

Sexual Minorities in the Bible: the Positive Texts

“Therefore, since we have lying around us such *a great cloud of witnesses*, let us throw off everything [!] that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, despising its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and faint” (Hebrews 12:1-3).

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- *Excursus. Theodore W. Jennings, Jr. *Jacob’s Wound: Homoerotic Narrative in the Literature of Ancient Israel*. New York: Continuum, 2005. Summary and Review by Tom Hanks

Note: For items not in General Bibliography, → refers reader to *The Subversive Gospel*, by Rev. Dr. Tom Hanks (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2000), available at www.fundotrasovejas.org.ar/ingles/ingles.html, “Books on line” (see biblical book chapters).

1. Abel, victim of heterosexual violence. Abel's older brother Cain was a farmer who married a sister (apparently) and became the prototype of the heterosexual "breeder" (Gen. 4:17-24 [J]; his creative descendants all died in the flood but the priestly source gives a parallel genealogy for Seth in Gen. 5:1-32 [P] that produces Noah's line (regarding the similar names, see notes in NOAB, NISB, HCSB, JSB; NJB). Abel, however, was unmarried and childless when Cain murdered him and thus qualifies as a sexual minority (Gen. 4:25; also a shepherd, a humbler occupation, often characterized by homoerotic activity; see Joseph, Moses, David; → **1-2 Samuel**; the shepherds in → **Luke 2:8-20**). Yahweh's preference for Abel's offering, of the first and best from his flock, and rejection of Cain's casual choice from his crops evidently provoked Cain to murderous jealousy (Gen. 4:3-5). Yahweh's consistent option for the socially disadvantaged younger brother is a major theme throughout Genesis (see Isaac, Genesis 21; Jacob, Genesis 27 and 31; and Joseph, Genesis 37). As the first sexual minority in the Bible, Abel is also the first victim of murderous violence, whose blood, crying from the soil for justice (Gen. 4:10), also anticipates the blood of countless sexual minority martyrs throughout human history. At this writing (Jan-Feb, 2011), memorial services are being held throughout the world for Ugandan Anglican David Kato, martyred secretary-leader of Integrity, the Anglican/Episcopal gay organization, who also brought the sexual minority ecumenical ministry of Other Sheep to his country. (In the USA see Matthew Shepherd, 1998; Byrne Fone 2000:12-13, 413 / 2008 [Spanish]:31, 564; Louis-George Tin 2008: 418-19).

2. Sarah (sterile) and Hagar with Abraham, polygamy – and Keturah, Genesis 12–25.

For the authors of the New Testament, Sarah had achieved the status of a saint, characterized by her exemplary submission to her husband (→ **1 Peter 3:6**), but she pioneered in the biological process of procreation ("depositing seed," the role traditionally attributed to the male, → **Hebrews 11:11**), mother of the children of the divine promise (Rom. 9:9; Gal. 4:21-31) and justified by faith (jointly with Abraham, Rom. 4:9; anticipated in Is. 51:2). The Sarah of Genesis, however, is someone more human, complex, even sinful – and if "submissive", also a pioneer in the development of the tactic of a "subversive submission" (see the slaves and the women in → **Colossians and Ephesians**).

Although Abraham's principal wife, Sarah also was his half-sister (Gen. 20:12), a prohibited incestuous relationship according to → **Leviticus 18 and 20**. Thanks to the subterfuge imposed by her immigrant husband, Sarah spent time in Pharaoh's harem, but she left with her reputation intact (Gen. 12:15); she later had a similar adventure with King Abimelech (20:1-18). Sarah ("princess") was extraordinarily beautiful but was "sterile" and, in order to remedy the disastrous situation, pioneered "open marriages": she took the initiative, giving her slave Hagar to Abraham as his concubine (Gen. 16:1-3). Almost as soon as she was pregnant, Hagar began to mock Sarah for her infertility. Sarah interpreted the scorn and verbal attacks of her slave as a type of "violence" (*khamas*, 16:5) and responded with the first act of oppression indicated in the Bible: "Then Sarai dealt harshly (*'anah*) with her, and she ran away from her" (16:6). Exemplifying an option for the poor, an angel of Yahweh appeared to Hagar in the desert and convinced her to return and submit herself to Sarah; when she had done this, she gave birth to Ishmael (16:7-16; → the option of angels for the poor in **Luke 1–2 and 16**).

When Hagar's son Ishmael was a youth and Isaac, Sarah's son (born when she was 90 years old), a small child, Sarah was shocked when she saw Ishmael "playing" (sexually?) with Isaac (→ **Galatians 4:29**) and demanded that Abraham divorce Hagar. Abraham, after receiving marriage counseling from Yahweh, submitted to Sarah (!) and sent Hagar with Ishmael away, poorly provisioned, to die in the desert (child abuse?, Gen. 21:8-14; → **Galatians 4:30**). In this second marriage crisis, after having recommended divorce, God manifested an option in favor of the divorced concubine slave (now a single mother) and rescued Hagar and Ishmael, promising them a marvelous future: a lineage that would constitute a great nation (17:20; 16:10; 25:13-16, which are the Arabian tribes and the Arabic peoples; see NJB note 25:12b; HCSB note 25:12-18).

Undoubtedly exhausted after so much "submission" and so much assistance to "family values" (incest, twice a concubine of kings, bigamy, campaigns in favor of open marriage and then divorce), at 127 years of age Sarah died (Genesis 23). Abraham now was only 140 years old, a widower, and divorced from Hagar. Then he married Keturah and – without Viagra – fathered six more children with her (Gen. 25:1-2). Finally, at 175 years of age, Abraham also died and was buried by his sons, Isaac and Ishmael, in Machpelah, where Sarah's tomb was (Gen. 25:7-11).

3. Tamar and the levirate provisions for widows (Genesis 38)

Tamar (widow posing as “prostitute”) and Judah's three sons (Er, Onan and Shelah), 38:1-30. This revealing Yahwist narrative shows how the “scandalous” Canaanite Tamar achieved entry in the genealogies of both David (Ruth 4:12-21 and 1 Chron. 2:3-4, which omits Onan's punishment!) and of Jesus (Matt. 1:3). One would think that one of the four women in the genealogy of Jesus, to whom Genesis dedicates a long chapter, would be of maximum interest to all those who pride themselves in “taking the Bible seriously.” However, many works of traditional biblical erudition almost consign Tamar to the list of “the disappeared.” Recently, several feminist biblicists have managed to rescue Tamar from oblivion and some even work to draw edifying lessons from her for respectable women and contemporary Christian families. Tamar appears to be grateful for the rescue but somewhat resistant to the sexual ideologies that endeavor to rectify her life instead of celebrating her status as another sexual minority accepted by God. Genesis 38 would leave most modern readers perplexed, but decades of feminist research have illuminated the majority of the mysteries (Tikva Frymer-Kensky gives a brilliant summary in “Tamar 1”, 2001:161-162).

Judah, one of Jacob's twelve sons and ancestor of the principal tribe of Israel, separates himself from his brothers and marries a Canaanite, who gives him the three sons of this narrative (Er, Onan and Shelah). Then Judah obtains Tamar (undoubtedly another Canaanite) as a wife for Er, his eldest son. Er suddenly dies, young and without children, which the narrator takes for granted is divine punishment for some unknown sin (38:7; see Uzzah in 2 Samuel 6). Following the *Levirate* custom, common in the Ancient East (→ **Deuteronomy** 25:5-10; **Ruth**; **Mark** 12:18-27), Judah then says to Onan, Er's younger brother:

“Go in to (*bo'*); “Lie with,” NIV) your brother's wife and perform the duty of a brother-in-law to her; raise up offspring for your brother” [*levir*, Latin for brother-in-law; see *levirate*]. But since Onan knew that the offspring would not be [legally reckoned as] his, he spilled his semen on the ground whenever he *went in to* (*bo'*) his brother's wife, so that he would not give offspring to his brother. What he did was displeasing in the sight of the Lord, who put him to death also (Gen. 38:8-10).

For “go in to (*bo'*)” as a euphemism for sexual relations (not “marriage”!), see the word play in the title of Psalm 51, with reference to David's “going into” Bathsheba. Modern “family values” commentaries notwithstanding, the text refers only to sexual relations (“go in to, penetrate”) and says nothing about marriage (Claus Westermann, *Genesis*, 1982/86 III:52, “Excursus on the Levirate” and texts cited). The narrative concerning Tamar revolves around the responsibility of the *levirate*; → **Deuteronomy**, *levirate*), a common custom in the Ancient East and still practiced today among tribes in Africa and Asia (DHHBE notes 38:8, 10; NOAB note 38:8-10). Onan refused to impregnate Tamar to avoid losing the portion of his inheritance that the son born to Tamar would receive from Judah. Following the *levirate* custom, after Onan's death Judah should have sent Shelah, his third son, to have sexual relations with Tamar and procreate an heir, who would be reckoned as the son of Er, the deceased brother. This is what Judah promised his daughter-in-law (38:11):

“Remain a widow in your father's house until my son Shelah *grows up*” (NRSV).

However, perhaps for fear Tamar might have been the cause of Er's and Onan's deaths, Judah decided not to send his youngest son Shelah to this *femme fatale*, but left her as a widow in her father's house, even when his own wife had died and Shelah had grown up. When Tamar found out that Judah was going to shear his sheep (a time of feasting, 1 Sam. 25:4, 8, 11, 36) and thus would pass nearby, she concocted a risky plan: covering her face with a veil, she sat by the roadside like a prostitute. When Judah passed by – undoubtedly very happy from the feast and the abundance of wine – he invited her to have sexual relations with him in exchange for a kid goat but then gave her as a guarantee his staff, his signet and his cord.

Although Judah had not fulfilled his promise of giving her his third son, Tamar had the responsibility with regard to her father-in-law of avoiding other sexual relationships. Thus, after three months, when Judah found out Tamar was pregnant, he exercised his patriarchal authority and ordered her to be burned (38:24):

As she was being brought out, she sent word to her father-in-law, “It was the owner of these who made me pregnant.” And she said, “Take note, please, whose these are, the signet and the cord and the staff.” Then Judah acknowledged them and said, “She is more just than I, since I did not give her to my son Shelah.” And he did not lie with her again (Gen. 38:25-26, author's translation).

Tamar's “scandalous” conduct in reality was more “just” than that of Judah, since she acted with loyalty to and solidarity with her deceased husband, rescuing his name and his inheritance from oblivion. Furthermore, as Tikva Frymer-Kensky explains: “In-law incest rules are suspended for the purpose of the levirate.... Once she is pregnant, future sex with a late son's wife would be incestuous” (“Tamar 1,” WS 2001:161-162). Genesis 38 thus describes a levirate custom, which obligated the male to have sexual relations to produce a son (“Lie with,” NIV 38:8), but not to “marry” the widow (*pace* the Spanish NVI, 38:8, “*cásate* = marry her”, and many commentaries; → **Deuteronomy 25:5-10**). **See Excursus below.**

Although Tamar has not had “good press” among traditional commentators, this long account full of suspense and humor probably was originally told and conserved among Israelite women for whom Tamar was a heroine. She found herself in a weak position: a foreigner and twice widowed, with a father-in-law who refused to fulfill the requirements of the *levirate* to perpetuate the name of his son and to be able to distribute the part of the inheritance that belonged to his descendants. Acting astutely and with courage, Tamar risked her life, in solidarity with her deceased husband, and was vindicated as a “just” person (so recognized publicly by her father-in-law and implicitly by God; cf. the justification of the prostitute Rahab in → **James 2:25-26**).

Claus Westermann concludes: “It is characteristic of the patriarchal stories that revolt against the established order, where it is a question of injustice, is initiated by women only. And in each case the justice of such self-defense is recognized.” (*Genesis*, 1982/86 III:52, “Excursus on the Levirate”; see Hagar, Rebekah, Leah, Rachel, Lot's daughters; also the midwives in → **Exodus 1**). The nineteenth century dean of evangelical commentators, Franz Delitzsch (1888), even concluded that Tamar is a “saint” of the Hebrew Bible, a conclusion that Westermann rejects because the narrative says nothing explicitly about God's actions or words. Perhaps a new concept of holiness is needed! (See **3.14 Onan** below).

Excursus.* Levirate traditions (sex with the widow of a deceased brother); see Ruth below, → Deuteronomy 25:5-10 (cf. Lev. 18:16; 20:21; → **Mark 12:18-27** // **Mat. 22:23-33**; // **Luke 20:27-40**)

A unique exception to the Levitical prohibitions of incest is the law in Deut. 25:5-10 regarding levirate marriage (from the Latin *levir*, *brother-in-law*) which, in effect, commands what Leviticus (18:16 and 20:21) prohibits: incestuous relationships with the sister-in-law (Lev. 18:16; 20:21). If a brother died without a descendant, the surviving brother was obligated to have sexual relations with the widowed sister-in-law in order to ensure the continuity of the brother's name (lineage). As in the command to make Isaac a burnt offering (Genesis 22), the Bible thus presents us with a “teleological suspension” of ethical norms (Soren Kierkegaard). The hunger of David's troops also resulted in a suspension of the prohibition of eating consecrated bread (→ **1 Samuel 21:1-6**; **Mark 2:23-28**). In the custom and law of the *levirate*, the necessity of the widow to have a son results in the suspension of the prohibition against an incestuous relationship with the sister-in-law. That is, in general what is prohibited in Leviticus becomes a legal requirement in Deut. 25:5-10 (which reflects a later transformation of the old customs described in Genesis 38 and Ruth). Similarly, John Boswell concluded that what was prohibited for persons with the common heterosexual orientation should be permitted for persons with a homosexual orientation (see → **Leviticus 18:21, 20:13** and → **Romans 1:26-27** and references to Boswell). Regardless, the Bible makes it clear that wisdom and discernment are necessary in the interpretation and contemporary application of the commandments and norms. See *40 Myths in the Seven “Clobber” Texts Unmasked with Exegetical Studies* by Tom Hanks, available at www.fundotrasovejas.org.ar/ingles/ingles.html, Reviews, “Jacob's Wound (Jennings Jacob).

* Claus Westermann, *Genesis*, 1982/86 III:52, “Excursus on the Levirate”; Jeffrey Tigay, *Deuteronomy* 1996:482-483; Frank Frick, WS 2001:198-199. For the modern practice, common in Asian and African tribes, see “Levirate marriage” in <http://en.Wikipedia>.

In addition to the discrepancy with the Levitical laws against incest with a sister-in-law, scholars have noted several differences between the *narrative customs* (Tamar in **Genesis 38; Ruth**), the levirate *law* in → **Deuteronomy 25:5-10**, and fundamentalist “family values” ideology as a framework for biblical interpretation:

- In Genesis 38 the widow Tamar only had the right to a descendant, not marriage (as in Ruth and Deuteronomic law), which provokes considerable difficulty for the insistence that sexual relations should only occur in a *permanent, exclusive* marital relationship.
- However, in the law of the *levirate* in Deut. 25:5-10 the brother is obligated to take the widow as his wife, resulting in polygamy in many cases, not just to have sexual relations with her in order to procreate a son. The levirate law thus offers considerable difficulty and undermines any sexual ideology that considers polygamy as always contrary to God’s will (by chance do three become one?); cf. same sex relationships and the language of “the two [male and female] shall become one” (Genesis 2:24; Mark 10:8).
- Deut. 25:5-10 limits levirate marriage to the *brothers* who “reside together” (before dividing their inheritance), but in Genesis 38 the responsibility extended to the father-in-law (Judah) and in Ruth to Boaz, an even more distant relative of the mother-in-law Naomi.
- Deut. 25:7 stipulates that the brother’s responsibility is to perpetuate the name of the deceased brother; however, Ruth’s genealogy (Ruth 4:18-21) names only the biological father (Boaz), not the distant relative whose place he took (Mahlon).
- In Genesis and Deuteronomy levirate responsibility is *obligatory*, but in Ruth it is *optional*.

On the day of questions, Jesus was obligated to deal with the levirate law (→ **Mark 12:18-27 // Matthew 22:23-33; // Luke 20:27-40**). His answer included the affirmation that angels do not marry, which in the Neoplatonic tradition was interpreted as an indication that angels are spiritual in the sense that they are non-material beings and, consequently, incapable of coitus with anyone. Other texts, however, make clear the sexual capacity of angels (→ **Genesis 6:1-4, 18-19, Jude 7** and **1 Corinthians 11:10**). While the levirate law does not represent the ideal, for certain situations of widows where the alternatives are worse, a type of “open marriage” was not only permitted but actually commanded by God.

However, the law and practice of levirate law, never abandoned in the New Testament, present serious problems for ideological fundamentalism. Fundamentalists who demand a simple “return to the Bible” for modern sexual questions must explain why in churches today no hands are cut off (Deut. 25:11-12), no one takes an oath in court with their hand on male genitals (instead of the Bible; see Gen. 24:1-4), neither are males with deceased brothers obligated to fulfill the responsibility of levirate sex/marriage, commanded in the Hebrew Bible, cited in the New Testament and never revoked. In recent decades articles tend to impose rabbinic and Christian heterosexist emphasis on “family values” but overlook the diversity in the biblical texts noted by Westermann and the older sources he cites.

4. Joseph, “the best little boy in the world” (Genesis 37–50).

Joseph, 17 years old, Jacob's eleventh son and Rachel's first (Gen. 30:22-24; 35:24), was his father's favorite, a son so pampered that his ten older brothers were jealous. Jacob commanded that a very “special (*passim*; 37:3, 23, 32) tunic” (*ketonet*) be made for Joseph. Biblicists traditionally interpreted this obscure descriptive Hebrew word (*passim*) as “of many colors” (KJV). However, lately some writers and composers have suggested that Jacob recognized that Joseph was gay and wanted to celebrate it, dressing him with a tunic with the design and colors of the rainbow (→ **Revelation 10:1**; see the Broadway musical, *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*, Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice). Perhaps that is why it is more common now to question the translation “of many colors” and prefer:

- “long robe with sleeves” (NRSV); “ornate robe” (NIV);
- “elaborately embroidered coat” (The Message), “decorated tunic” (NJB)

Regardless, Joseph leaves the impression of being “the best little boy in the world” (to cite *The Best Little Boy in the World*, Andrew Tobias’ classic gay autobiography). To the insult of having received a splendid tunic of

royal style (2 Sam. 13:18-19), Joseph was in the habit of adding the insult of informing his father about his brothers' bad reputation. And to make things worse, he told everyone about his two dreams in which his parents and all his brothers bowed down before him (see the fulfillment in 42:6). Naturally, the majority of his brothers soon wanted to kill the spoiled kid. Only Reuben convinced the others that it would be better to sell him as a slave. By divine providence (the principal theological theme of the story, 45:5-7; 50:19-21), the young and handsome Joseph becomes the slave in Egypt of Potiphar, whom the Bible refers to as a “eunuch” (*saris*, Gen. 39:1; another sexual minority; cf. the cup bearer and baker, also eunuchs, *saris*, 40:2; → **Deuteronomy** 23:1; **Esther**; **Isaiah** 56:3-7; **Matthew** 19:12).

