

Good News for Women (unless they are lesbians), Bad News for Gays.

Davidson, Richard M. (2007). *Flame of Yahweh: Sexuality in the Old Testament*. Peabody: Hendrickson.

As Daniel L. Block, Professor of Old Testament, Wheaton Collage, says (on the back cover):

This volume [844 pp] represents a most remarkable achievement. With *encyclopedic* breadth and extraordinary depth the author explores what the Old Testament has to say about every conceivable subject related to human sexuality. His discussions of the ancient Near Eastern cultural contexts...are exceptional; and his treatment of specific biblical passages [indexed pp 817-42] is generally balanced and *thorough*. Regardless of where readers find themselves in debates concerning sexual morality or gender relations...all who embark on serious study of biblical perspectives on these issues would do well to start with Davidson's work. The bibliography alone takes up 140 [142] pages.

Davidson, who self-identifies as [conservative] evangelical, is Professor of Old Testament Interpretation at Andrews University, the world's leading Seventh Day Adventist academic institution, where he did his doctoral studies under the late Gerhard F. Hasel. This encyclopedic work is a bargain at its official price of \$29.95, but it was a real steal at the Society of Biblical Literature conference at \$15.00. Although more traditionalist than Presbyterian Robert Gagnon on introductory questions (no Second Isaiah, etc.), he generally follows and further develops Gagnon's ideological line on texts purporting to condemn homosexuality (while naively acknowledging great indebtedness to the work of lesbian Biblicist Phylis Trible (1978; as does Tremper Longman III 2001:63), His lengthy treatment of texts relevant to women's issues, however, are remarkably—almost militantly—pro-feminist, with respectable citation and interaction even with the more radical feminist literature he disagrees with (see especially “Elevation versus Denigration of Women,” 213-295, 639-52).

Note. From my fleeting visits to the USA (each Nov for the AAR and/or SBL), I had understood that for some time the term “**denigrating**” has been considered politically incorrect (“black is beautiful”—see Song of Songs 1:5). However, this judgment about political correctness evidently is not shared by all the faculty at Andrews University, since Davidson repeatedly seeks to protect women from “Denigration” (alas, he does not so defend those guilty of “homosexual practice”—“Gay is NOT good”!). I suspect that Barack Obama would not object to Davidson's use of the politically incorrect term for the worthy cause of defending (white?) women—but watch out for his pastor!.

When the interpreter brings *to* the text his own preconceived ideology/theology and pretends to get it *from* the text, we call it *eisegesis* (reading our prejudices *into* the text instead of *exegesis* (reading the meaning *out of* the text). Methodologically Davidson and Gagnon share this tendency common to scholarship that is strongly driven by ideology: (1) first in good scholarly fashion, a highly dubious interpretation of a text is properly and humbly presented as only one of many hypotheses; (2) the hypothetical interpretation that supports the ideology is then rigorously defended and all alternatives discredited; (3) within a few pages the highly dubious interpretation resurfaces, mysteriously transubstantiated into fact/dogma; (4) thenceforth, all other “ugly sister” biblical texts that appear to contradict the dogma are then forced to jam a big foot into the tiny slipper of the favored text. As a result the ideology so blinds us with its glow as “eternal truth” that we are expected to ignore all the bloody feet of the ugly sister texts. Perhaps the Apostle Paul had some such process in mind when he wrote of inconvenient truth being violently trampled by powerful oppressors (Rom 1:18) and cruel ideologies appearing to glow with angelic light (2 Cor 11:14). Examples of *eisegesis*, this pseudo-sacramental hermeneutical process, abound in Gagnon but in Davidson the following three cases are especially illuminating:

1 **Leviticus 18:18** is interpreted as an absolute prohibition of **polygamy** (highly unlikely) and then the multitude of Hebrew Bible texts appearing to accept or even support polygamy are forced to wear the tiny glass slipper. Consequently, the character of marriage in the Bible as always exclusive is thus established. All the Hebrew Bible examples of divinely accepted/approved polygamy are nimbly side-stepped with interpretations emphasizing the problems in such polygamous households and the disastrous results. Adam and Eve, however, are portrayed as establishing the ethical absolute of one man-one woman and the disastrous results conveniently forgotten (Paul and Rom 5:12-21 notwithstanding).

2 In **Mark 7:21** *porneia* (prostitution, sexual immorality) is interpreted as a technical Jewish legal term prohibiting all that Leviticus 18 and 20 condemn (highly unlikely), thus proving that Jesus taught that homosexuality is an abomination. The character of marriage as heterosexual and the condemnation of homosexual practice thus guaranteed. Alas, sometimes when the cat swallows the canary but insists she is still safe in her cage (all the evidence on the table), a yellow feather floats gently to the floor that tells a different story. And such is the case when we try to define *porneia* with too much “help” from Leviticus. Both Gagnon and Davidson recognize that Leviticus 18 and 20 include a severe condemnation of a male who has sex with a menstruating woman (Lev 18:19; 20:18; cf Ezek 18:6; 22:10; 36:17). Gagnon nimbly sweeps the yellow feather under the rug and says “forget about it” (the church always has). Davidson consistently insists that a biblical theology of sexuality must make clear that sex with a menstruating woman is always a terrible sin, on the same level with incest, polygamy, homosexuality and bestiality (334; Jesus agreeing, 634). Confronted with Gagnon’s inconsistency and Davidson’s absurdity, Paul might plead attention to his “more excellent way” that involves focusing on a love for neighbor that does no harm to neighbor (1 Cor 13; Rom 13:8-10).

