament texts are those where homosexual acts are possible but not probable. As we interpret them their nature neither condemns nor condones homosexuality, since the presumed acts for the most part are read into the texts. The sole text in this category where a homosexual act may have occurred contains a terrible curse against the perpetrator of the act.

By ignoring the larger context and historical background of some of these passages, some cite isolated texts which can be interpreted to condone loving homosexual relationships. Similarly, others isolate a few texts out of context in an effort to show that God destroyed nations because of homosexual acts. In the Old Testament, although God does not countenance homosexual acts, neither does He make them the only reason for pouring out His judgments on humanity.



**Chapter five of this research will discuss homosexuality in detail, focusing on new testament and its texts.**