Because of ignorance concerning eunuchs, many biblicists rush to conclude that Potiphar could not have been literally a eunuch since he was married (DHHBE, notes Gén. 37:36 and Jer. 29:1-2). However, although eunuchs could not procreate children, they could marry, since marriage is a social state and marriages for political and economic reasons were common in the Ancient East (Janet Everhart 2002:137-155; → **Esther**; **Matthew** 19:12). The recognition of Potiphar as a eunuch (literally) may help us to understand the deception and sexual desperation of his wife, who tries to seduce Joseph. “A midrash [Jewish interpretation], finding it difficult to believe that Joseph was altogether innocent, likens him to one ‘who would stand in the market place, put make-up around his eyes, straighten up his hair, and swing his heels.’ Mrs. Potiphar’s proposition was thus a punishment for his narcissism and machismo (*Gen. Rab.* 87.3),” cited in JSB (note 39:6-7).

The text (Gen. 39:6b) stresses the fact that the young Joseph was “well-built” (NIV, *yefeh to’ar*, muscular) and “good-looking” (*yefeh mar’eh*; see Sarah, 12:11; Rebekah, 26:7; David, 1 Sam. 16:8), but he was also pious. The Genesis writers do not aim to contrast the scandalous Tamar, who acted as a prostitute (Genesis 38, Yahwist), and the pious Joseph, who flees from the invitation to adultery (Genesis 39, Elohist). Both Tamar and Joseph are in situations of social weakness and suffer slander and oppression, and both take the initiative and achieve socio-economic vindication (suggesting to the reader that the hand of God is guiding them; Gen. 45:5; 50:19-21). Biblicists usually refer to Genesis 39 as the narrative of Joseph's *temptation*. However, the word “temptation” implies a heterosexist presupposition that takes for granted that Joseph was heterosexual and felt inwardly an attraction and temptation because of Potiphar's wife's demand that he commit adultery with her. The text never says or suggests that Joseph felt “tempted” – it only affirms that the woman tried to seduce him.

On refusing the demands of Potiphar's wife (“lie with me”), Joseph points out that such an act would betray the confidence that Potiphar had placed in him and concludes: “How then could I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?” (39:8-9). The previous narrative texts concerning Sarah (12:10-20 // 20:3) and Rebekah (26:10) make it clear that adultery, as theft of the sexual property of another male, was already prohibited (→ **Exodus** 20). Thus, the prohibitions of adultery in later legal codes (Ex. 20:14, etc.) are not novel heavenly revelations but confirmations of the norms considered wise and necessary in order to maintain viable communities (see Cain in Genesis 4, the “do not kill” of the Decalogue, Rachel's theft of domestic gods, Gen. 31:19-55).

After being sold as a slave and incarcerated (two oppressive experiences), Joseph becomes the second in authority, under Pharaoh, over all of Egypt, the primary empire of the period. Even though liberated from slavery and jail, on the arrival of his brothers in search of grain, Joseph remained as a “brother in the closet” and only after many tricks does he leave the closet and reveal his identity as brother. His suffering, under divine providence, served to free his father and brothers from famine. When Judah also offers to suffer in place of his brother Benjamin, the brothers experience a profound reconciliation. The alienation that began in Genesis 3 thus finds resolution at the end of the book. However, at the same time, on leaving the parents of the twelve tribes in Egypt, Joseph's narrative prepares the way for the liberation of → **Exodus**.

Although Potiphar's wife remains nameless in Genesis, it is she, with her violent effort to seduce the young and attractive Hebrew slave (Gen. 39:6), who triggers all the following important events: the imprisonment, Joseph's release and exaltation, the emigration of the Israelites to Egypt during the famine in Palestine and, finally, the most important event in the Hebrew Bible – the Exodus (→ Susan Hollis 2001:184). The account of the attempted seduction has many literary parallels, for example, Ishtar’s effort to marry Gilgamesh, another hero known for his apparent homosexual orientation. (Concerning Gilgamesh and Enkidu, see **Jonathan and... David**, below; also → **1-2 Samuel**).

After Joseph's imprisonment, as part of his vindication, Pharaoh gives him Asenath as his wife (Gen. 41:45) and they had two sons (Manasseh and Ephraim, 41:50-52) and no more (46:20). But as we never read that Joseph felt "tempted" by Potiphar's wife, we also never read that he *wanted* to marry Asenath or that he loved her. Furthermore, Asenath was the daughter of the powerful priest of On, and such political marriages, very common among the royalty of antiquity, did not imply love or sexual attraction but the fulfillment of common social obligations. Quite similar is the narrative concerning Uriah, who did not want to sleep with his beautiful wife, the frustrated Bathsheba, who tempted David; → **1-2 Samuel** 11:2-13). Of course, the dominant heterosexist propaganda never sleeps and cannot leave such cases in doubt, and so the apocryphal book, *Joseph and Asenath* (James Charlesworth 1985, Vol. 2:177-247), races to fill the void with erotic details of the relationship between Joseph and Asenath and her melodramatic conversion.

5. Madame Rahab (*zona*, sex-worker) and the two spies (Joshua 2; 6:16-25). Rahab is not a common street prostitute since she has her own house where she practices her profession. This house does not belong to her parents since they have to be brought to the house to escape destruction (2:18; → Phyllis Bird 1997:211). See Rahab's *mother* and father, *sisters/brothers* (2:13, 18; 6:17, 22-23; cf. the sons and *daughters* of Achan (without a wife), destroyed with the father (7:24). According to → **Hebrews** 11:31, Rahab is an outstanding example of faith (one of two women named in the list; see Sarah, 11:11). But James insists that God chose the *poor* to be "rich in faith" (James 2:5) and names Rahab (with Abraham) as an example of an authentic faith that is manifested in praxis/works (2:25).

- According to → **Matthew**, Rahab was one of four women in the genealogy of Jesus (Mat. 1:5; also see Tamar, Ruth and Bathsheba), two of them Gentiles and all representatives of sexual minorities (Mat. 1:5; → **Joshua**, Amy Jill Levine 2000:141-142; → **Matthew** bibliography: W. E. Davies and Dale Allison 1998:172-173; Robert Gundry 1994:14; Craig Keener 1999:79; *pace* Bruce Waltke ISBE.). According to Joshua, Rahab enjoyed a long life (Joshua 6:25, "ever since"). Matthew was not aware of the date of the Deuteronomistic editing of the book (sixth and seventh centuries B.C.), but he also attributes to Rahab a miraculous longevity, since he says she married Salmon, who lived two centuries later. She was the mother of Boaz, King David's great grandfather (tenth century).

- → James (2:25) places Rahab on an equal footing with Abraham as an example of faith expressed in works.

- The author of → **Hebrews** (11:30-31) also names Rahab as an example of faith, but, notably, Hebrews speaks of the miraculous fall of the walls of Jericho without mentioning Joshua:

By faith the walls of Jericho fell after they had been encircled for seven days. By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had received the spies in peace (Heb. 11:30-31).

Rather than name Joshua, Hebrews prefers to emphasize the people's faith (the implicit subject, 11:30-31). The "peace" that the two spies experienced, according to Hebrews, would include a certain sexual relief (*shalom*, "well-being in every way"; → **Song of Songs** 8:10; → 1 Corinthians 7:15). Notably, then, Rahab appears in three key texts in the New Testament, but Joshua (the book's other hero) only appears in one negative text (Heb. 4:8).

Traditionally of course, the church assumed that the two spies received hospitality from the prostitute without taking advantage of her sexual services and that Rahab, upon her conversion, immediately abandoned her scandalous profession and was given a sewing machine. Also, according to certain Jewish traditions (Josephus and Targums), Rahab was not a prostitute but only an innkeeper. Unfortunately for such purified versions, the Bible provides them with no support. The two spies entered the house of the prostitute and immediately "went to bed there" – without ascertaining anything relative to their mission (2:1). Furthermore, the visit to the prostitute was all that the spies did to obtain information. "Probably the narrator intends to titillate by reminding readers of an immemorial symbiosis between military service and bawdy house" (→ Boling and Wright 1982:145; see 141). The assuredness of the spies in entering Rahab's house is impressive: they know who she is,

where she lives and what her profession is (→ Frank Cross 1973; → Steven McKenzie 1992:161-168; 2007:106-108). Martin Woudstra (gay), president of the Evangelical Theological Society in 1979, cites the commentary by A. Gelin (1955) as the first affirmation of a sexual act between Rahab and the spies (→ Martín Woudstra 1981:70, note 8). The original text contains six elements suggestive of sexual services, which have been erased by tradition (→ Richard Nelson 1997:36-44):

- Joshua *secretly* [Hebrew, *kheresh*] sent... (omitted in the LXX);
- two *young* spies... [*neaniskoi*, LXX], 2:1a, 23; (also see the MT, Joshua 6:23);
- *they lay down there* (Young's Literal Translation) [in the prostitute Rahab's house], 2:1b, *shakab*, see Gen. 19:33, 35; Phyllis Bird points out that the LXX tries to eliminate the sexual nuance of the Hebrew with the translation *kataluein* ("they lodged", → Phyllis Bird 1997:210, note 31), a bias still reflected in many versions: "spent the night" (NRSV, JSB); "stayed" (NIV);
- *tonight* [2:3, LXX: placed in 2:2 in the TM "to minimize the sexual implications" (→ Richard Nelson 1997:38, note d);
- *those who entered in you* [Siriach; that is, "*in your house*", Hebrew]; Phyllis Bird points out the repetition of the verb "enter", with its sexual nuance, 2:1, 3; see heading of Psalm 51, NRSV;
- the *crimson/scarlet cord* has sexual connotations, perhaps as a sign of a house of prostitution (→ Phyllis Bird 1997:213). (See the lips of a woman, Song of Solomon 4:3; Tamar, prostituting herself, in Gen. 38:18, 25, 28; cf. the blood on the lintels in Exodus 12.)

Woudstra also recognizes the first five elements, but in titling the second chapter "Spies sent to Jericho" – without mentioning Rahab – he reflects a certain prejudice against her which the New Testament authors did not share (→ Woudstra 1981:70).

Trent Butler, another evangelical commentator, titles the chapter "A Prostitute's Profession" and recognizes elements that suggest sexual activity (→ Trent Butler, 1983:24). Butler, then, interprets the text as irony: the house of Madam Rahab in Jericho enjoyed international fame and the two young spies hurried to go directly to her, without asking directions, obviously looking for sexual service from Rahab, in addition to information concerning the enemy. The priorities of the spies are evident, since before ascertaining anything they go to bed ("lay down" literally, 2:1). However, their fantasies are frustrated; immediately the king's messengers interrupt them – like gay bar owners today Madam Rahab was accustomed to being watched and invaded by the royal police. Like the midwives of Exodus 1, Rahab lies to the royal messengers and God blesses her lie. The spies go to bed two more times (2:4, 6). But when Rahab approaches them, she preaches to them about her faith and proposes "other business" – concerning the survival of her relatives – instead of providing the expected sexual service. Rahab finally lets the two spies go, hanging by a rope from her window, sending them off totally disappointed. Butler recognizes that Rahab's confession of faith (Joshua 2:9-11) is an insertion by a deuteronomistic editor, but in this case, much of the irony that he perceives is owed to the later editor, while the original story appears to suggest sexual activity. Butler's interpretation may well reflect the intention of the deuteronomistic editor, but the original story does not appear to be so pious. With her confession of faith, added in the first deuteronomistic edition of the book, Rahab, the Canaanite, in effect evangelizes the two Israelite spies, and through them all of Israel, including King Josiah's generation (seventh century B.C.). With the final deuteronomistic writing, after the destruction of Jerusalem (587/86 B.C.), Rahab's testimony becomes "apologetics" and explains the cause of the disaster (idolatry).

The arrangement with the spies that allows Rahab and her relatives to live obviously contradicts the rules of Yahweh's wars (Deuteronomy 20; cf. the punishment of Achan and his family for disobeying these rules, Joshua 7). This event is one of several signs that such laws represented an ideal for the succeeding generations and indicate Yahweh's firm opposition to idolatry (→ **Ezra-Nehemiah**), while the possession of the land in reality was a gradual process that followed other less rigorous and cruel rules of conduct.

The "Wars of Yahweh". Especially since Gerhard von Rad's study (→ von Rad 1951/1991, *Holy War in Ancient Israel*), it has been common to speak of "holy war" in the Hebrew Bible, since the texts describe wars with religious language (Ex. 15:3) and war in Israel was a ritualistic act, a rite of the religious community. However, Gwilym Jones demonstrated that such a phrase does not occur in the texts, which rather refer to "Yahweh's wars," since the conduct of war is not holy and has no value in itself (→ Jones 1975:642-58). At any rate, the

laws of war in Deuteronomy 20:16-18 command the practice of *kerem*, the extermination of all the inhabitants (women, children and even animals) of the conquered Canaanite cities (Jos. 6:17-18, 21; 7:1-13, 15). The book of Joshua, in the texts that reflect the deuteronomistic editing of the seventh and sixth centuries B.C., seeks to apply such laws literally. However, the stories of the Canaanite Rahab (Joshua 2 and 6:16-25) and of the Israelite Achan (Joshua 7) subvert the ideology of the war laws: they point out that a Canaanite woman *faithful* to Yahweh, along with her relatives, is blessed with long life, while an *unfaithful* and disobedient Israelite suffers the penalty of death, along with everyone in his household. The book of Joshua carefully presents Rahab, the Canaanite prostitute, and Achan, the covetous Israelite, in a dialectical connection that serves to subvert the ideology of war (→ Hamlin 1983:19-20):

* Rahab , poor Canaanite, 2:1, 6	↔	Achan , prosperous Israelite (tribe of Judah), 7:17, 24
* hid the spies, 2:6	↔	took and hid the booty, 7:21-22
* made a pact with Israel, 2:12	↔	broke the pact with Yahweh, 7:11
* showed loyalty (<i>khesed</i>), 2:12, 14	↔	betrayed Israel and Yahweh, 7:1, 25
* caused victory against enemies	↔	caused defeat in war, 7:10-12
* saved her relatives from death, 6:25	↔	caused the death of everyone in his house, 7:25

This strong dialectical contrast between Rahab, the Canaanite who is faithful to Yahweh and Israel, and Achan, the unfaithful Israelite, demonstrates that the value and essential criterion of divine judgment is not blood or ancestry but authentic faith in Yahweh (see Appendix below). The result is a faithful practice of solidarity with the weak and oppressed (→ **Ezra** 9:2; **Matthew** 8:11-12). “From Israel’s perspective Madame Rahab is the epitome of the outsider. She is a woman, a prostitute, and a foreigner” (→ Danna Nolan Fewell 1998:72), not reduced to her profession as a prostitute, but identified primarily as a “woman” (2:1, 4; 6:22, 23).

6. Joshua, an unmarried "savior-liberator" (thanks to the “good hooker”). The New Testament notably only mentions Joshua in a negative reference (Greek: *Iesous*, Heb. 4:8; in other texts the word is translated “Jesus,” as in Matt. 1:21). No text in the Bible indicates that he was married. Joshua’s genealogy in → 1 Chronicles 7:25-27 indicates ten generations of ancestors, but it ends with Joshua, with no descendants (→ **1-2 Chronicles**, Sara Japhet 1993:183-184). To fill this disturbing void, Jewish tradition says that Joshua married Rahab (Talmud b. Mevilla 14b-15a), thus rescuing two reputations at one shot – and giving us another example of the way that the ideology of the majority (“family values”) imposes its propaganda and erases the evidence of the presence of sexual minorities (cf. → **Matthew** 1:5, which creates an impressive miracle by having Rahab married to Salmon, who lived two centuries later). The Jewish and Christian traditions recognize in Joshua “a military genius and a spiritual giant” (→ Walke 1982:1134), but as a single man, not married to Rahab, we should understand his life as similar to that of shamans in other cultures: spiritual persons and almost always sexual minorities. Biblical traditions emphasize Joshua’s military exploits (Ex. 17:9-13; Joshua 2–12) as well as his spirituality (Ex. 24:1; 33:11; Num. 11:26-29; cf. Joshua 5:15 with Ex. 3:5) and wisdom in administration (Joshua 1:6-9; 8:2; 13–21). They demonstrate that a shaman or male sexual minority need not be weak or effeminate.

Nonetheless, some modern versions suggest that Joshua was married and had children. Incidentally, the book’s patriarchal-hierarchical character is evident in the eloquent exhortation at the end, where Joshua speaks for his whole “household”:

“But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord” (24:15).

Certain modern versions substitute the misleading term “family” (The Message, New Living Translation, Good News Translation, etc.) for the original Hebrew word “household” (see “household” or “house” in the NRSV, NIV, KJV and others; → see **Acts** 16:31). However, examples of households of unmarried people abound in the Bible (Lydia, Mary and Martha, → **Romans** 16). Rahab as well, without being married, was responsible for relatives and perhaps children, all saved from destruction by the agreement she made with the spies.

In fact, in modern studies (Albrecht Alt; Martín Noth) it is common to conclude that Joshua originally was only a military leader of the tribe of Ephraim (Joshua 10:10-14; see 19:49-50; 24:30), whose name was added in other

accounts of the Pentateuch and of Joshua under the monarchy (the principal deuteronomic writing under Josiah, 640-609 B.C.) to strengthen national unity and a sense of common origins. Joshua is presented as a precursor to the ideal kings, especially Josiah, for his courage and obedience (Joshua 1:6-9); his integrity (1:7; 23:6); his support for celebrating the Passover correctly (5:10-12); and his commitment to the Law (8:30-35); (→ Richard Nelson 1997:21-22).

According to 5:1-9, Joshua circumcised all the men of the nation – some 600,000. (See Ex. 12:37, Num. 11:21; cf. Ex. 38:26, Num. 3:39; → **Exodus**, William Propp 1999:414.) Thus, not without reason the hill where Joshua labored was called the "Hill of the Foreskins". If Joshua worked 10 hours, that would be 60,000 men per hour or one thousand per minute. It is doubtful he could have performed such a delicate surgical procedure so quickly (a Vatican commission is seeking to authenticate the miracle). But with a task so enormous he would have worn out several flint knives. Surgeon Joshua's preference for an instrument of the Stone Age instead of knives of iron suggests that his medical school did not figure among the best of the period, but every progressive religious leader also has her or his "conservative" side.

The story of Joshua's death in the Septuagint (LXX) states: "There [in Thamnasarach] they put with him into the tomb in which they buried him, the knives of stone with which he circumcised the children of Israel in Galgala, when he brought them out of Egypt, as the Lord appointed them; and there they are to this day." (Joshua 24:30; 21:40 in the Septuagint version also refers to these flint knives, obviously a matter of special interest in that tradition.) Richard Nelson suggests that the Septuagint of 24:30 represents "just the sort of folkloristic, midrashic detail typical of textual expansions" (→ Richard Nelson 1997:282), but the Septuagint confirms that the first readers interpreted the account literally and as a personal achievement by Joshua. (For the same reason Nelson also rejects the Septuagint addition in 21:40.) So much zeal and enthusiasm for the rite of circumcision has no parallel in the Bible and in history; see Paul concerning Timothy's circumcision (→ **Acts** 16:1-3) and the zeal of Zipporah (→ **Exodus** 4:24-26), but cf. Moses' indifference.