3 **Malachi 2:14** is interpreted as referring to marriage as a covenant between groom *and* bride (ignoring all the texts where marriage is a business transaction between the groom and *the father*); highly dubious interpretations of Genesis 1:28 and 2:24 are then proposed in order to support the ideology of marriage as a solemn covenant between groom and bride (just like today, but with Yahweh standing in for the justice of the peace). The ethical absolute of permanence in marriage is thus established and all divorce condemned as involving sin for both partners, even in the Biblical cases where God commanded the divorce (Abraham from Hagar; Ezra 10, regarding Israelites in mixed marriages), or himself divorces his “wife” Israel.

Procreation. In addition to Davidson’s pseudo-sacramental hermeneutical methodology, perhaps the major problem, inadequately acknowledged, has to do with the fundamental character of the procreation imperative in the Edenic sexual theology, which he takes as paradigmatic for the entire Bible. The difficulty surfaces abruptly when he seeks to transform the *narrative* element of God’s creation of Adam and Eve into his ethical absolute (heterosexuality, etc.), while relativizing the clear *imperative* to be fruitful and multiply. The relativizing of the procreation imperative begins already in Leviticus 18 and 20, where he seeks to refute the common rationale of the commands as designed to maximize fertility in a decimated post/exilic Israel (see Jacob Milgrom; → Leviticus), since that explanation would destroy the case he seeks to build against homosexual acts (if the prohibitions of such acts as male-male anal sex are part of the post-exilic program to maximize fertility, they would not be absolute norms for the modern world faced with the opposite problem of population explosion). Hebrew Bible heroes who failed to obey the Edenic imperative to procreate are referred to (Jeremiah, even claiming that God told him not to marry; eunuchs like Nehemiah and Daniel), but commended for their fidelity, not condemned for disobeying the Edenic imperative. In his development of the theology of sexuality in the Song of Songs, Davidson must admit: “If the relational movement in the symphony of sexuality is performed double forte in the Song of Songs, the procreational movement is punctuated by *deafening silence*....in the Song the procreative function of sexuality is *conspicuous by its absence*” (604).

Similarly, in the New Testament, Jesus and Paul are recognized as unmarried and exemplary. On his last page (658) Davidson attempts to rescue what appears to be a hopeless case with a revealingly brief (10-line) section on procreation and the blessing of fertility. He cites the birth narratives (Mat 1; Luke 1-2), which of course still fall under the Abrahamic fertility covenant sealed by male circumcision. To these texts he is able to add Rev 12:2, 4-5, similarly celebrating the birth of the messiah and the comparison of the disciples’ imminent suffering to a woman’s pain and joy in giving birth. 1 Cor 7:3-5 and Heb 13:4 are cited to show that in the NT “sexual intimacy is also described as honorable *on its own account, independent of procreation*”—a fatal admission for his absolutizing of heterosexuality. Two texts in 1 Timothy (5:10, 14) commending re/marriage and procreation to widows are added, without acknowledging the quite different counsel Paul gives widows in → 1 Cor 7:39-40. Texts showing the “fully human status” of the unborn fetus (Luke 1:15, 35, 41, 44) are brought in (somewhat irrelevantly) with a footnote citing anti-abortion literature, but failing to note that in the pre-scientific biblical perspective, the “fully human” status of the unborn has to do with the male semen and extends back several centuries (see Levi, “fully human,” in the loins of his ancestor Abraham centuries before his birth, → Hebrews 7:10). The only valid NT support for Davidson’s Edenic sexual theology might be found in 1 Tim 2:15, which (as commentators recognize) if it proves anything proves too much:

But she [the woman] will be saved through the childbearing, if they remain in faith and love and sanctification with sobriety.

This main proof text for “denigrating” women (2:11-15, something Davidson incessantly and fervently opposes), has not been one of his favorites and was previously cited only to refute its apparent meaning. Finally, however, he must include it, since it constitutes the only real NT support for making procreation normative in the church and thus keeping his Edenic paradigm from collapse. However, the attribution of the text to Paul (who glorified in his unmarried status as a divine gift, 1 Cor 7) seems even more dubious since the Apostle of justification by faith alone (Romans; Galatians) here seems to attribute a woman’s salvation to the good work of childbearing. Davidson’s adversaries, of course, employ his pseudo-sacramental hermeneutics to 1 Tim 2:11-15, using the odd text to force all the contradictory ones to submit. Were Davidson to show the same empathy and solidarity for oppressed homosexuals that he manifests to oppressed women, he would have written a very different—and much more coherent and convincing—book. His anti-feminist adversaries commonly insist that one who takes a position like his (accepting women’s leadership and ordination) have jumped half way off the cliff and logically should proceed to accept equality and ordination for gays. Both logic and history tend to support this claim, which constitutes a basis of hope, if not for Davidson personally, at least for his younger students.