7. Ruth of Moab (!) and Naomi of Bethlehem, ever our paradigmatic loving couple

The folk history of Ruth, a masterwork of Hebrew narrative art, tells the experience of two strong women "in the days when the judges ruled" (1:1; → **Esther**, the only other Bible book named for a woman). The book, probably originating in a circle of wise women as oral narrative, is unique in the canon of the Hebrew Bible and Israelite patriarchal society because it celebrates one woman's love and devotion to another (→ Ina Johanne Petermann [Batmartha] 1998/99:104; see also Mona West 2006:190). Previously the book commonly was dated after the Babylonian exile (538-400 B.C.), but recent studies indicate linguistic characteristics that suggest an earlier origin, sometime after David (950-700 B.C.; JSB, JB, HCSB). Perhaps the oral form of Ruth was early, but was then developed and revised. The concluding genealogy, ending with David (Ruth 4:18-22) would have been especially significant after the Babylonian exile that ended the Davidic monarchy. After the exile, the book would have encouraged those who returned to trust God's promises that they would be blessed, like Naomi returning from Moab to Bethlehem with Ruth. The positive depiction of the Moabite Ruth may be polemical, protesting the campaigns of → **Ezra** 9-10 and → **Nehemiah** 13 against mixed marriages (→ **Ruth**, Marjo C. A. Korpel 2001), or of → **Leviticus** 18 and 20 against fourteen kinds of incestuous unions. In later Jewish tradition Ruth became the designated reading for the annual festival of Weeks/Pentecost, the first harvest (barley); cf. the famine that prompted the departure of Naomi with her husband and two sons to Moab.

The strong predominance of Ruth and Naomi in each division of the book suggests to many that the author must have been a woman (→ Phyllis Trible 1992), but not one who exalted matriarchy over patriarchy. However, if not a woman, the author certainly shows extraordinary sensitivity to the sufferings and perspectives of women. Postexilic readers, facing the dominant exclusive ideologies reflected in → **Obadiah**, **Nahum**, **Ezra**, **Nehemiah**, would find in Ruth support for a more universal and inclusive theology (→ **Jonah**). After the exile, with the monarchy eliminated, readers tired of corrupt priests and governments probably desired the restoration of an autonomous monarchy rather than the puppet governors imposed by foreign empires (perhaps signaled by the final Davidic genealogy).

Discrepancies exist between Ruth and the Law (perhaps finally edited by Ezra, ca. 458 B.C.). According to Genesis, Moab was Lot's son, fruit of his incestuous union with his older daughter (19:37). The Law forbade Israelites to marry women from Moab and Edom (Deut. 23:2-8; cf. Num. 25:1-5; Hosea 9:10; Ezra 9:1-2, 10; Neh. 13:1-3, 23-31), but the book of Ruth celebrates precisely this kind of union (see Jesus' "Good Samaritan," → Luke 10:25-37; cf. John 4). Is this because Ruth's story originated prior to the law? Or perhaps later, to modify the law, make it more flexible, or to insist on the spirit and intention behind the law? The law sought to protect the rights of the poor to share the harvest (Deut. 24:19-22; Lev. 19:9-10; 23:22 [the Feast of Weeks/Pentecost]; cf. Ex. 23:10-11). According to David Pleins, the book of Ruth "profoundly presents the implicit recognition that law must be driven by a covenant motivation or a motivation that the community has together shared in the exodus experience of freedom from economic oppression" (David Pleins 2001:195).

The levirate law (from Latin *levir*, "brother-in-law") sought to assure the preservation of name and property in the cases of males who died without sons, and also to guarantee economic support for the widow (see above **Tamar, Genesis 38, Excursus**; → **Deuteronomy 25:5-10**; cf. Lev. 18:16, 20:21). Why, however, do the narratives of Ruth 3-4 and Genesis 38 (Judah and Tamar) not follow the law literally? And if Jesus wanted to insist in the authority of the Law in each detail (Matt. 5:17-20), as many today would insist, should Christians obey the levirate law (Mark 12:19; Luke 20:28; Matt. 22:24)? Ruth and Naomi take advantage of the levirate legal provisions but do not achieve an independent liberation (4:10); rather they enable Boaz to be responsible and fulfill the law or to incarnate its values (→ Robert Hubbard 1988:48-51). Boaz's "spreading the cloak" over Ruth (3:9) signified his acceptance of her marriage proposal (Ezek. 16:8). Mona West (2006:190) also emphasizes the place of *go'el* (redeemer) legal responsibilities in Ruth (2:20; 3:9, 12-13; 4:1,3-4, 6-7; cf. Leviticus 25), concluding that the laws are "intentionally ambiguous in order to provide possibilities for the characters to act above and beyond what society requires of them" (190, citing the study of David Biale, 1997).

The book of Ruth provides us with classical examples of multiple identities: Ruth and Naomi are *women*, in addition to being *poor* and representatives of *sexual minorities* (widows; lesbians?). Ruth, moreover, is a foreign immigrant, but not an idolater, since she decided to abandon her country (Moab) and her god (Chemosh) to enter into covenant relationship with Yahweh, the Liberator God of the Exodus, worshipped by her mother-in-law Naomi, and the deceased husbands. The multiple identities represented by Ruth and Naomi, both in the Bible and in other history, generally represent weak persons and groups who suffer oppression and violence at the hands of the stronger (prosperous males, married and living in their own country). The history of Ruth thus demonstrates the fundamental error of any liberation theology that claims to "opt for the poor" but demonstrates solidarity only with "the poor" as an abstract identity – forgetting that in real life the "poor" may be women, sexual minorities, foreigners, descendants of incestuous unions, etc. (Marcella Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology* 2001:passim).

Boaz makes passing reference to youths "rich or poor" whom Ruth didn't seek out (3:10), the only reference to the poor in the entire book. However, as David Pleins indicates, like many folk stories, Ruth seeks to defend specific norms of justice (Pleins, *Social Visions* 2001:194). The entire book relates the experience of a household impoverished by famine and then of poor widows bereft of their husbands' support. The widows' experience does not support the ideology of the Exodus (Jewish immigrants enslaved and impoverished by the imperial oppression). Neither does Ruth support Proverbs' ideology (warning sons of Israel's elite that their sloth and vices would impoverish them). The story of Ruth demonstrates the danger of drawing sweeping theological conclusions about poverty from methodologically-limited word studies of poor/poverty (an occasional weakness in the excellent works of David Pleins [1992, 2001]; cf. Thomas Hanks 1992:414-415; 2000). The Bible refers to more than 20 causes for poverty, indicating the great complexity of human experience in this area (Thomas Hanks, *God So Loved the Third World: The Biblical Vocabulary of Oppression* [Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1983], 33-39; cf. 1982:44-46, omitted from the English edition). As Marcella Althaus-Reid points out: "Any theology concerned with issues of wealth and poverty needs to consider more the incoherence of oppression and its multiple dimensions rather than its commonalities" (Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology* 2001:169).

According to the Exodus paradigm, oppression is the basic cause for poverty, and the Bible spotlights this cause (more than 160 texts), among some 20 other causes. Ruth, however, demonstrates that ecological elements (famine) and family tragedies (the deaths of the husbands of Naomi, Orpah and Ruth) may be decisive, rather than the oppression seen in Exodus and the vices denounced in Proverbs. Thus, from a biblical perspective,

especially in the New Testament, “the problem” is not so much the poor and their poverty but the rich and their wealth. However, since the Bible commands solidarity with the poor in their needs and suffering, we may conclude that any effective praxis must start from an analysis of the complex multiple causes for poverty and not isolate ourselves and console ourselves with cruel ideologies that blame the poor as alone responsible. (Proverbs occasionally faults the poor, but the sons of the wealthy are the ones warned against sloth and vices.)

Lesbian scholar Phyllis Trible shows how the placement of Ruth after Proverbs 31 in the canonical order in the Hebrew Masoretic text enriches the perspective about women (→ Trible, *Ruth*, 846). In modern Christian translations (following the LXX), Ruth is placed after Judges, reflecting the purported historical context of the story related. Ruth thus provides a strong contrast with the horrifying earlier story about the rape and murder of the Levite’s concubine, where God appears to be absent (Judges 19–21). Ruth demonstrates that even in the period of the Judges, before the establishment of the monarchy, there were exceptional pious males (such as Boaz) and not all men “did what was right in their own eyes” (Judges 17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25). Some males lived by the norms of *khesed* (solidarity, compassion; see 1:8; 2:20; 3:10; Petermann, “Das Buch Rut,“ 105) and treated women well, even when the women were poor immigrants.

In the Septuagint order, besides the contrast with the raped and murdered concubine, Ruth precedes and complements the story of Hannah (1 Sam 1–2), where God providentially protects women in trouble (Hannah’s infertility – since from the pre-scientific patriarchal viewpoint women were always to blame). Since Ruth meant more to Naomi than seven sons (Ruth 4:15), so Hannah meant more to Elkanah than ten sons (1 Sam. 1:8) – strong assertions, given the patriarchal context. Similarly, as Jewish tradition (MT) placed Ruth after the Book of Proverbs (concluding with the poem about the rarity of a woman of “noble character,” Prov. 31:10-31), so Ruth uses the same phrase to describe the leading woman, thus providing an ideal example (Ruth 3:11).

Phyllis Trible also shows that many elements in Ruth find significant resemblance in compositions from other periods in the Hebrew Bible (→ Trible, *Ruth*, 846):

- The heroic decision of Ruth to abandon her country, her clan and gods in order to go with Naomi resembles Abraham’s decision (cf. Gen. 12:1-3 with Boaz’s words in Ruth 2:11).
- The elderly men of Bethlehem compared Ruth with the matriarchal women of Israel (Raquel and Leah; Ruth 4:11; see also Tamar).
- The book’s concluding genealogy (4:18-22; cf. 1 Chronicles 2) connects Ruth’s story with the entire historic liberation project (see God’s election of King David, descendant of Ruth the Moabite).
- → **Matthew** (1:3-6) carries the subversion a step further by including Ruth, Tamar, Rahab and Bathsheba in Jesus’ genealogy, all women (Ruth and Rahab also are Gentiles) who, like Mary, had irregular sexual histories.

Ruth thus allows us to see, as in the case of Moses (the courage of his mother, sister and midwives, Exodus 1), how the brave leadership of marginalized women was essential to the establishment of Israel as a nation, the monarchy under David and his descendents, and for Jesus’ birth (→ **Esther**, who risked her life to preserve her people in the face of violent persecution during the Exile).

As an impoverished woman, suspicious immigrant and sexual minority (widow), Ruth (following Naomi’s advice) made use of a sexual strategy quite common among poor women in order to get out of her crisis – and also to keep her mother-in-law alive: she first seduced and then proposed marriage to the wealthy Boaz, an older relative of Naomi. Fundamentalists like to pretend that the Bible always requires exclusive and permanent sexual relationships sealed by a marriage covenant. The Bible, however, contains a legal provision for cases like Ruth and Naomi, the levirate law, which is not a favorite fundamentalist proof text. The legal measure in Deut. 25:6-10 provides the cultural and legal background for understanding Ruth’s behavior. As Robert Hubbard shows, the situation of Naomi and Ruth does not correspond exactly with levirate law: Naomi is an older woman so cannot give birth; Boaz is not Naomi’s brother-in-law, but a more distant relative (Ruth 2:20; 3:9, 12s; 4:4, 6; Lev. 25:23-34, 47-66); thus Ruth replaces Naomi and procreates with Boaz a son for her mother-in-law (→ Hubbard, *Book of Ruth*, 48-51; the women say “a son has been born to Naomi” [4:17; West 2006:194]).

Moreover, for the modern reader, understanding Ruth's behavior is obscured by the repeated references to Boaz's "feet/legs" (3:4, 7-8, 14), long recognized by scholars as a euphemism for genitals. Until recently the various study Bibles did not clarify the matter, supplying only notes that would not disturb the readers' sexual ideologies (even the HCSB; but see now the JSB 1583, and NOAB 395, both cautiously, but the NISB 387-88, more boldly). Edward Campbell indicates that here we do not have the common Hebrew word for feet (*regel*). Recognizing the euphemism, Campbell points out that the translation "legs" (representing the Hebrew word *margelotaw*), occurs only here four times + Dan. 10:6, where it clearly means "legs".* In addition to the use (four times) of the words "feet/legs" as a euphemism for genitals, the verb "uncover" (*glh*, v. 4), is mainly used to describe illicit sexual relationships (twenty-four times in Leviticus 18 and 20 plus Deut. 23:1, 27:20, Isa. 22:8); the verb "lie down" (*shakab*, v. 4) also suggests illicit sexual relationships (Gen. 19:32-35; Ex. 22:15/16; Lev. 18:22; Deut. 22:22; 1 Sam. 2:22; 2 Sam. 11:4, etc.; → Hubbard, *Book of Ruth*, 203-204).

As Marcella Althaus-Reid reminds us, although "respectable" modern readers may be shocked at Ruth's sexual behavior, poor and abandoned women commonly have no other options if they are to survive and provide for their children: "Ruth is not a Moabite judge who challenges the judicial system to her advantage; the result of the triumph by excess of femininity is not always a happy one. Bread is exchanged for bitter intimacy" (Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology*, 169; cf. p. 90).

After the seduction, Boaz praises Ruth's gesture of solidarity and fidelity (*khesed*, 3:10; cf. 1:8; 2:12, 20) with her mother-in-law. At the end of the story Boaz marries (literally "acquires") Ruth, and they procreate a line of descendants that include King David and Jesus (4:18-22). However, Ruth's famous "vow of commitment," ever popular in traditional heterosexual marriage ceremonies, in the original context does not express Ruth's love for her husband Boaz (who "acquired/ purchased" her as wife along with the ancestral property; 4:5, 9-10, cf. 13), but is a promise of love and faithfulness by which the despised Moabite "comes out," declaring her love and lifelong commitment to her Israelite mother-in-law, Naomi, the closest physical relationship between two women expressed anywhere in the Bible:

Do not press me to leave you
 or to turn back from following you!
 Where you go, I will go;
 where you lodge, I will lodge;
 your people shall be my people,
 and your God my God.
 Where you die, I will die—
 there will I be buried.
 May Yahweh do thus and so to me,
 and more as well,
 if even death parts me from you! (Ruth 1:16; cf. the erotic poetry of Sappho of Lesbos, ca. 600 B.C.).

In addition to her vow, Ruth "clung/stuck" to Naomi (1:14, *dabaq*), the same Hebrew verb describing the union between Adam and Eve, which made them "one flesh" (Gen. 2:24; → Amy-Jill Levine, "Ruth", 1992/98:80; Mona West refers to Ruth's "coming out" to Naomi (2006:191). Today Ruth's vow is also used for gay and lesbian marriages, as well as for blessing same-sex couples – all of which are more consistent with the original context. However, few churches or synagogues are willing to sanction such blessings, even after decades marked by millions of deaths from AIDS, when encouraging fidelity between same-sex couples may be a matter of life or death.

1. Compare the modern concept of marriage with that in Ruth.
2. How could Ruth promise to be faithful to Naomi without implying sexual exclusivity? Compare the modern concept of "fidelity" with Ruth's understanding.
3. Compare the modern concept of nuclear family with the patriarchal household established by Ruth, Naomi and Boaz.

* → Edward Campbell 1975:121. For *regel* as a euphemism for sexual organs see Ex. 4:25; Deut. 28:57; Judg. 3:2; 1 Sam. 24:3; 2 Kings 18:27 = Isa. 36:12; Isa. 6:2; Ezek. 16:25; → Robert Hubbard, *Book of Ruth*, 203; cf. Noah's son "looking on" his father's "nakedness" as a euphemism for rape (anal intercourse, Gen. 9:22).

Mona West (2006). “Ruth”. *The Queer Bible Commentary*, ed. Deryn Guest, Robert E. Goss, Mona West, Thomas Bohache, 190-194. London: SCM. [The Rev. Dr. West was Southern Baptist; now she is MCC pastor]:

All these actions [Ruth 3–4] indicate Naomi, Ruth and Boaz’s decision to create their own family and define their own understanding of kinship and responsibility to one another within the context of the inheritance and kinship laws of ancient Israel. These actions are similar to the ways in which Queer people of today create families: a bisexual man and two lesbians live together with their biological child; a gay man is a sperm donor for a lesbian couple and is part of the parenting of their child; three gay men live together as lovers and family for twenty years; a lesbian mother and her lover live two doors down from her lesbian daughter and her lover....

Ruth, Naomi and Boaz provide our community with an ancient example of the ways in which we have been creating our families. We find, however, that like us they must overcome some legal barriers in the creation of their family.... Certainly there are ways that we in the Queer community manipulate laws to overcome barriers that deny the legality of our relationships. We also work the system to make our relationships more permanent and secure.... In their words and actions the townswomen acknowledge the procreative strategy of Ruth and Boaz that produced a son for Naomi.... Naomi is not the biological mother of Obed, yet the townswomen realize Ruth’s relationship to Naomi has been life-giving-procreative [4:17]. The Queer community hears the blessing of our unions in the words of the townswomen of Bethlehem. We claim with them that our unions, our love, our families with or without children, are life-giving and procreative” (193-194).

Was Boaz possibly gay or bisexual?

1. Older but unmarried although many women were available; no indication of being widowed (3:10; 2:8-9, 22-23).
2. Boaz is very sensitive and spiritual and even uses a feminine image for God (2:1-12, esp. 12).
3. When he discovers Ruth in bed with him, his reaction is not lust but fright (3:8).
4. He is impressed with Ruth’s virtue (3:11; cf. Proverbs 31), acquires her as wife and fulfills his levirate duties of siring a son for Naomi but shows no romantic interest in Ruth (3:5, 9; 4:10), who makes a nice “beard” but loves Naomi.

Naomi’s experience, personality and theology (cf. Job, losing all, but eventually regaining even more).

1. 1:6-7, 10 Believed report of God’s providential provision (“visited”) of bread/food for his people in Judah; Naomi’s original intention with that of Orpah and Ruth was to travel together to Bethlehem.
2. 1:8-9 Naomi had second thoughts, believed Yahweh would show *khesed* to Orpah and Ruth in Moab, and decided to make the trip to Bethlehem alone (as an evangelist in reverse gear she sends Orpah back to her gods, 1:15).
3. 1:11-13 Naomi argues that Orpah and Ruth should return to their mother and reveals her conviction that behind all her bitter suffering was the fact that “Yahweh’s hand has gone out against me” (famine, death of husband and sons).
4. 1:14-18 When Ruth clings to Naomi and declares her love, Naomi accepts her decision.
5. 1:19-22 In Bethlehem Naomi insists she be called “Mara” (bitter) because Shaddai (the Almighty) has embittered her life, brought her back “empty” from Moab, oppressed/afflicted [*’anah*] her and brought evil [*ra’ah*] upon her.
6. 2:1-3 Naomi agrees to Ruth’s plan to glean behind the barley harvesters and Ruth “happened” [*wayyiqer miqreha*] (providence/chance?) to glean in the fields of Boaz, Naomi’s prosperous and pious relative.
7. 2:17-20 Naomi sees Ruth’s ephah (half bushel) of barley, eats and asks where she had gleaned, blessing the unidentified man who took notice of her; Ruth reveals she had worked with Boaz. Naomi blesses him, affirming that “Yahweh has not stopped showing his *khesed* to the living and the dead” and reveals that Boaz is a close relative and “one of our kinsmen-redeemers” (20).
8. 2:21-23 Naomi encourages Ruth to accept Boaz’s invitation to stay with his workers, since in company of his servant girls she would be safe.
9. 3:1-4 Naomi tells her daughter-in-law her plan for Ruth to “find rest” (a home, married) by seducing Boaz (after washing and perfuming herself), going where he sleeps (on a pile of barley), uncovering his “feet/legs” [*’=genitals?*] and then doing whatever he tells her; Ruth follows Naomi’s plan and even proposes to Boaz (3:9).
10. 3:16-18 Naomi gets Ruth’s report and assures her that Boaz will settle that same day the legal question of a possible alternate kinsman-redeemer claiming precedence.
11. 4:1-8 The alternate kinsman-redeemer wants to buy the ancestral land from Naomi and Ruth but backs out on learning that, with the land, he will acquire Ruth with levirate responsibility, which would endanger his own estate.
12. 4:9-10 Boaz buys the land from Naomi, also acquiring Ruth and accepting the levirate responsibilities with her.

13. 4:13-17 Boaz impregnates Ruth; the town women assure Naomi of Boaz's care and Ruth's love and refer to Ruth as "better to you than seven sons" [the love was mutual]. They name the son Obed, saying "Naomi has a son." Naomi takes Obed in her lap and cares for him. Obed is King David's grandfather and also ancestor of Jesus (18-22).

8. Jonathan and all those others who loved David (1 Samuel 16–31 + 2 Samuel 1)

8.1 Ten key texts:

1 Sam. 16:12. [David] was ruddy, had beautiful eyes and was handsome (*tob*) in appearance. Yahweh said: "Arise, anoint him [as designated king]; for this is he!"

16:21. And David came to Saul and stayed in his presence, since Saul loved (*'ahab*) him greatly, and he made David his armor-bearer. [Later on, Saul jealous of Jonathan? See 20:3.]

17:42. [Goliath] looked around, and saw David, and he disdained him, because he was [only] a youth, ruddy and beautiful. [Was Goliath distracted?]

18:1-4. ¹When David had finished speaking to Saul, the soul/life (*nefesh*) of Jonathan was knit (*qashar**) to the soul/life (*nefesh*) of David, and Jonathan loved (*'ahab*) him as he loved himself [see Lev. 19:18, 34; → **Romans** 13:8-10]. ²From that day on, Saul would not let [David] return to his father's house. ³Then Jonathan made a **covenant** with David, because he loved him as he loved himself. ⁴And Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that he was wearing, and gave it to David, and he also gave him his tunic and even his sword, and, what is more, his bow and even his girdle [see covenant, 20:40-41; 23:17-18].

[**qashar* (active form = *qal*): to tie, unite, knit, fasten, attach; in the passive form (*nifal*) it means "to grow fond of, to develop tender feelings towards" (Schökel 1994:677)].

18:25-27. ²⁵Saul insisted: "Tell David: 'The only thing that the king wants...as a marriage present for his daughter...is 100 *foreskins* of Philistines...'" ²⁶.... ²⁷David arose and went, along with his soldiers, and killed 200/100 of the Philistines, whose *foreskins* he then gave over to the king [Saul].... [Michal loves (*'ahab*) David, 18:20; → **Samson, Judges** 14:3.]

19:1. Saul made known to Jonathan his son and to all his officials that he had decided to kill David. But Jonathan, Saul's son, loved (*khafats*) David very much, and he warned him....

20:30. Saul became furious with Jonathan: "You son of a *perverse* (*na'awah*) and rebellious woman! Do you think I do not know that you chose (*bakhar*) the son of Jesse, to your own shame, and to the shame of your mother's nakedness? [See Saint Jerome and Saint Chrysostom.]

20:41-42. ⁴¹David came out from his hiding place, and after having bowed three times, put his face to the ground. Immediately *they kissed one another*, and wept with one another, until David *was able to calm down* (*higdil* from *gadal*, to grow larger). ⁴²"You can go in peace", said Jonathan to David, "since we have made an eternal **covenant** together in the name of Yahweh, asking him to judge between me and you, and between your descendants and mine" [= a **covenant/alliance**].

23:16-18. ¹⁶Jonathan, Saul's son, rose and went to see David at Horesh, and encouraged him to keep on trusting in God. ¹⁷"Fear not", he said, "for my father will not be able to catch you. You shall be king over Israel, and I shall be next to you. This, even my father knows." ¹⁸And the two of them made a **covenant** in the presence of Yahweh, after which Jonathan went back home and David remained in Horesh.

2 Sam. 1:26. “Your love (*’ahab*) for me was more delicious than the love (*’ahab*) of women.” [With his eight wives and ten concubines, David had ample basis for comparison.]

8.2 Interpretation of the key texts: David and Jonathan and.... (1 Samuel 16–31 + 2 Samuel 1).

On 2 Sam. 1:26, David Jobling writes:

The story of David and Jonathan, and these words in particular, assume great importance for gay rights activists, who find in them virtually the only positive presentation of male homosexuality in the Jewish Bible. Here is a man telling of his love for another man, comparing it with heterosexual love, and saying it is better. A reading of 1 Samuel that claims to be in touch with issues ethics and human liberation can no longer overlook the central importance of the book for one of the urgent and vibrant discourses of our time.... (→ Jobling 1998:161).

In the same vein, Silvia Schroer and Thomas Staubli conclude: “David and Jonathan shared a homoerotic and, more than likely, a homosexual relationship” (→ Schroer & Staubli 2000:22; see → Randall Bailey 2000:1165; Gary Comstock 1993:79-90; Nancy Wilson 1995:149-153 (in a chapter which was omitted in the later edition published in 2000); Tom Horner 1978:26-39). What is involved are *eight chapters* in the Hebrew Bible, not just a lone verse, whereas only *two verses* in Leviticus (18:22 y 20:13) prohibit anal sex (without condoms) between males, within a context where other practices common in idolatrous cults are also prohibited. Regarding “the validity and power of the gay reading,” David Jobling comments: “Nothing in the text rules out, and much encourages, the view that David and Jonathan had a consummated gay relationship. The text does not force this conclusion on us; there are obvious cultural reasons why it would not. But it is at least as valid as any other. There are issues in the text that the homosexual reading seems better able to explain than other readings, for example Saul’s outburst in 20:30-34” (Jobling 1998:161):

20:30. Saul became furious with Jonathan: “You son of *perversity* (*na’awah*) and of rebelliousness! Do you think I do not know that you chose (*bakhar*) the son of Jesse, to your own shame, and to the shame of your mother’s nakedness?”

Saul explains his fury against Jonathan by saying that his son has “chosen” David (20:30), that David is a menace to Jonathan’s succession to the throne, and that, thus, David must die. However, as Jobling points out, such an “explanation” cannot explain Saul’s desire to kill Jonathan with a spear, since such a violent act would never help his son ascend to the throne. Jobling comments: “It is fair to look for some unspoken cause of the irrational rage, and modern experience of irrational homophobia suggests that this may be the cause” (Jobling 1998:161).

According to Jobling, such an interpretation is strongly confirmed when we observe how Saul connects Jonathan’s behavior with sexual matters: “to your own shame, and to the shame of your mother’s nakedness” (1 Sam. 20:30b). Jobling concludes: “The idea that a gay man is a ‘mother’s boy’ is a commonplace of homophobia. The father tries to destroy the possibility that there is anything [effeminate] *in himself* that could have made the boy turn out like this” [Jobling 1998:161, following Fewell & Gunn 1993:149-150]. According to another possible reading of the Hebrew text in 20:30, it could be that Saul is not only blaming Jonathan, but also his own wife Ahinoam: “Son of a *perverse* (*na’awah*) and rebellious woman!” (see NIV, NJB, DHH; cf. Jobling 1998:178). The father’s irrational fury expresses itself, just as in the case of some homophobic fathers of today, by blaming the mother (see even Sigmund Freud in some of his writings), and not just the son, for his homosexuality. In a patriarchal, *machista* society, the father cannot accept the son’s queerness as a simple occurrence within the spectrum of human variety (such as left-handedness), and any departure made by males from prevailing cultural norms is attacked as if such a “perversion” were intentional, coming either from the son, or from the mother, or from both. Jobling points out: “This is an all-too-familiar reaction of a father finding that his son is gay. For present purposes I just want to emphasize how a woman can take blame without ever even making an appearance as a character” (178).

18:1-4. ¹When David had finished speaking to Saul, the soul/life (*nefesh*) of Jonathan was knit (*qashar*) to the soul/life (*nefesh*) of David, and Jonathan loved (*’ahab*) him as he loved himself [see Lev 19:18,

34; → **Romans** 13:8-10]. ²From that day on, Saul would not let [David] return to his father's house. ³Then Jonathan made a **covenant** with David, because he loved him as he loved himself. ⁴And Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that he was wearing, and gave it to David, and he also gave him his tunic and even his sword, and, what is more, his bow and even his girdle [see covenant, 20:40-41; 23:17-18].

Jobling comments that the relation between David and Jonathan “is mostly worked out as a ‘covenant’ between two men, which we can read as analogous to a marriage agreement” (1998:163). In this relation, he points out, “Jonathan plays the same role that I have ascribed to David’s women.... Jonathan, in terms of the way the text exploits women’s power, is a better woman than David’s women (162), since the texts talk of Jonathan’s love for David and of the women’s love for David, and not of David’s love for them; it is Jonathan who takes all the risks and uses all means in order to rescue David from Saul, and it is Jonathan and the women who prophesy that David will succeed Saul as king. This interpretation reflects the conclusion previously reached by Danna Fewell and David Gunn: “Jonathan is a woman, more woman than [David’s] women are” (1993:151).

In contrast, Gordon Hugenberger (→ 1944/98) has attempted to establish that *heterosexual* marriage in the Hebrew Bible consisted in a covenant between a man and a woman, established by the taking of vows – even though the three texts he quotes are all of dubious interpretation (→ **Malachi** 2:10-16; → **Proverbs** 2:17; → **Ezekiel** 16; cf. the metaphors in Hosea 2:18-22 and 1 Samuel 18–20). On the other hand, it is quite striking that the texts concerning the relation between David and Jonathan and their mutual pact of love *explicitly* refer three times to the covenant they made together. The biblical evidence thus approximates the conclusion drawn by John Boswell (1994/96), who showed that the Christian rites of wedding between friends of the same sex existed centuries *before* ecclesiastical rites for a wedding between a man and a woman (since heterosexual marriage continued existing as a secular phenomenon until the end of the Middle Ages). J. A. Thompson (1974:334-338) showed that, in Hebrew, the verb *to love* (*’ahab*) commonly occurs in contexts that refer to covenants, such as in the texts that tell about David and Jonathan. But Thompson failed to acknowledge that the political dimension in the pacts between David and Jonathan is subordinate to their shared friendship and to their committed, homoerotic love.

A tradition of censorship and denial. In order to interpret these texts correctly, a good knowledge of their historical context within the literature of the Ancient Near East is essential. For Cyrus H. Gordon, a conservative Jewish scholar and one of the leading twentieth-century experts in Ancient Near Eastern literature, the conclusion is obvious:

Achilles compares his comrade Patroclus with a girl (II.16:7ff.), reminding us of Gilgamesh’s love for Enkidu as for a woman (Gilg. Epic 2:31 ff., 1:v:47, vi:1ff.). That this (to us unmanly) attitude was firmly entrenched in the Near East epic is shown by its presence in the Book of Jashar (excerpted in II Sam. 1:17ff.) where David proclaims that Jonathan’s love was sweeter to him than the love of women (v. 26; Cyrus H. Gordon, “Homer and the Bible: The Origin and Character of East Mediterranean Literature”; in *Hebrew Union College Annual*, vol. 26 [1955], p. 89; quoted in Tom Horner 1978:19).

If, for experts in Ancient Near Eastern literature, the homoerotic nature of the relation between David and Jonathan is so obvious, how can we explain that this conclusion has been denied and censored during so many centuries of Jewish and Christian tradition? And how can we explain that it is only now that so many biblical scholars such as David Jobling are coming to accept the homoerotic interpretation instead of the traditional homophobic one? To understand this radical change in interpretation during the last century, we must remember that, traditionally, almost all scholars accepted the conclusion that Moses had written all of the Pentateuch (in ca. 1300 B.C.), some 300 years *before* David and Jonathan, and thus the scholars supposed that the two verses in Leviticus forbidding anal sex between males (18:22 y 20:13) must have already existed in David and Jonathan’s time, and had been accepted by them and by their contemporaries as divinely inspired. However, now that almost all biblical scholars acknowledge that the texts in Leviticus have their origin in the priestly source (P) of the Pentateuch, dated during the period of exile some 500 years *after* David and Jonathan, the new tendency is to interpret the texts concerning David and Jonathan in their Ancient Near Eastern context and not permit that two verses from Leviticus predetermine their correct interpretation. Furthermore, only a century ago, everybody thought that the texts referring to Sodom (→ **Genesis** 19 and a total of some 48 others) were condemning “sodomy” (or “homosexuality”, the new term used starting in the late 1800’s). Now,

however, scholars acknowledge that what Genesis condemns is the attempt to *rape* angels, not consensual homoerotic relationships. The process of unmasking traditional homophobic interpretations has thus prepared the way for acknowledging and accepting texts that portray homoerotic relationships in a positive manner.

Even → **1-2 Kings** begins to speak of “the mercies of God,” using David’s piety as a meritorious basis for God’s forgiving the sins of subsequent kings. Thus, already in 1-2 Kings (i.e., the books that come after 1-2 Samuel in the → **Deuteronomist History** (550 B.C.), David is mainly remembered for his compassion. Heavy censorship then sets in with → **1 Chronicles** 10–29 (400 B.C.), where some 20 chapters retell the story of David, yet eliminate all references to Jonathan as well as to the adultery with Bathsheba. In his history of the Jews written in the first century after Christ (*Jewish Antiquities*), Josephus eliminates the homoerotic scenes and affirms that Jonathan honored and loved David because of David’s virtue.

Randall Bailey concludes that all of David’s eight marriages were “political” (i.e. they were an attempt to gain more power), including that with Bathsheba (1990; 2000:1164):

- (1) **Michal**, Saul’s daughter, 1 Sam. 18:20-28; 25:4; 2 Sam. 3:1-16; see her sister, **Merab**;
- (2) **Abigail**, 1 Sam 25:2-42;
- (3) **Ahinoam** of Jezreel, 1 Sam. 25:43;
- (4-7) Four further political weddings, 2 Sam. 3:2-5; 5:13; and
- (8) **Bathsheba** (adultery, assassination), 2 Samuel 11–12.

Like many great spiritual leaders, David seems to have been somewhat narcissistic: the texts repeatedly refer to the love that others have for David, but not of his love for them. Ilse Müllner summarizes the evidence as follows: “Saul loved David (1 Sam. 16:21; cf. 18:22); Jonathan loved David (1 Sam. 18:1,3; 20:17; 2 Sam. 1:26; cf. 1 Sam. 19:1); all the servants of Saul loved David (1 Sam. 18:22); all Israel and Judah loved David (1 Sam. 18:16); Saul’s daughter Michal loved David (1 Sam. 18:20, 28). *Only David did not love*” (1999:118); see how David expresses his sorrow over the death of Jonathan: “*Your love for me was more delicious than the love of women*” (2 Sam. 1:26; cf. 1:23, with a less explicit subject; also 2 Sam. 19:7, where the object of love is not identified). None of the texts indicate that Jonathan had a wife (divorced?, a widower?); see his son (2 Sam. 4:4; 9:9-13).

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- Garcia-Treto, Francisco (2008). “Jonathan”. *The New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, III:379-80. Nashville: Abingdon. “The references to love in these accounts imply a deep personal friendship between the two men – some go so far as to read a homosexual attraction between them – but it is clear that those references also belong in the formal discourse of ANE political pacts of allegiance. *The skillfully composed text blends echoes of both*” (830, my emphasis – the first recognition of homosexual attraction between David and Jonathan in a standard reference work).

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9. Nehemiah: Eunuch, Governor, Visionary. That Nehemiah was a eunuch was recognized even by certain translators of the Septuagint, who mistranslated "cupbearer" (*mashqeh*, 1:11) as "eunuch". In the church the first to explicitly recognize Nehemiah as a eunuch was Origen (182-251 A.D.), who also literally interpreted Jesus' teaching about eunuchs (Mat. 19:12) and castrated himself (Jacob Myers 1965:lxxvi). Jacob Myers also notes that Nehemiah's responsibilities as cupbearer (1:11) included taking care of the harem (Neh. 2:6): "The cupbearer was an important official in the royal household; he was also a eunuch since he served in the queen's presence" (Myers, 96). Furthermore, the Septuagint reads "concubine" rather than "queen" in 2:6 (Myers, 93, 97). As a layperson and eunuch, Nehemiah could not enter the Temple (6:10-11; Myers, lxxvii). Even before the exile, Isaiah had prophesied that the conquerors would make eunuchs of the royal family's young men (Isa. 39:7).

The fact that Nehemiah was a eunuch explains why the book presents him as without family (2:5) and landless (5:16). This also helps us understand why he is always praying for God to remember him (5:19; 6:14; 13:14,22,29,31), since a man without descendants and without awareness of the resurrection (cf. the New Testament) had to depend on God (also see his frequent prayers, 1:5-11; 2:4; 4:4-5,9). Hugh Williamson points out that Nehemiah never asks God to remember his most important contribution – the construction of the wall (Hugh Williamson 1999:380), perhaps because he saw it as a product of the efforts of all the people of God (Nehemiah 3). In spite of the strong evidence and long history (both in Judaism and in the church) that Nehemiah was a eunuch, the prejudice against sexual minorities is such that recently many have attempted to deny this conclusion. Robert North even affirmed that "‘eunuch’ as a physical condition is totally alien to the exuberance and forcefulness sown throughout Nehemiah's career" (Robert North 1992:1069; with reference to E. M. Yamauchi 1980:142; cf. Ron Stanley 2006:270-71, 274). Hugh Williamson analyzes other relevant factors:

- In the Septuagint the translation of the Hebrew word *mashqeh* as "eunuch" rather than "cupbearer" could be the result of an error, since the Greek *euno-echos* ("have-bed") is easily confused with *oinochoos* ("wine-pourer"). However, such linguistic confusion also can represent a type of Freudian slip, since it was well-known in antiquity that the king's cupbearers commonly were eunuchs, and the life of Nehemiah, single exiled Jew, would have supported such a conclusion.
- Although a eunuch, Nehemiah would have been accepted as leader in Jerusalem due to his high position in the royal court and his designation as governor by the king himself. His lay status and the prohibition of Deut. 23:2 could have prevented his entrance into the Temple, but → **Isaiah** 56:4-5 demonstrates that

new criteria determined exclusion and inclusion in the post-exilic community, where many Jewish males had suffered castration as prisoners and slaves (see the emphasis on the Sabbath in Neh. 13:15-22 and the "eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths" in Isa. 56:4).

- Haman's access to Queen Esther (Es. 7:8), by invitations to banquets and accompanied by the king, does not refute the common practice of having eunuchs responsible for the protection of the royal harem (eunuchs in the royal court are omnipresent in the book of → **Esther**).

The Nehemiah text (13:23-31; cf. 10:30) condemns community *leaders* for having accepted mixed marriages with pagan women (a political issue), while the → **Ezra** text (chs. 9–10) condemns them for *diluting the Jewish identity* (especially Ezra 9:2; D. L. Smith-Christopher 1994:243-65, esp. 257-58). David Pleins, however, disqualifies the Ezra conclusion for not taking into account the secondary character of the Ezra and Nehemiah texts (David Pleins 2001:207). If Ezra precedes Nehemiah (458 B.C., Ezra's traditional date), the Nehemiah text implies the failure of Ezra's forceful effort to eliminate mixed marriages.

At first glance, with his great project of constructing a wall around Jerusalem, with his denunciation of mixed marriages and with his exclusion of foreigners from Jerusalem – an expression of "separatism and xenophobia," according to Robert North (1992:1069) – Nehemiah appears to be the antitype of Jesus Christ described in → **Ephesians** 2 as the divine instrument who, through his cross, destroyed the wall that separates Jews and Gentiles. And Ezra, with its proclamation of Moses' law, appears to be the antitype of the incarnate Christ who, instead of the law, brought us grace and truth (John 1:17). However, any viable human community excludes those who seek to destroy it (→ **2 John**) and requires norms of conduct that avoid harm to neighbor (Rom. 13:8-10). Commentators are remarkably silent on Nehemiah's resort to a "cat fight" (pulling out hair, 13:25) with offenders who married pagan women (Ezra pulled out his own hair, Ezra 9:3; see shaming by shaving off beards, 2 Sam. 10:4).

10. Esther – pious heterosexual or militant lesbian? As Sidnie Ann White-Crawford says (1998:133), biblicists (male) tend to praise Mordecai as the authentic hero and minimize Esther's contribution, or even to slander her (for a supposed lack of "sexual ethics"), a prejudice already evident in 2 Maccabees, that called the festival of Purim "the day of Mordecai" (2 Macc. 15:36, JB), showing that "Mordecai's usurpation of Esther's role is almost complete" (David Clines 1992:903). According to this tradition, logically the book should have the title "Mordecai" instead of "Esther." Even in 1971 Carey Moore could write: "Between Mordecai and Esther the greater hero in the Hebrew is Mordecai, who supplied the brains while Esther simply followed his directions" (Carey Moore AB 1971:lii, cited by Sidnie Ann White-Crawford 1998:133). And the introduction to the book in DHHBE says that the book describes "how the Jew Mordecai, who had already saved the king's life, obtained, *with Esther's help*...the liberation of his people."

More than merely diminishing Esther's contribution and exaggerating that of Mordecai, the sexist tradition of the Greek version and the traditional commentaries openly criticize Esther for a supposed lack of "ethics/morals" on the sexual plane: "Esther, for the chance of winning wealth and power, takes her place in the herd of maidens who became concubines of the king" (L.B.A. Paton 1908: 96, cited in Sidnie Ann White-Crawford 1998:133). However, in Esther's world, she had no other option, and once crowned as queen, risked her life and used her power and rhetorical abilities with great wisdom and subtlety in order to liberate her people – a true paradigm of liberating practice for the Jews in Exile. The LXX (Greek) version, however, reduces Esther to the stereotype of a weak woman: she faints twice to stir the king's compassion. The very dramatic Hebrew text is reduced to a kind of melodramatic soap opera.

Much of the book's dramatic tension results from a supposed tradition that the laws of the Persians and Medes were "irrevocable" (1:19; 3:12-14; 8:8-14; cf. Dan. 6:9, 13, 16). Adele Berlin places in doubt the translation and the historicity of this tradition (2001:18). At any rate, at the end of the book (9:32), after interceding with the king (see Moses and the Pharaoh) and achieving a "second Exodus", Esther confirms her authority as a second Moses by establishing, by eternal law, "the command of Queen Esther", the new feast of Purim, a day before the Passover of the Exodus (Adele Berlin 2001:93). Esther and Mordecai succeeded in saving their people from a threat (anti-Semitic) of annihilation even more devastating than the decrees of the Pharaoh in the Exodus

(cf. Moses and Miriam), but Esther as well as Mordecai demonstrated a tolerance and sympathy for the eunuchs that greatly surpasses the provision of the Pentateuch (Deut. 23:1-2). According to the LXX, Esther is not the adopted daughter of her older cousin (Hebrew, 2:7, 10-11, 20), but Mordecai's "wife/woman (*gynaika*"; LXX 2:7; see JB note). Nothing in the Hebrew text suggests that Esther was heterosexual, and in the LXX, Esther even says that she "hates" the matrimonial bed of the uncircumcised king (4:15).

10.1 Vashti (dismissed/divorced): against sexism. For many modern women, the true heroine of the book is not Esther, but Vashti, since it is she who had the courage to say "no" to the insulting and sexist demand of the king to display her beauty in front of his guests, all drunk (1:10-12). The mere refusal of this woman threatens to subvert the "good order" (patriarchal) of the entire empire (1:17-18; Adele Berlin 2001:lv-lvi, 17). The seven "wise" advisors of the inept king proposed as a punishment precisely that which Vashti desired – a "divorce" – to not have to again be in the king's presence (1:19). Gary Comstock qualifies the king's counselors' reaction to Vashti's denial "a striking and poignant illustration of patriarchal panic" (1993:53). Comstock indicates that he found a biblical model for his life only by reading the story of Vashti in Esther. He then summarizes some modern "re-readings" of Vashti's denial:

The story of Vashti was rewritten when an underground railroad, and not complacency, was the response for a people's ignored cry for freedom; the story of Vashti was rewritten when armed resistance, and not accommodation, was the response to Hitler's program in the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising; the story of Vashti was rewritten when a boycott, and not continued obedience, was the response to the arrest of a tired woman who dared to sit down in a bus where she was not supposed to; the story of Vashti was rewritten when a few lesbians and gay men finally did not go gently into that ever-waiting paddy wagon outside the barroom door and started the Stonewall Rebellion, the founding event of the modern lesbian/gay movement" (Gary Comstock 1993:57 [actually it was drag queens who initiated Stonewall]).

In effect, Vashti, like a John the Baptist, "prepares the way" for Esther, since Vashti's refusal to appear before the king paves the way for Esther's courage, who risked her life by appearing uninvited before the king. In Persia women could eat with men. So, more than being merely a "literary technique" (HCSB, note 1:9), both the banquet Vashti prepared for the women and her insubordination suggest that she preferred the company of the harem rather than further relations with Ahasuerus. Traditionally, lesbians have been considered a threat to the entire patriarchal order (1:17-18; Bernadette Brooten 1996:303-357).

10.2 Zeresh and Haman, the only "respectable" marriage (not polygamy, but "fascist" and pro-holocaust; see Ananias and Sapphira, Acts 5). Zeresh has little character and responds to each bit of news with the obvious and expected reactions (5:10-14; 6:13). But even she, at the end of the book, joins the grand company of sexual minorities, since she is a widow and without sons (9:13-14). Haman is proud to be the father of ten sons, but according to LXX is also "loved" by the king (and anyway, how do we explain the rise of such a brute? just for being so rich?; see HCSB note 3:1). His death by hanging at the height of 22 meters (72 feet; 5:14) makes it a caricature of Moses' serpent (Numbers 21:4-9; John 3:14) and of Jesus "elevated!" on the cross (John 8:28; 12:32-34) – a sacrifice, not for his nation but for his own sins. Perhaps it was he that inspired the failed assassination of the king by the eunuchs (were they also bribed? 2:21-3:1; see the LXX).

Sexual minorities and sexual sins. The Greeks considered the Persians – and especially the Persian court – to be decadent and effeminate; an inferior power in the process of collapse; a bureaucracy filled with eunuchs and slaves, who always prostrated themselves in the presence of their lords (Adele Berlin 2001:xxix). The book of Esther seems to share with the Greeks this same contempt for the Persian court. After the triumph of Alexander the Great (333 B.C.), the Jews also ridiculed the Greeks for being effeminate (Scroggs 1983:66-98). Does the book of Esther, then, serve as a source of "sexual ethics" and "family values"?

10.3 The twelve eunuchs (*sarisim*). According to Esther, nothing happened in the great empire without the advice of a large number of eunuchs, appearing at propitious moments and running in all directions – an 'omnipresence' that substituted for the apparent absence of God. Almost all are "trustworthy" (10 of the 12), very good men, and no one seems to have prejudices or to discriminate against them:

- 1:10, 12, 15 – Seven eunuchs named: Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha, Abagtha, Zethar and Carkas. “Trustworthy men: lit. *euncuhs*. They were men, ordinarily castrated, at the service of the king and his wives.” (1:10, note g, DHHBE). See Jeremiah 29:1-2, note b; Gen. 37:36, note p and 39:1, which names Potifar a “functionary” of the Pharaoh.
- 2:3. 8, 15 – Hegai, “guardian of the women”. He had a beauty salon (see Eccl. 1:9, “nothing new under the sun”) where the women stayed for a year, receiving two treatments of six months (2:9, 12); in the LXX, which at times seems to give evidence of its own prophetic inspiration (Isa. 7:14), Hegai is simply called “Gay” (*Gai*)!
- 2:14 – Shaashgaz, “in charge of the concubines,” who had already been used and filed away.
- 4:4-5 – Esther and “the men that formed her personal guard... Hathach, one of the king’s eunuchs”.
- 6:14 – The king’s seven eunuchs take Haman to the banquet.
- 7:9 – Harbona (one of the seven eunuchs named in 1:10) informs the king of the hanging which Haman had prepared for Mordecai. As Jon Levenson notes, this Harbona is a relatively humble figure, not one of the king’s official advisors, who suggests to him what he should do with Haman – another example of comic inversion, where a person of low standing shows a man of nobility what he should do (Jon Levenson, 1197:105).
- 2:21-23; 6:2 – Bigthan and Teresh, “two of the king’s eunuchs, who guarded the threshold”, conspire to assassinate the king, Mordecai informs Ahasuerus of the plot and the two eunuchs are hanged; afterward, the king remembers the conspiracy and Mordecai’s service to him (6:2). The failure of the two eunuchs’ conspiracy and success of Vashti, Esther and Mordecai suggest that the effective praxis for the Jews in exile involves the rejection of armed revolution and endeavoring to achieve favorable changes within the system (→ **Daniel** 11:34 and the criticism of the Maccabean revolution, as of “little help”).

Total: Ten good eunuchs and two bad ones (all named). *However*, in one important Greek manuscript (the Alpha Text, AT) the story of the two bad eunuchs’ treason is not included and some think this Alpha Text represents the original version of Esther (Jon Levenson 1997:32-34).

10.4 Mordecai (confirmed bachelor, intimate companion of the eunuchs). The contrast between Mordecai, unmarried and openly Jewish, with neither wife nor children, and his enemy, Haman, with his spouse Zeresh and ten sons, is notable.* The LXX translators, apparently nervous about the lack of “family values” (no wife, no children), changed the text to have Mordecai married (incestuously?) with Esther, his wife/woman (*gynaika*, LXX 2:7; see JB note). In the Hebrew text, however, Mordecai appears to foreshadow the way of Jesus and Pablo (not to marry), and adopts not only Esther as his daughter, but all the Jewish population as his spiritual children, since the last word in the book in Hebrew (10:3) refers to his concern for peace (*shalom*) for “all his people” and “his seed” (*zar’o*), better “kindred” (JSB); “all the Jews” (NIV; cf. Jesus, John 15; Paul; 1 John, etc).

As an unmarried man, Mordecai shares the status of “sexual minority” with the palace eunuchs, with whom he maintained intimate and trusting relations (2:19-32) and as such could find out about the two eunuchs’ plot against the king (2:19-23), have daily access to the harem and converse with Esther without arousing suspicion (2:11). Mordecai occupied an administrative post in the empire, where he was known as a Jew, but he advised Esther to maintain her Jewish identity a secret (2:19-20).

Mordecai’s refusal to prostrate himself before Haman, which is left unexplained in the text (3:1-6), seems to be extremely foolish, since it put not only his own life in danger, but also the lives of all of the Jews in the Empire (Sidnie Ann White-Crawford 1998:135). See the prostration of Jacob to Esau (Gen. 33:3) and David to Jonathan (1Sam. 20:41; also 1 Kings 1:23; 2 Kings 4:37; see JB note, Esther 3:2; Carey Moore 1971:36-37). Marti Nissinen introduces the concept of sexual passivity as a role construction, not as sexual orientation, which takes us to the conclusion that the “dog” (*keleb*) was a male who accepted the passive sexual role, that is, anal penetration (1998:37-44). John Burns elaborates:

* If Mordecai had been deported in the time of Nebuchadnezzar (Esther 2:6; 598/97 B.C.), but still during the reign of Ahasuerus (Xerxes I, 485-465 B.C.), he would have been 115-150 years old (Berlin 2001:25).

The image behind... canine passivity can be illustrated from the positions adopted by the inferior before the superior. In these instances the suppliant kneels head between hands and rump raised, just the position of a male dog, fawning but uncertain as to its reception, head between the front paws, the elevated rear exposing the anus and testicles. The line between the perception of the 'dog' as a faithful or groveling servant or as a male about to submit to anal penetration, whether for prostitution or pure pleasure, must have been a fine one: epithet and image were easily transferred. It was inconceivable that a freeborn, mature male would want to take a woman's role for whatever reason. He was no better than a dog (John Barclay Burns 1999).

Not that the act of prostration was always an explicit sign of offering oneself for anal sex, but the gesture was one of total submission of the male or female slave which the lord or lady assumed over the body – and such sovereignty included the right to penetrate and to demand sexual services. Hence, we should not interpret Mordecai's defiance as a rejection of "homosexuality" but an insistence in his freedom with the refusal to prostrate himself like a slave before Haman. Implicit in this declaration of freedom and independence is a rejection of the abusive type of homoerotic relations where one is superior (he that penetrates) and the other person (male or female) is inferior and penetrated. Haman prostrates himself on Esther's couch and the king thinks that he is trying to have sexual relations with the queen (7:8).

10.5 Ahasuerus the King (polygamist, divorcee, surrounded by eunuchs...). Obviously he is a type of "sexual minority", but with his great harem, Ahasuerus would appear to be unquestionably heterosexual. Herodotus (480-420 B.C.), Greek historian, informs us that Xerxes (his name in Greek) was a womanizer, committed adultery with his brother's wife and also had sexual relations with his daughter. However, in Esther king Ahasuerus lives surrounded by other men, eunuchs and young male slaves (2:2; a study of enslavement in Esther is needed: 1:3, 10; 2:2-3,9,14,21; 3:2,5,7-8,13; 4:5,9-11; 6:3,5,9,14; 7:4,8-9; 8:3,9-10,14). Ahasuerus has a very "gay" life style, and Saint Paul would call him a *malakos* (soft, effeminate; 1 Cor. 6:9), for instead of going out to conquer his enemies and enlarge his empire, he prefers a six month party with other men and lets queen Vashti spend six months apart in a party with other women. He wants to sleep with a different person each night. After divorcing Vashti, he loves Esther "more than any of the other women" (2:17), but concerning possible relations with slaves and eunuchs, the text is discreetly silent. According to LXX, the king says to Esther, "I am your brother" (5:1f, BJ), and such a sentiment could explain why he goes for 30 days without seeing her (4:11). Furthermore, according to LXX (6:9), Haman says: "Thus shall be treated the man whom the king wishes to honor" (*agapa*; cf. Hebrew: "wants to honor"). In general, the LXX is zealous in promoting traditional devotion and Jewish family values, but perhaps in the case of the villain Haman and the pagan king, it prefers to point out the lack of such values.

10.6 Conclusion. The three women in the book are thus also examples of sexual minorities: Vashti, divorced; Esther, active member of the harem of a polygamist pagan king; Zeresh, widow after the death of Haman. In addition to the solidarity with the poor and the oppressed, also illuminating in Esther is the alliance between women and sexual minorities, and between Mordecai (a known Jew) and Esther (a secretive Jew, but with great influence in the workings of the empire). The two eunuchs' conspiracy fails, but with Vashti's courage, followed by the collaboration of Mordecai (wise strategy) and Esther (rhetoric and brilliant tactics), counseled by the eunuchs, these are highly successful, managing to subvert an empire characterized by sexism, heterosexism and anti-Judaism. Mordecai and Esther maintain good communication in spite of their difficult and very different situations ("networking"). Today many insist that only "decent" married couples are worthy of adopting children (Haman and Zeresh?); but what would have happened to Esther had she not been adopted by her bachelor cousin, Mordecai?

10.7 Esther's "theological meaning." Traditional biblicists are left perplexed that the book of Esther refers 190 times to the pagan king in 167 verses and not even once to God (→ **Song of Songs** 8:6). How dare such a book enter into the sacred canon? And how can the theologians "do theology" while lacking all the ingredients? Being "learned men," like Ahasuerus' seven advisors, the biblicists and theologians have concluded that Esther (who hid her Jewish identity) contains a theology a bit "in the closet" (implicit), that is concerned with the "providence" of God (also hidden behind the book's coincidences). It's just that, like "God", the word "providence" also doesn't appear in Esther, nor in the entire Bible, since it is a word taken from philosophy (especially from Plato and Stoicism), not the Scriptures. As James I. Packer affirms: "Not one term in the Hebrew or Greek Bible expresses the concept of divine providence" (1982/91:1136). Certainly, as in

the case of “trinity,” in the Bible thousands of texts could be grouped together under the term “providence.” Liberation theologians prefer to liberate themselves from the philosophical categories of Plato and Aristotle and refer to God as the “Lord of History” – and (with the ecologists) we could add “Lord of Creation,” since, after the creation, God continues to help and guide all his creation and especially human beings. In Esther we may discern the fundamental conflict: pagan chance vs. divine direction, between coincidence and providence, between human initiative and divine omnipotence.

- 1:1-21 By the great wisdom of the learned royal advisors, Vashti’s punishment for insubordination was, ironically, precisely what she wanted: never to have to appear again in the king’s presence. All the resources of the imperial bureaucracy were needed to confront the danger of a willful woman (HCSB note 1:21-22). Seven eunuchs couldn’t bring her, and seven wise advisors could only convince the king to decree what she wanted.
- 2:1-23 The king’s young slaves remind him that he must search for a successor to the divorced queen Vashti. Only after a year of cosmetic treatments (2:12) could Esther be with the king.
- 3:1-15 Haman’s project: *destroy* all the Jews (a verb used 25 times in the book); see Lamech, Genesis 4:23-24.
- 4:14-16 Mordecai appears to refer to God’s project of liberation in history (“relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from *another quarter*” = God’s providence; see DHHBE 4:14, note b). Esther: “and if I perish, I perish”; see Prisca, Rom. 16:3-5).
- 6:1 The king couldn’t sleep. Did he have a bad conscience for not having rewarded Mordecai? Or does he fear Haman’s power and is searching for someone trustworthy to protect him from another conspiracy? According to LXX, God caused the king’s insomnia.

Conclusion concerning the “theological meaning” in Esther. Divine providence, according to Esther, does not favor the violent oppressors. Rather, as the Lord of History, God carries out the historical project of liberation, lifting up oppressed women and sexual minorities and frustrating violent oppressors (see above). Traditionally, the concept of “providence” reflected elitist philosophies that attempted to maintain an unjust status quo, but Yahweh, the Liberating God of the Exodus, overturns the oppressive order of the world (→ **Romans 8:28-30**).

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11. Jeremiah, Baruch and the Black Eunuch – Bachelor prophet (but well accompanied).

Patrick Miller acknowledges that the Hebrew Bible gives us “little information” about the prophets’ marriages and families (2001:702) but appears to accept the heterosexist presupposition that almost all the prophets had

wives and children. However, Miller points out that in the books of the 16 canonic prophets, the Bible speaks of spouses only in the case of → **Hosea**, **Isaiah** and **Ezekiel** (cf. the city, not “husband,” of the prophetess Huldah, → **2 Kings** 22:14). God ordered Hosea to marry a whore, and Ezekiel remained a widower (Ezek. 24:15-27), leaving only → **Isaiah** apparently exemplifying ordinary marriage (siring children with a woman prophetess, probably his wife, Isa. 8:1-3). Only Jeremiah, however, speaks of an explicit divine commandment *not* to marry, a commandment that appears to contradict the Creator’s command to maximize procreation (Gen. 1:28; cf. → Jesus, **Matthew** 19:12; Paul, **1 Corinthians** 7:7-10):

Jer. 16:1 The word of the Lord came to me:

2 You shall not *take* a woman/wife, nor shall you have sons or daughters in this place.

3 For thus says the Lord concerning the sons and daughters who are born in this place, and concerning the mothers who bear them and the fathers who beget them in this land:

4 They shall die of deadly diseases. They shall not be lamented, nor shall they be buried; they shall become like dung on the surface of the ground. They shall perish by the sword and by famine, and their dead bodies shall become food for the birds of the air and for the wild animals of the earth.

According to William Holladay, Jeremiah was 27 years old when he thus declared himself a (divinely) confirmed bachelor (→ 1986:5), but this was such a strange occurrence in Israel that Hebrew didn’t even have a word that meant “unmarried” (→ Lundbom 2001; neither does Hebrew have a word for marriage/to marry; see the translation above; the woman was “taken,” not “proposed to”). David Pleins comments that Jeremiah’s visions and parables, together with the calling to the bachelor life, are “representations of a shamanic behavior which attracts attention” (2001:291-292; → Herbert Huffman 2001, “a unique commandment in the Hebrew Bible”). Like a motive for the unmarried life, Jeremiah refers to a divine judgment to come concerning children, without giving any hint of other motives or purposes in matrimony (see his purchase of inherited land in Jeremiah 32).

For company in his solitude, Jeremiah mainly had his personal secretary, Baruch the scribe, “a rather enigmatic figure in Jeremiah and strangely absent from chaps 37-42” (David Pleins 315, note 1). However, Jeremiah was rescued from the cistern by Ebed-melech, the Ethiopian eunuch, another gesture of intimate and loyal friendship (38:7-13; cf. 13:23). In his five confessions/laments (psalms of supplication), Jeremiah even presents himself as someone who has personally suffered sexual violation (20:7):

O Lord, you have seduced me,
and I was seduced;
you have overpowered me,
and you have prevailed.
I have become a laughing-stock all day long;
everyone mocks me.

It appears that, after so much suffering, Jeremiah interpreted his divine calling as a type of seduction and sexual violation on God’s part (Bauer 1999a:113-117; 1999b:258-269; Lundbom 2001:854-855). → **Ezekiel** concerning the metaphor of God as sexual violator.

In the five confessions/laments we may sense a bachelor prophet’s intimacy with God and (as was already recognized in the nineteenth century) these texts reveal the prophet’s tender, feminine side (Cheyne 1883:xi, xiv, cited in → Lundbom 2001:115; see (1) Jer. 11:18-20 + 12:1-6; (2) 15:10-21; (3) 17:14-18; (4) 18:18-23; (5) 20:7-18). However, Jeremiah does not indicate attraction when faced with feminine sexuality (Jer. 2:23-24) but considers it as wild, disgusting and uncontrollable (Kathleen O’Connor 1998:180). Not only due to Israel’s intransigence but perhaps also from his own undeniable homoerotic desires, Jeremiah felt a profound anger (15:17). Like Qoheleth (1:15; 7:13), he did not share the easy optimism of those who believe in a God who continually offers himself for whatever miracle, but rather recognizes that certain things can’t be changed (13:23, in reference to the color of the skin and the sinful nature of Israel; cf. the fraudulent “Ex-Gay” ministries; see www.fundotrasovejas.org.ar/ingles/ingles.html, Articles, “Is there Really Such a Thing As “Ex-gay?”

Bauer-Levesque, Angela (2006). “Jeremiah”. *The Queer Bible Commentary*, ed. Deryn Guest, Robert E. Goss, Mona West, Thomas Bohache, 386-393. London: SCM. “From a queer perspective the fluidity of

gender dynamics in Jeremiah and the instances of power exchanges with sexual connotations are to be foregrounded, yielding suggestive insights and offering various points of entry and intrigue within the book of Jeremiah” (387).

Jeremiah 1:1–6:30 (387-88) 1:1-3, 5 “The womb (Heb. *beten* and *rehem*) belongs to God and provides the locus for Jeremiah’s call.... The pregnant imagery of the opening quickly gives way to the metaphors of bride, prostitute, wife and promiscuous woman in the first cycle of judgment oracles (Jer. 2:1–4:4). Assuming a heteropatriarchal mindset, the writer juxtaposes Israel as loving bride (Jer. 2:2-3) with Israel/Judah as prostitute and promiscuous woman (Jer. 2:20; 2:25-8; 2:29-37; 3:1-5, 6-10; 3:19-20) in characterizing the prophet calling the people to repent.... Male Israel is pursuing unacceptable (‘defiling’, ‘no good’) love interests and female Israel is prostituting herself on heights under trees – ancient places for goddess worship – and is showing the supposedly uncontrollable sexual libido of a cow camel and a female wild ass.... To translesbigay ears such accusations sound familiar. Oppressive dualisms and animalization function to other and lessen the accused then as now. At the same time, the back and forth of gender designations for the people may inadvertently suggest modes of deconstructing the same such system” (387). The later passages regarding worship of the Queen of Heaven (Jer. 7:16-20; 44:15-25) attest to the historical realities of a folk religion existing alongside the official YHWH cult (387-88). “The choice of imagery has pornographic qualities..., perversely reversing typical heteropatriarchal dynamics by accusing the female of sexual aggression run amok. The judgment proclaimed is divorce (Jer. 3:1-5).... In the next cycle of judgement oracles (Jer. 4:5-6:30).... the prophet addresses the Israelites as ‘Daughter of My People’ and ‘Daughter Zion’ in a trans-gender move identifying himself with Jerusalem portrayed as female. This becomes more explicit in Jeremiah taking on a female voice in a brief lament (Jer. 4:19-21)... crying ‘My belly! My belly! I writhe in labour’ (Jer. 4:19).... The experiences of war find bodily expression in an m/f transgendered prophet succeeded by the image of a made-up street walking (drag queen?), who instead of her lover meets her murderer (Jer. 4:29-31).... From a pregnant God to a pregnant prophet... this first section of the book embraces gender-fluid images and traditional sexualized power dynamics with pornographic dimensions, all mixed together” (388).

Jeremiah 7:1–25:38 (388-90). “Those interested in portrayals of strong women will turn to Jeremiah 7:16-20 [// 44:15-25], Judahite women leading worship of the Queen of Heaven, and Jeremiah 9:16-21, professional mourners and teachers leading ceremonies....” (388). The women bake special ritual cakes (7:18) and can be understood as cultic officials at the temple. The Queen of Heaven (the Assyrian Ishtar, the Canaanite Astarte?) “is probably a conglomeration of various local goddesses at the time” (388; cf. the women weeping for Tammuz, → **Ezekiel** 8:14). In Jer. 9:16-21, YHWH calls the wise women keeners to intone their laments, with the only messenger formula in the HB addressed exclusively to women (9:20; “female companion,” *re’utah*, *close friend*, *neighbour*, *lover*, a possible mention of same-sex companions); the keeners sing, teach and lead in wisdom. The people’s punishment for their iniquity is described in the porno-prophetic metaphor of a woman, stripped naked and raped with the consent and even participation of YHWH (Jer. 13:20-27; see labor pain, 13:21; rape, 13:22, 26).

Jeremiah 26–52 (391-92). The gendered and/or sexualized imagery is again found predominantly in the poetic sections, especially in ‘the Little Book of Comfort’ (Jeremiah 30-31). “Wartime terror and panic are symbolized by male warriors in labour pain... this effeminization of warriors... the ultimate mockery and degradation” (Jer. 30:6, p. 391; cf. Moab’s warriors, 48:41; all of Damascus, 49:24; and Babylon’s king, 50:43). The oracles against the nations (Jeremiah 46–51) echo earlier imagery of sexual violation applied to Babylon (Jer. 51:2, 47). In Jeremiah 31 “the recollection of a dancing and drumming Maiden Israel... (Jer. 31:4-5) recalls... Miriam at the Sea of Reeds (Ex. 15:20-21).” Gender fluidity stands out in Jer. 31:22 and “The new gendered realities climax in the promise of a New Covenant (Jer. 31:3-14) that comes in the form of a marriage contract with somewhat changed role expectations” (392; see comparable gender fluidity in contemporary discussions of marriage). Jeremiah is thus a book that “crosses gender lines back and forth again and again in trying to make sense of the historical reality of a people led into exile” (Jeremiah 52, p. 392; → **Galatians** 2:28).

12. Qoheleth: heterosexual misogynist – or gay? “One man among a thousand I have found” (7:28; cf. Song of Songs 5:10)

In imitation of the gay *Epic of Gilgamesh*, Qoheleth’s literary genre is a pseudo-autobiography of a great king (→ Richard Clifford 1998:98-99, 174, note 1; → Seow 1997:306; → O. Loretz 1964:116-22). The author utilizes the figure of King Solomon (970-931 B.C.), son of David (1010-970 B.C.), as literary fiction, to demonstrate his conclusion that “under the sun” all is “vanity” (1:2; 12:8). Qoheleth, a wise “professor” of youth in Jerusalem’s court, probably wrote Ecclesiastes between 400 and 200 B.C., since the book shows influences of Greek culture which greatly affected Palestine after 450 B.C., especially after triumph of Alexander the Great (333 B.C.). Although recent studies of the linguistic evidence suggest the possibility of an earlier Persian date (539-333; → C.L. Seow 1997:20-21; → Clifford 1998:100), in recent decades the majority prefer a later Hellenic date (333-200 B.C.; → James Crenshaw 1998:139; → Anthony Ceresko 1999:92; → Craig Bartholomew 2009).

Craig Bartholomew (2009) emphasizes the parallel expression, “a striving after the wind,” not as indicating “without meaning” but rather “ungraspable, incomprehensible” and thus concludes that *hebel* is best translated “enigmatic,” or “ungraspable, incomprehensible” and in some contexts “ephemeral” (Eccl. 11:10; Bartholomew 2009). Bartholomew also seeks to show that Ecclesiastes presents “an ironical exposure of...an autonomous epistemology that seeks wisdom through personal experience and analysis without the glasses of the fear of God” (2009:94-95) and is therefore repeatedly stymied by the enigmas of life. His “two Qoheleths” solution leads him to read a text like 8:10-17 as involving two voices: the Greek philosophical voice of “autonomous epistemology” learning from one’s own experience without reference to faith presuppositions (14, 16-17), and the Hebrew “confessional voice” (12-13, 15) in which the fear of God is not only the final destination of Qoheleth’s journey (12:13) but also the point of departure (3:14; 5:6/7; 7:18; 8:12; cf. Prov. 1:7 and see the presuppositional apologetics and philosophies of thinkers such as Herman Dooyeweerd, Cornelius Van Til and Francis Schaeffer).

In the fifth century, under the Persian Empire (539-333 B.C.), commerce was democratized and privatized and thus ceased to be a royal enterprise. Instead of the earlier farming society’s land and cattle, under the Persians money became the principal tender of commercial transactions (→ C. L. Seow 1997:95; → Clifford 1998:99-101). For Qoheleth “economy came to be the metaphor for human life” (Clifford 101):

yitron – profit, advantage (1:3; 2:11; 3:9; 5:16; 6:8)
inyan – business, concern
heleq – portion, lot
nakhala – inheritance (7:11)
toser – wealth
kesep – money (7:12)

Under the oppressive domination of the Persians and the Greeks, with the new effective bureaucracy and its disastrous (ruinous) taxes, Qoheleth and his contemporaries felt trapped and – according to some – almost incapable of improving their situation (→ Anthony Ceresko 1999:92-93; → Elsa Tamez 1998). Nevertheless, although Qoheleth’s theology expresses itself in a vocabulary that reflects the new economic situation, he seeks to subvert both imperial economic domination and the ideology (traditional “wisdom”) that supported it (Ceresko 1999:95).

12.1 Qoheleth and the poor: lacking in solidarity?

According to David Pleins, *Ecclesiastes* lacks the kind of “radical solidarity with the poor” that we see in *Job* and various prophets (Pleins 2000:510). And yet, as Pleins points out, even though Qoheleth avoids various common words for the poor (*‘ebyon*, *dal*, *makhsor*), he frequently employs other terms (*‘ani*, *rash*, *misken*; 509-510, 513). However, as Pleins recognizes (508-509), Qoheleth causes us to contemplate the oppressive brutalities of the epoch, in which the people had to confront the new world of money and finance:

Again I saw all the oppressions (*‘ashuqim*) that are practiced under the sun. Look, the tears of the oppressed (*‘ashuqim*) – with no one to comfort them! On the side of their oppressors (*‘oshqehem*) there

was power – with no one to comfort them (4:1; concerning the root ‘shq, three times in 4:1, see Hanks 1983; Tamez 1982).

We see that Qoheleth does not merely denounce certain local acts of oppression against the poor (as did many prophets) but directs our attention to all types of oppressive acts (not only against the poor) globally (literally, “under the sun”). He analyses the problem of the distribution of power that permits some to abuse their privileged situation and causes the weaker to suffer. And he sensitizes us to the suffering of the oppressed, for in fact, in the entire Bible only Qoheleth depicts how so many oppressed are homeless and crying.

As for the poor, Qoheleth makes it clear that the fundamental cause of its poverty is not some purported vices (laziness), but the abuse of power manifest in acts of oppression. Moreover, the common mechanism of oppression that Qoheleth emphasizes is the abuse of political power on the part of the state and its easily bribed bureaucrats:

⁸If you see in a province the oppression (‘*osheq*) of the poor (*rash*) and the violation (*gezel*) of judgment and justice, do not be amazed at the matter; for the high official is watched by a higher, and there are yet higher ones over them. ⁹But all things considered, this is an advantage for the land: a king for a plowed field (5:8-9).

Oppression makes the wise foolish, and a bribe corrupts the heart (7:7).

As Pleins points out, Qoheleth subverts the ideology of Proverbs, which, like Pharaoh (Exodus 5:8), blames the poor for their poverty, insisting that they are poor because they are lazy. Qoheleth even employs the word that Proverbs uses for the indolent poor (*rash*), but uses it to refer to the poor of good character.

¹³Better is a poor (*misken*) but wise youth than an old but foolish king, who will no longer take advice.

¹⁴One can indeed come out of [debtors’] prison to reign, even though born poor (*rash*) in the kingdom.

¹⁵I saw all the living who, moving about under the sun, follow that youth who replaced the king (Qoh. 4:13-15).

Frequently these poor [*rash/misken*] are wise and of good character:

¹³ I have also seen this example of wisdom under the sun, and it seemed great to me. ¹⁴ There was a small town with few inhabitants. A great king came against it and besieged it, building great siege works. ¹⁵ Then there was found in it a poor [*misken*] wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city. Yet no one remembered that poor man [*misken*]. ¹⁶ So I said, “Wisdom is better than might; yet the poor [*misken*] man’s wisdom is despised, and his words not heeded” (9:13-16).

For what advantage have the wise over fools? And what do the poor [‘*oni*] have that know how to conduct themselves before the living? (6:8 BJ)

Pleins concludes that the poor, like all human beings under the sun, are “victims of an immense system of futility... that subverts even the best of human plans and deeds” (Pleins 2000:510). Is Pleins then correct when he says that Qoheleth lacks solidarity with the poor? Certainly he does well to point out the Bible’s diversity of perspectives concerning poverty, which is reflected in the varied vocabulary and different historical contexts. And since few in antiquity could write, the biblical books reflect the class perspective of privileged males. Nevertheless:

- The kind of comprehensive “academic” analysis Qoheleth carries out facilitates a better understanding of the problem – and thus is itself a type of solidarity.
- Qoheleth clearly points to oppression as the fundamental cause of poverty and which is manifest, above all, in a corrupt and indifferent state bureaucracy.
- In describing eloquently the suffering (“tears”) of the poor, Qoheleth does not sin by silence, but directs our attention to the problem, which is another type of solidarity (consider journalists today). He could

have investigated countless other subjects and problems and never said a word about oppression, poverty, and the violence against the poor.

- Qoheleth subverts majority propaganda (reflected in Proverbs and by Pharaoh in Exodus: “the poor are poor because they are lazy”), by insisting that the poor are poor because of the oppression of the powerful – and he points us to examples of poor persons who were wise and of good character.

12.2 Qoheleth and women (7:23-29)

²³ All this I have tested by wisdom: I said, “I will be wise,” but it was far from me. ²⁴ That which is, is far off, and deep, very deep: who can find it out? ²⁵ I turned my mind to know and to search out and to seek wisdom and the sum of things, and to know that wickedness is folly and that foolishness is madness. ²⁶ I found more bitter than death the woman who is a trap, whose heart is snares and nets, whose hands are fetters: one who pleases God escapes her, but the sinner is taken by her. ²⁷ See, this is what I found, says the Teacher, adding one thing to another to find the sum, ²⁸ which my mind has sought repeatedly, but I have not found. One man among a thousand I found, but a woman among these I have not found. ²⁹ See, this alone I found, that God made human beings straightforward, but they have devised many schemes.

Was Qoheleth misogynist? (cf. the slaves, singers and many concubines of “Solomon”; Eccl. 2:7-8)

Commonly 7:23-29 is taken as convincing evidence that Qoheleth was misogynist (→ Carole Fontaine 1998:162; → Longman 1998:206). Others, however, suggest that 7:26 does not talk about all women or women in general, but only of a certain type of seductive woman (adulteress or whore), or even woman as a metaphor of stupidity (→ Choon-Leong Seow 1997:262-263). Others propose that 7:28 is an annotation, an editorial addition written by someone who misinterpreted 7:26 as a condemnation of women in general (→ Seow 1997:264-265; cf. → Kumiko Kato 1998:227, where he concludes that Qoheleth is, indeed, refuting the common prejudices against women).

Marriage as inevitable?

Enjoy life with the woman/wife whom *you* love, all the days of *your* vain life that are given under the sun, because that is *your* portion in life and in *your* toil at which *you* toil under the sun (9:9; “you/r” always singular).

Many conclude from 9:9 that Qoheleth loves marriage, since he clearly recommended it to his disciples – although the Hebrew text only speaks of a “woman,” not necessarily a wife. What’s more, we must note the emphasis on the second person singular “you” and the possible note of irony or sarcasm (the days of your *vain* life), since Qoheleth thus seems to distinguish between that which he recommends to his students and the bachelor life which he personally preferred (similarly, Paul, 1 Cor. 7:1-7).

A time to throw away stones and a time to gather;
a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing (3:5).

“Stones” has been interpreted by a few as a metaphor for sexual relations (Carole Fontaine 1998:162), but this interpretation is rejected by the majority (Seow 1997:161).

12.3 Was Qoheleth heterosexual? “One man among a thousand I have found” (7:28).

Following the German commentator O. Loretz (1964), biblicalists commonly point out the special literary affinity of Qoheleth with the *Epic of Gilgamesh* and his intimate companion Enkidu (Richard Clifford 1998:98-99, 174, note 1). In recent gender studies Gilgamesh and Enkidu are commonly recognized as an ancient example of a “gay” couple (David Halperin 1990:75-87; Byrne Fone 1998:3-9; Robert Drake 1998:28-37). Connecting the dots, we may conclude that Qoheleth’s imitation of the literary genre of Gilgamesh provides what is perhaps the strongest among the many clues that the author of Ecclesiastes was not heterosexual, but of homosexual orientation (“gay”).

The *Epic of Gilgamesh* is the earliest known text in world literature that celebrates intimate male friendship. Gilgamesh ruled the ancient Mesopotamian city of Uruk (in what is today Iraq) around 2700 B.C. Around 1700-1600 B.C. a Sumerian priest wove the legends about this king into a magnificent poem that was rediscovered only in the mid-nineteenth century. Like David and Jonathan (→ **1-2 Samuel**), the friendship between Gilgamesh and his intimate companion Enkidu is intense and passionate. They are inseparable in life and at Enkidu's death, Gilgamesh is devastated. Inconsolable, Gilgamesh sings a moving lament and then sets out on a journey to discover the secret of eternal life. Both Gilgamesh and Qoheleth

- share the common somber theme of human mortality;
- refer to human life as “under the sun”;
- evaluate even the most exalted royal accomplishments as “vanity”.
- For vanity, Qoheleth uses the Hebrew term *hebel*, breath, wind; Gilgamesh, the Akkadian term “wind”.
- Gilgamesh the warrior king in the epic becomes Gilgamesh the sage, who has seen and done everything, like King Solomon in Qoheleth 1–2. (Had T-shirts been the style for ancient rulers, that of Gilgamesh and the Solomon of Qoh. 1–2 would both read the same: on the front, “Been There, Done That“, and on the back, “All is Vanity“.)
- Qoheleth (4:12) echoes Gilgamesh's ancient proverb:
“a three-fold ply cord is not easily broken.”
- Qoheleth 9:7-9 echoes Gilgamesh's *Carpe Diem* with identical sequence of topics:
(1) feasting, (2) fresh clothing, (3) hair care, (4) spouse/woman:

Gilgamesh, wither rovest thou?

The life thou pursuest thou shalt not find.

When the gods created humankind,

They set aside Death for humankind,

Retaining life in their own hands.

(1) Thou, Gilgamesh, let thy belly be full,

Make thou merry by day and by night.

Of each day make thou a feast of rejoicing.

Day and night dance thou and play!

(2) Let thy garments be sparkling fresh,

(3) Thy head be washed; bathe thou in water.

Pay heed to the little one that holds thy hand.

(4) Let thy spouse delight in thy bosom!

For this is the task of humankind!

(1) Go, eat your food in pleasure
and drink your wine with merry heart,
for God has already favored
what you have done.

(2) Let your garments be ever white

(3) and oil not be lacking upon your head.

(4) Enjoy life with your beloved spouse

all the days of your vain life

which has been given to you

under the sun,

for that is your portion in life

and in your toil,

which you are toiling

under the sun.

In societies that pressure its people to accumulate honor and avoid shame by marrying and procreating, in the case of adults that never marry the burden of proof obviously falls on whoever would insist on the heterosexuality of the person in question. In Qoheleth's case, his book gives no indication whatsoever of heterosexuality, but rather includes various indications to the contrary. In addition to the literary genre in purposeful imitation of the famous gay saga of Gilgamesh:

3.1. Qoheleth is unmarried (7:26-28; 2:18-23, 28; 4:7-12; 5:14; 6:1-2). With a certain irony or sarcasm (“Each one of your absurd days!”), Qoheleth recommends marriage to others, especially his students (“you/r”, 9:9; see above 11.2 Qoheleth and women), although he himself never married, nor was he interested in finding a wife. Then why is it supposed that he was heterosexual?

3.2. Although not attracted to women, he is not necessarily misogynist (see above 11.2 Qoheleth and women; 7:26-29). Modern studies have focused so much on the question of his possible misogyny that they have passed over his strong expression concerning the very special male that he encountered. Even Proverbs, which ends with a tribute to the ideal wife (hard-working and virtuous, but not so beautiful), begins by affirming that – for the wise – such a woman is nearly impossible to find, and the book often complains of unbearable wives (cf. the exhortation to be faithful to the wife of one's youth, 5:18-20).

3.3. Given his lack of sexual interest in women, it is not surprising that Qoheleth prefers a male companion (4:7-12) and even to be in bed with another male (4:11, Hebrew *sheney'im*, contrary to various translations). God had declared that “It is not good for a man to be alone” (Gen. 2:18), but Qoheleth makes it clear that matrimony is not for everyone and that for a minority it is better to have friends (4:9-12) and sleep with someone of the same sex (→ Jennifer Koosed 2006:349-51; → Choon-Leong Seow 1997:188-190; see Jesus on two men in a bed // two women grinding, → **Luke** 17:34-35); Paul on “bed-males;” → 1 Corinthians 6:9; 1 Timothy 1:10. Conservative evangelical commentator Tremper Longman III explains that Qoheleth:

contrasts the image of two people traveling together who at night share body heat to keep each other warm with the pathetic image of the lonely traveler who at night vainly tries to keep himself warm. While as early as the Targum [Aramaic translations and commentary, difficult to date] the argument has been made that this refers to a married couple, it is far more likely, and the predominant opinion today, that the two are companions (a view that goes back at least as far as the eighth chapter of *Abothj de-Rabbi Nathan* [second century A.D.]” (Tremper Longman III 1998:142, citing Delitzsch).

Another conservative evangelical commentator (2010:116), Philip Graham Ryken, President of Wheaton College, even says: “The desert gets cold at night, and if a pilgrim is walking alone he will freeze, maybe even to death. But not if he has a companion! Two of them can sleep back to back and stay warm all night. And sometimes of course, the traveling companion is also a lover, who gives the most warmth of all:

The snow is snowing, the wind is blowing
But I can weather the storm!
What do I care how much it may storm?
I’ve got my love to keep me warm” [Irving Berlin, 1937]

3.4. The wise testimony of an *ex* “Ex-Gay”: The favorite proverb that Qoheleth has seized upon occurs at the beginning of the two principal sections of the book:

“What is crooked cannot be made straight,
and what is lacking cannot be counted” (Eccl. 1:15)....
“Look at God’s work:
who can make straight what He has made crooked? (Eccl. 7:13).

“Crooked” has been a common euphemism and a favorite metaphor for persons who are not sexually attracted to the opposite sex, but to their same sex. For example, from the Maale of Ethiopia comes this testimony:

The Deity created me *wobo*, crooked. If I had been a man, I would have been able to take a wife and create sons. If I had been a woman, I would have been able to marry and have children. But I am a wobo, I cannot have either of those things.” (Stephen O. Murray, *Boy-Wives and Female Husbands: Studies of African Homosexualities*, 1998:23-24. New York: St. Martins.)

This male “wobo” had come to believe that God created him in that way. Qoheleth also appears to have accepted or “assumed” his sexual orientation, since at first he only insists that such a preference cannot be changed (1:15), but later accepts that God created him in that way (7:13). The pain that he suffered all his life for being “different” surely made him especially sensitive to the suffering of others – not only the poor, but the oppressed and outcasts of all kinds. Otherwise, it is difficult to understand why someone so privileged concerned himself so much with all the oppressed, their suffering and tears.

3.5. Qoheleth, the name that the author of Ecclesiastes chose for himself, is the feminine participle of the Hebrew verb *qahal*, “to collect” or “to gather together” (→ Dianne Bergant 1997:110). The author seems to be thinking of Solomon, who collected proverbs, riches (→ Seow 1997:97) – and 1000 women (see 11.2, women, 7:23-29, above). This feminine noun “Qoheleth” (“who gathers together”) is used with masculine verbs in 1:2 and 12:9, and is described as a wise male (*khakam*, 12:9; → Seow, 96). But, at the precise point where his frustration with women is revealed, “Qoheleth” employs the feminine form of the verb (7:27; changed to the masculine in LXX). Translators and commentators generally succeed in imposing a “correct” grammar on all

the texts that appear to them to be “queer/ strange”. However, such playful manipulation of the laws of grammar is a commonly intentional diversion among various sexual minority groups. As teacher/ professor in the court, in addition to proverbs and slaves (2:7, 8), Qoheleth “gathered together” students-disciples (see the bachelors Jesus and Paul) who could listen to and learn the proverbs and the wisdom that “She who gathers up” – “the Qoheleth (feminine)” – had collected.

3.6. Qoheleth's life-style was not typically that of a male, but “different”, giving much consideration to the style and color of his clothes (always white) and an interest in perfumed oils (9:8). If he had no desire for women, whom did he wish to attract with such lovely clothing and expensive perfumes?

3.7. Qoheleth found the common processes of Creation boring and tiresome, (1:1-11, “nature?”), since he prefers those things “against nature” (cf. Rom. 1:26-27; even as God does, Rom. 11:23-24; → Carole Fontaine, “the monotony of nature,” 1998:161).

3.8. Qoheleth is a lover of the pleasures and has a positive theology, integrating the body and spirituality (3:11). In six texts Qoheleth exhorts his disciples to enjoy the simple pleasures of eating, drinking and working. People can even find God in the enjoyment of their work (2:24-26; 3:12-13, 22; 5:17-18 [18-19]; 8:15; 9:7-10; cf. 11:9-10; Dianne Bergant 1997:114; Richard Clifford 1998:106). Although references to sexual pleasure are notably absent, probably reflecting the reality of the unmarried author, now aged (cf. Prov. 5:18-20 and Song of Songs), it would be difficult to find better counsel for gay youth than the following:

Rejoice, young man, while you are young, and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth. *Follow the inclination of your heart and the desire of your eyes*, and know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment (11:9; cf. Numbers 15:39! → William Brown 2000:104-07).

3.9. He is sensitive to the oppression of all the weak and outcast (4:1-3; 5:8-9).

3.10. He is aged, never married, nor even tempted to marry (11:7–12:8).

3.11. Qoheleth will die without bearing sons (2:18-21; 4:7-8).

3.12. As Richard Clifford points out: “Qoheleth uses ‘I’ to the very end of the book. In no other wisdom book does an author explicitly base all his teaching on his *personal* experience and observation” (→ 1998:99). More explicitly, Qoheleth’s theology emerges from the conflictive experience of an oppressed sexual minority that caused him to be an extremely dialectic thinker, a lover of paradoxes and of the contradictions of life (Jacques Ellul 1987/89; Anthony Ceresko 1999:93; cf. feminist, black, Latin American, Pentecostal/charismatic and gay theologies, all criticized for starting from experience instead of the Bible). To not share the common sexual interests in the opposite sex caused Qoheleth to suffer greatly, and gave him a special sensitivity to those who “don’t seem to fit” into the scheme, the dominant ideologies and the propaganda that supports them. Michael Fox (1989:1-4) points out three principal contradictions in Qoheleth’s dialectic:

- (1) Work is useless and absurd; it does, however, give pleasure and create wealth;
- (2) The possibility and the value of wisdom is both affirmed and negated;
- (3) Life is unjust, but God is just (2:26; 3:17; 5:4-6).

Conclusions

The principal theses of Qoheleth (cf. → James Crenshaw 1998:117-128):

- (1) Death, our common destiny, cancels all temporary and illusory gains (2:14b-23; 6:6, 12; 8:8; 9:1-6, 10; 11:7–12:8).
- (2) Meanwhile, we must avail ourselves of all the pleasures that God offers us (food, work; 2:24-25; 3:12-13, 22; 5:18-20; 8:15; 9:7-10; 11:7-10; cf. erotic love in → **Songs**).
- (3) Wisdom is better than foolishness, but its outcome can never be assured (1:16-18; 2:12-14a; 7:11-13, 19).

- (4) The world is characterized by injustice, oppression and violence against the weak.
- (5) God is an inscrutable and transcendent judge, but also a source of pleasure.

Roland Murphy criticizes H. W. Hertzberg's conclusion that "the book of Qoheleth, standing at the end of the Old Testament [in terms of date], is the most staggering messianic prophesy to appear in the Old Testament." Murphy explains: "This is meant to be understood in the sense that the 'Old Testament was here on the point of running itself to death. Behind this total nothing from a human point of view, the only possible help was the 'new creature' of the New Testament'" (→ Roland Murphy 1992:lxix, citing H. Hertzberg, *Der Prediger*. KAT 17. Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1963:238). We should distance ourselves from any anti-Judaic tendency in Hertzberg's commentary, since the Hebrew Bible itself provides innumerable counterpoints to the teachings of Qoheleth (see the resurrection in Daniel 12:2-3). However, with all due respect to Murphy's concern, the Apostle Paul (a Jew) intentionally succeeds in transcending Qoheleth's pessimistic conclusions, insisting:

- that by the redemptive death of Jesus, God has liberated the entire Cosmos from Vanity (Rom. 8:20-21);
- that in the light of Jesus' resurrection, our labor "is not in vain" (1 Cor. 15:58); and
- that instead of a monotonous universe ("nothing new under the sun", 1:9), "if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away, *everything* has become new!" (2 Cor. 5:17; also cf. Eccl. 1:8 with 1 Cor. 2:9).

Note: Pastoral for the gay and "gray" (older lesbians and gays). Qoheleth offers us a positive paradigm of an older gay male that may have even more importance for the young than for the old, since for many in the gay culture, the idolatry of youth makes the successive transitions from one stage of maturity to another (30...40...50...60...) a traumatic process. For lack of happy older gay role models, many youths fall into patterns of destructive conduct: alcoholism, drugs, risky sexual practices, suicide, etc. Abundant self-help groups and bibliographies are available in English, but up to now there are few in Spanish. Concerning death and life, see 4:1-3; 6:3; 7:1-4; 9:4-6, 10; 11:5; and abortion → Exodus 21:22-25.

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13. Daniel: The eunuch who served and subverted four different empires

Porphyry the heretic (ca. 232-303 A.D.) affirmed that the book of Daniel did not have its origins in a “Daniel” from the sixth century B.C., that he had neither miraculously foretold the Maccabean battles against Antiochus IV Epiphanes, the Seleucid governor (Syria) in the second century (167-164 B.C.), nor the advent of Rome as a “fourth empire” (Daniel 11). This Neo-Platonic vegetarian philosopher, born in Tyre (Syria), concluded that, rather, the book of Daniel was pseudonymous: written precisely towards the end of the Maccabean war that it supposedly *foresaw* (ca. 165 B.C.). As to the succession of four Empires, the fourth was not Rome, but the Hellenistic empire of the second century B.C., the successors of Alexander the Great: the Ptolomies (in Egypt) and the Seleucids.

Daniel thus refers to four Empires:*

1. Babylon: Nebuchadnezzar (604-562 B.C.), Daniel 1–4 (see Cyrus, 1:21; cf. 6:28); [Nabonidus, the last king of Babylon (556-539 B.C.), absent for eight years]; Belshazzar fulfilled the role of “king” during his father Nabonidus’ absence, Daniel 5; 7–8.
2. “Darius the Mede” (Dan. 5:31–6:28; 9:1-27; 11:1). Historical?*
3. Persia: Cyrus II (558-530 B.C. [Edict 538]). Dan. 1:21; 6:28; 10:1–12:1 (cf. 11:1); [Darius I of Persia (522-486 B.C.) is *not* “Darius the Mede” from Dan. 5:31–6:28].
4. Greece: Alexander the Great conquers Persia (333 B.C.);
Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175-163 B.C., reign of the Seleucids: Syria and Palestine);
The great persecution and the Maccabean revolt to overthrow Antiochus (167-164 B.C.).

During almost two millennia, the Church was scandalized about Porphyry’s conclusions and denounced them as a heresy. (See also the fundamental error, which also lasted two millennia, in the interpretation of → **Song of Solomon** as pious allegories instead of erotic poetry). However, in the 1800’s, scientific study of the Bible began to support Porphyry’s “heresy” as being the correct interpretation of the Book of Daniel, and in the twentieth century this conclusion was universally accepted (with the exception of fundamentalists, both Jewish and Christian). Maurice Casey even attempts to show that some glosses in the Syrian version of the Hebrew Bible and certain Syrian-speaking authors in the Eastern Church actually anticipated Porphyry’s observations, but John Collins disagrees with Casey’s conclusions (→ Collins 1993:114-117).

We can accept the possibility of miraculous prophecy in the Bible (normally referring to the immediate future) without having to exaggerate its possible extent. (It certainly would be quite miraculous if Daniel, in the sixth century B.C., was able to describe the Maccabean battles that were to take place in the 2nd century B.C., the advent of the Roman Empire and of Christianity; → John Goldengay 1989:xxxix-xl). Such increasing exaggeration concerning the extent of miracles is a common phenomenon in the history of religions. In Daniel’s case, only a Maccabean date of origin can explain that the book is so specific and correct in its “predictions”, whereas in 11:39 and in 11:40-45 it suddenly stops being specific and reverts to more vague and general descriptions. This phenomenon of “predictions” written *after* the events that they supposedly prophesy (*vaticinium ex eventu*) was quite common in other pseudonymous Jewish writings of the age, which also claim to be “prophesying” events in the far future: 1 Enoch; 4 Esdras and the 2nd Apocalypse of Baruch (→ John Collins 1993:54-58; James Charlesworth, ed. 1983-85). Furthermore, the narrations in Daniel 1–6 concerning the life of a certain Daniel who lived in the sixth century B.C. could contain a historical core relating to such a person’s actual life, yet the selection of those narrations and the way they are told, along with the apocalyptic visions in Daniel 7–12, represent precisely what must have been the perspective and the interests of an author who lived and wrote ca. 165 B.C. If the book of Daniel was truly written by Daniel from the sixth century, we would expect to find at least some narrations that were superfluous in relation to the situation in the second century, as opposed to the selection in the Book of Daniel which particularly addresses the problems of the Maccabean period.

* For historical background, see NISB, NOAB, HCSB, NJB, JSB.

The study of parallels between the stories of Daniel, Joseph and Esther has helped to ascertain that their literary genre is not “history”, but, rather, “legends of the court” or “sapiential didactic narratives” (John Collins 1993:38-56):

- Both Joseph and Daniel are taken into captivity, and they become members at the Court of foreign kings.
- Both are handsome and sexually attractive (Genesis 39:6; Daniel 1:4).
- Both achieve a prominent position thanks to their capacity to interpret dreams: they are entrusted with high functions in the service of a Gentile king.
- Both possess a divine spirit (Gen. 41:38; Dan. 5:11, 14) and both recognize the work of God in the interpretation (Gen. 40:25, 28; Dan. 2:28) and in the fulfillment (Gen. 41:25, 28; Dan. 2:28) of dreams.
- Both are rewarded for their services with a gold chain (Gen. 41:42; Dan. 5:29).

Thus, it is probable that the author of the Book of Daniel knew the story of Joseph and other similar ones, such as the Gentile narrative of Ahikar (→ John Collins 1993:39-41; James Charlesworth, ed. 1983-85).

The Book of → **Esther** and Daniel 1–6 have even more in common than Esther and the Joseph narrative in Genesis 37–50 (→ John Collins 1993:40; → **Esther**, Adele Berlin 2001:xl):

- Daniel, just as Mordecai, is an exiled single man, and member of the court of an Empire (Babylon or Persia); both men insist on living a life that is openly and publicly faithful to the laws of Israel.
- Daniel, just as Esther, is quite attractive sexually; both live in luxury and both books refer to the king’s ring that is used to seal official documents written in several languages.
- Just as Mordecai, Daniel also resists the order to prostrate himself, and both are victims of slander on the part of a pagan who tries to kill them.
- In all of the Bible, only the books of Esther and Daniel mention imperial edicts that are irrevocable (Esther 8:8; Dan. 6:8, 12).
- In both cases, the king lies awake a whole night, and the pagan enemy is killed by the same means that had originally been prepared for killing the Jew. The Book of Daniel, however, emphasizes the role of God, and God’s miraculous interventions.

The only woman mentioned in the book of Daniel is the widowed mother of “Persian king” Belshazzar (Dan. 5:10-12). This alerts us to the extent to which sexual minorities are prevalent in the whole book. The only mentioned “family”, that of Belshazzar (countless wives and concubines, 5:2), is totally lacking in “family values” (5:3-4, 22-31), whereas Daniel and his three single companions lived together (2:17) and are paradigms of faith and virtue. During the history of the Christian church, the idolatry of “family” and of its supposed “values” has entailed that the exclusive prevalence of sexual minorities in the book of Daniel has passed without notice in innumerable Bible commentaries.

Daniel and his three single friends, young men brought up in noble Jewish homes, were taken to the palace as exiled prisoners, partly due to the fact that they were quite “handsome” (*tobe mare’h*, 1:4), and they were made slaves under the authority of Ashpenaz, the “chief of the *eunuchs*.” The most common translations use euphemisms (“chief of *court officials*”, NIV) in order to conceal the reality pointed out in more literal translations: KJV, “eunuch(s) (*saris[im]*)”, 1:3, 7-11, 18 (seven times in Daniel 1; see also RV95 and DHHBE, notes 1:3 and Jer. 29:1-2). According to Josephus (*Ant.* 10.186) and other ancient authorities, Daniel and his three companions were (castrated) eunuchs. John Collins gives a good summary of the evidence (1993:39,134-136; → Neh. 1:11; Is. 56:3-8; Mat. 19:12; Acts 8:27). The author of Daniel 1 wanted to present Daniel as a hero, and it is easy to understand his discretion in not explicitly referring to the castration of exiled Jews. But the emphasis (seven times) in referring to Ashpenaz as chief of the eunuchs and of the young prisoners does clarify their situation, which was quite common for prisoners of war at the time. And thus, we can understand why Daniel and his companions have neither wives nor children, how Daniel was able to continue as a man who maintained the trust of kings under three different empires, and many other characteristics in this book.

Similarly to → **Esther**, who underwent a year’s beauty treatment under the eunuch Hegai, Daniel and his friends underwent three years of education under the authority of Ashpenaz, chief of the royal eunuchs, until

they were finally presented to king Nebuchadnezzar (1:9, 18). They were not given beauty treatments, but they chose to eat dishes that were “for the weak,” associated with women (concerning the diet of vegetables and water, see Carol Newsom 1998:202; → **Romans** 14). Daniel was able to maintain his position of royal confidence for some 60 years (under Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar, “Darius the Mede” and Cyrus, 1:21; 10:1), since eunuchs did not represent such a high risk for the security of the king and of his harem (Herodotus, cited by → John Collins 1993:134). When Daniel is able to interpret Nebuchadnezzar’s dream, he is richly rewarded (Dan. 2:48-49), but not with a wife (cf. Joseph in Genesis 37–50).

The narratives in Daniel 1–6 describe a young man who is not only handsome and intelligent, but also charming (→ David, **1-2 Samuel**). Like Esther, Daniel managed to establish an intimate bond with the chief of the eunuchs, and the text affirms that Ashpenaz felt “love and [maternal] compassion” (1:9, *khesed* and *rakhamim*) for Daniel. After three years of study, Daniel and his companions caused a great impression on King Nebuchadnezzar (1:18-21). When Arioch, captain of the king’s guard, arrives with the order to kill all the wise men, Daniel manages to convince him to let him talk with the king (2:13-14). When Nebuchadnezzar has the dream featuring a great tree, Daniel is the man of confidence for whom the king asks and from whom the king receives the interpretation (4:8). Under Belshazzar, the mother in the imperial court seems to be the only person who knows Daniel (Dan. 5:10-12). But then, once again, in the subsequent narration about the lions’ den, Daniel is described as being the person in whom Darius the Mede places the greatest confidence (6:3). Although the king orders (against his own will) the death penalty for Daniel, the text particularly emphasizes the great affection that Darius felt for Daniel (6:14, 16, 18-23).

The queen (5:10-12), just as much as King Belshazzar (5:13-16), sees Daniel as a sort of shaman, a man specially gifted with divine Spirit; → **Micah**, also full of the Spirit, was a man of peace who taught the wise path of justice and peace (4:1-4). However, the diversity of biblical texts on the subjects of war and peace suggests that it would be risky to try to establish an “ethical absolute” of pacifism (→ Matthew 5).

Whereas the Daniel figure in the narratives (Daniel 1–6) is a eunuch, the Daniel who narrates the apocalyptic visions (Daniel 7–12) was thoroughly impressed with the military figure of Alexander the Great (who was well-known to be gay, and, what is more, was the lover of a handsome eunuch; see below). Nevertheless, the Daniel who narrates the visions seems to be neither frustrated nor indignant about having been excluded from the Maccabean revolutionary army, since he offers evidence of being a pacifist. He at least describes the Maccabean revolution as being of “little help” (Dan. 11:34), and this passage has led some commentators to describe the book of Daniel as a “pacifist treatise” (cf. Collins 1993:386). Daniel does not recommend the Maccabean path of armed violence, but rather the path of the wise who attempt to instruct the people in the path of justice and solidarity with the weak, and of being willing to die, not to kill, for one’s faith (Dan. 12:3; 3:16-18; 4:27; 6:10-24).

Although Zechariah seems not only to refer to Alexander the Great (→ **Zechariah** 9:1-8) but also to do so in quite positive terms, Daniel refers to Alexander in four different chapters, without naming him but using metaphors and descriptions in such detail that they leave no room for doubt (see below: Dan. 2:40-43; 7:7; 8:5-8, especially 8:21-22; 11:3-4; BJ notes 2:28, 7:7 and 11:4; DHHBE notes 2:38-40, 2:41; 8:1-27; 11:2-45). If the author of these texts were a eunuch (as the Daniel figure in the narratives), we could well understand his fascination with the “one majestic horn” (Dan. 8:5, NJB) of the gay military hero who loved a handsome, well-known eunuch – and perhaps also why he insisted so much on the conqueror’s “different” character (Dan. 7:7, 19, 23; cf. the despised Antiochus Epiphanes, “the little horn”, 7:8). Furthermore, we can comprehend why a young man who suffered castration as a prisoner of war would have so much pleasure in describing the destruction of the enemies’ “horns” (8:7-9), the possibility of having a new horn grow in the place where an older one was destroyed, and how a little horn can also grow (8:7-10).

Most of all, although the last vision (10:1–12:13) does not reveal much about the future, the introduction to the vision is quite revealing about Daniel as a representative of sexual minorities. The modern reader, captive to Neo-Platonic ideologies, supposes that angels have neither a human body nor sexual capacities, yet several texts in the Bible refer to angels as human beings (Mark 16:5). Jacob wrestled all night with an angel, and that would be difficult if the angel had no human body; moreover, the Sodom narrative (Genesis 19) makes it clear that angels can arouse sexual attraction in others (→ **Judas** 7). Thus, although Daniel 10, in the beginning of Daniel’s vision, refers to a “man (*ish*) clothed in linen” (10:5), the angelical character of that “man” is soon

made manifest – his identity as Gabriel (DHHBE notes 10:5; 8:16; 9:21; cf. Michael, the angel who protects Israel, see the note to 10:13). The detailed description of the suntanned, “bronze” skin (not white, 10:6) on Gabriel’s body does not only resemble other descriptions of celestial figures in apocalyptic literature (→ **Revelation 1**), but also the descriptions of the beloved male in the → **Song of Solomon 5:10-16**.

Only Daniel has this vision, and his companions, inexplicably frightened, conveniently flee – leaving Daniel and Gabriel alone (10:7-8). For his part, Gabriel addresses Daniel twice, calling him “beloved man” (*khamudot*, fem. pl.; 10:11, 19; see 9:23; “beloved man” [Collins 1993:361]; cf. *khamadim*, masc. pl. “altogether lovely”, Song of Solomon 5:16). The NRSV maintains the literal strength of the Hebrew, “greatly beloved.” But other translations attempt to conceal this strength, starting with the LXX (“worthy of pity”). Modern translations commonly opt for one of two escape routes: either they change the expressed love into an admiration of Daniel’s character (“highly esteemed,” NIV) or they make Daniel the object of divine, not angelical love (“you are very precious to God”, NLT; “God loves you”, GNT). The same strong verb (*khamad*) is used in the Ten Commandments (Deut. 5:21) to prohibit strong desire (“coveting”; also in Prov. 6:25, the prohibition of coveting a prostitute).

Daniel’s first reaction to the handsome angel is not very manly, since he faints, like → **Esther** in the arms of the king (according to the Deuterocanonical version) and falls into a deep sleep (10:8-9; cf. Jacob *wrestling* all night with an angel, Gen. 32:22-32 and Daniel’s quite manly behavior in the lion’s den, Daniel 6). This phenomenon appears to be similar to current pentecostal/charismatic experiences (“to faint in the Spirit”). Just like Sleeping Beauty, Daniel only awakens, trembling, after Gabriel touches him (10:10 – afterwards, Gabriel touches his lips, 10:16, 18). Although biblical angels generally do not accept adoration, when Gabriel awakens his beloved Daniel, he places him in a kneeling position (10:6, 15) – the same gesture that Mordecai refused to make in obeisance to Haman (→ **Esther**). In the following revelation, Gabriel tells Daniel about his celestial military adventures with his angel companion Michael (10:13; see the famous Sacred Band of Thebes in Athens). Just as Michael had strengthened Gabriel, now Gabriel tenderly encourages Daniel. During the whole narrative, Daniel addresses Gabriel as his “Lord” (10:16-17, 19) and even voluntarily kneels in front of the angel, adopting the position of a slave (*‘ebed*, 17). Not only does Gabriel imbue Daniel with strength, but also gives him peace/shalom (10:18; → **Song of Solomon 8:10**). Especially for a man who never gives any evidence of interest in women, the whole tender scene with the angel Gabriel is possibly more “revealing” than the “prophecies” that follow (Daniel 11–12).

In his polemic against Antiochus Epiphanes, Daniel says: “He shall give no heed to the gods of his fathers, *nor to the love of women*, nor shall he give heed to any other god, for he shall magnify himself above all” (11:37). The literal Hebrew phrase could be an accusation of homosexuality, and Luther interpreted it as an allusion to papal celibacy. Saint Jerome, at the other extreme, translated it: “he shall be engrossed in lust for women” (Vulgate). However, modern translations that choose to interpret the ambiguous Hebrew phrase as a reference to the god “beloved by women” seem to be preferable: in other words, this is probably an allusion to Adonis-Tammuz (NVI; BL; BJ and DHHBE + notes; Ezequiel 8:14; Collins 1993:387).

In the New Testament Jesus preferred to refer to himself as “the Son of Man,” taken from Dan. 7:13. Particularly in the Gospel of → **Mark**, where Jesus is a “closeted” messiah, his wish to keep “the messianic secret” hidden is high on his agenda, and the references to the “Son of Man” serve to maintain a certain humility and ambiguity in the affirmations that Jesus makes about himself. We may ask ourselves why a single man like Jesus felt so fascinated with the figure of Daniel, a Jewish eunuch and the presumed author of the apocalyptic book. As a single man, Jesus also gave thought to the variety of “eunuchs,” and posited three types of eunuchs as paradigms of discipleship (Matthew 19:12; see also the single man Paul, 1 Corinthians 7).

Daniel 3 and the three Jewish “faggots” in the furnace (they preferred to be burned rather than to commit apostasy). In the tragic, thoroughly censured history of homophobia, many Western cultures feature the burning of sexual minorities as preferred method of punishment (Byrne Fone 2000). For example, Joan of Arc (1412-31 A.D.) was burned by the Inquisition for her heresies, the main one of which consisted in that she refused to forsake the male clothing that she had worn as a military leader. Five centuries after having burned her, the Roman Catholic Church canonized her in 1920 as a “saint” (Marjorie Garber 1992:215-217). The feast day of Joan, the first canonized transvestite person, is now May 30th.

When all the men of Sodom attempted to rape the visiting angels, the entire city (including women and children) was destroyed by fire (Genesis 19). Later on, when the sin of Sodom was misinterpreted as “sodomy” (anal penetration of a male), the narrative of Genesis remained in human memory forever, suggesting that the appropriate punishment was to burn the transgressors.

Lev. 20:13 imposes the penalty of death for two males guilty of anal sexual relations, probably by stoning, which was the most common method of capital punishment in the Hebrew Bible (see John 8:1-11: “Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone”). However, the next verse (Lev. 20:14) requires that a man who marries both a woman and her mother be “burned alive”, along with them. (The same applies to the daughter of a priest who offers herself in prostitution, Lev. 21:9; see the adultery of Tamar, Gen. 38:24-26; Gagnon 2001:113-114, nota 181). Bernadette Brooten points out the great injustice of always putting both people to death, when often the passive person was the victim of rape, or a war prisoner, a slave, or an abused child or young person (1996:292-94; cf Robert Gagnon 2001:122-28).

Fone writes about France in the thirteenth century as follows: “Sentences commonly condemned a sodomite to be ‘burned alive together with the records of his trial,’” thus censuring the evidence for the executions (2000:174). In a chapter entitled “The Burning Question”, Fone points out that the first penalty of death in the furnace for a sodomite was carried out in Ghent, Belgium in 1292 (2000:144). In the sixteenth century, the Council of Trent and the Counter-Reformation produced an unprecedented number of persecutions and death penalties for sodomy (Fone 2000:189). In Germany in the Second World War, during the “Holocaust”, besides killing some six million Jews, the Nazis also killed thousands of homosexuals. Many Jews now prefer to use the term “Shoah” (destruction), in order to avoid the suggestion that this horror could in any way be seen as a sacrifice mandated by God (see the holocausts commanded by God according to Leviticus 1).

The first documented use of the word “faggot” in English in order to designate homosexuals (pansies, queers) occurred in the press in Portland, Oregon in 1914 (Johansson 1990:383; Speirs 2000:301). In Europe, the punishment of burning sexual minorities to death was common over centuries (with the exception of England, where, following the decree of Henry VIII in 1553, sodomites were hanged). Possibly under the influence of those who remembered the punishment of Sodom and the Medieval practice of burning sodomites (European immigrants to the USA?), the term “faggots” as applied to effeminate homosexuals emerged from the imagined “faggots” of wood to kindle a fire, often abbreviated as “fag(s)”. By shouting that insult to gays and lesbians today (and this is still quite common in schools, colleges, universities and the workplace), hardly anyone recalls the horrible practice and the homophobic tradition which this word represents.

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Alexander III (the Great) of Macedonia (356-323 B.C.) and the Bible

Alexander, the son of Philip II (King of Macedonia) and Queen Olympias, had Aristotle as his tutor starting when he was six years old and the philosopher encouraged him in his love for Classical Greek culture and literature. When he was 14 years old, Alexander commanded the left flank of the Macedonian army, and, after his father’s death in 336, ascended to the throne at the age of 20. After conquering the Persian Empire (333 B.C.), he managed, within ten years, to create the largest empire in history. In the process, Alexander revolutionized the art of war: for example, he left the wounded behind so that they would marry with the local population, thus establishing Greek colonies and making Greek the first universal language in history. After conquering Egypt (332), he founded the city of Alexandria, which became the main intellectual capital of the Ancient world. There the Hebrew Bible was translated into the Greek *koiné* (the Septuagint version, LXX), which was to be the Bible of the early Christian churches (see the New Testament, also in Greek). Once Alexander had extended his empire up to the borders of India (the Hindu river), his soldiers refused to follow

any further. He returned to Babylon in 323 B.C., where he died on June 13th at the age of 32, from fatigue, wounds and fever. Hellenism, the cultural synthesis between East and West, continues to be a fundamental influence in Western history, and with the Judeo-Christian tradition, it expressed itself in the syncretism of the Catholic Church (apart from numerous popular expressions of faith, see also the Neo-Platonic theology of Augustine and the Aristotelian theology of Thomas of Aquinas).

Alexander's strong passion for handsome young men was legendary. Hephaestion, his intimate friend from their youth, died suddenly in 324 plunging Alexander into a quite extravagant period of mourning. He also enjoyed a relationship with the handsome young Persian eunuch Bagoas, who had previously been the young favorite of King Darius of Persia, and had taken many other eunuchs as sexual companions (Is. 39:7; Joel 3:3 [4:3 MT]; see → **Nehemiah** and → **Ecclesiastes**). He also wedded the Bactrian princess Roxane who bore him a son, born after his death. In spite of Alexander's predominantly "gay" life, the Koran (Chapter 18, *Al-Kahf*, The Cave, 83-99) regarded him as a prophetic figure: "Alexander of the two horns" (*Ishkander du al-qarnain*).

Alexander the Great in the Bible (see Collins, 1993, and Goldengay, 1988; → **Zechariah** 9–14):

Zechariah 9:1-8 debatable identity but with positive characteristics (330 B.C.)
Daniel 2:33 legs of iron (statue) = fourth kingdom, 2:40; metaphoric, implicit, neutral
7:7, 19 the fourth beast = the fourth kingdom, 7:23 ("different", three times)
8:5-8, 21-22 the he-goat with a magnificent horn; cf. Antiochus ("small horn", 8:9)
11:3-4 a brave king (with no descendants; see NJB notes on the texts of Daniel)
1 Maccabees (130-100 B.C.) 1:1-9; 6:2 explicit, negative ("arrogant")

Bibliography on "Alexander the Great" (see also Collins [1993] on Daniel 8)

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(See 120-123 on eunuchs.)
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Percy, William A. (1996). *Pederasty and Pedagogy in Archaic Greece*. Urbana: Univ. of Illinois. (See p. 139 on homoerotic relationships between people of the same age, and the tradition of homoerotic love among young Greek aristocrats.)
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***14. Song of Songs: "Black – and beautiful" (1:5) – The integration of sexuality and spirituality?**

Appendix. Theodore W. Jennings, Jr. *Jacob's Wound: Homoerotic Narrative in the Literature of Ancient Israel*. New York: Continuum, 2005. Summary and Review by Tom Hanks.