The results of this impressive display of exegetical and hermeneutical acrobatics are then brought to bear on the interpretation of **Song of Solomon**, which is expounded as developing the Adam-Eve paradigm for marital bliss and global blessing (Gen 1-2): sexual relations should only be permitted after the marriage ceremony sealing an exclusive, permanent heterosexual relationship. Davidson’s edifying reading of the Song would find more enthusiastic reception, I suspect, did he not insist on defending the traditional attribution of the book to King Solomon, who acquired 999 other women after his first experience of marital bliss with the daughter of Pharaoh Siamun (978-59 BCE) proved somewhat inadequate (564-65, 588, note 155). Why Yahweh should chose the most “promiscuous” man in the Bible to teach us the eternal truth that marriage should always be exclusive and permanent is never adequately explained. Given the open canon advocated by Jude and contemporary feminists, perhaps we may now expect archeologists to unearth a verbally inspired inerrant writing from the younger Jesse James providing us with the classic case against bank robbing; or from the younger John Dillon on “Thou Shalt Not Kill!” I can imagine archeological discoveries overturning a century of exegetical arguments and proving that King Solomon actually wrote Song of Solomon; I can also imagine someone developing Davidson’s Song of Songs inspired sexual theology with kinder wiser norms for contemporary sexual behavior. But the King Solomon of 700 wives and 300 concubines as the author of the erotic poems yet also the main authority for insisting on sexual exclusivity and permanence in marriage? Surely Davidson must have a hidden talent for comedy writing!

A review of such an encyclopedic work as Davidson’s cannot critique every subject, but as we focus especially on his attempt to breathe life into **traditional clobber texts** (“Can these bones live?”), related issues touched on will give further insight into the many strengths and serious limitations of Davidson’s work. In his chapter IV on “homosexuality,” which basically follows Robert Gagnon (2001) with a few deviations, Davidson treats texts on *heterosexual* rape and prostitution as simply “rape” and “prostitution” but lumps texts on homosexual gang rape and male prostitutes under “homosexuality,” thus giving the impression that a large number of texts condemn “homosexuality.” Were he to eliminate all the texts on rape and prostitution treated under “homosexuality, he would have only Lev 18:22 and 20:13 to deal with, which would make for an embarrassingly brief chapter on a subject that is supposed to be a major concern of biblical authors. Although concentrating on the Hebrew Bible, he includes a substantial chapter on “Some Implications for New Testament Theology of Sexuality” (633-658), arguing in Adventist-Presbyterian fashion for maximal continuity between the Testaments.

Hebrew Bible

From Genesis 1-2 (Gen 1:27; 2:23) to Song of Solomon. Like Robert Gagnon, Davidson places fundamental emphasis on the creation accounts in Genesis 1-2 as establishing God’s perfect plan for your sex life: a heterosexual marriage that is permanent and exclusive (“creation orders” reflecting “complementarity”; Hugenberger 238)), a paradigm he finds repeated in Song of Solomon. Like Gagnon, he seems totally unaware

of all the critique and literature of his 19th century concept of complementarity → Romans. Long ago, in dealing with Pentecostalism, evangelicals like John Stott emphasized the risk and difficulty of extracting theological and ethical absolutes from biblical narratives; hence the failure of Pentecostal efforts to establish from a few stories in Acts, where everyone spoke in tongues, that all Christians today should speak in tongues. What about the other stories, even in Acts, where everybody did *not* speak in tongues (not to mention Paul's implicit negation in 1 Cor 12:30). Even more difficult is the Gagnon-Davidson task in Genesis 1-2. From the *narrative* that God created an original couple male and female we are supposed to extract an ethical absolute that all expressions of homoeroticism are always sinful. Although the text's only relevant *imperative* says "Be fruitful and multiply" (Gen 1:28), that clear command is not made an absolute for heterosexual couples today who want to practice family planning—not to mention the unmarried who are permitted to follow Jesus' and Paul's example.

Obviously the Gagnon-Davidson reading trumpets *what* God did (created Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve), but fails to inquire *why?* (to procreate and thus fill an empty earth). Evidently by the time of Jesus and Paul (not to mention Jeremiah and all the Jewish eunuchs like Nehemiah, Daniel and Mordecai in the Hebrew Bible), the earth was already full enough, thank you. True, Davidson can gather a bushel of texts from the Hebrew Bible illustrating the fundamental blessing of fertility in God's covenant with Abraham, sealed with the circumcision of Abraham's male descendants. However, as even Davidson's data reveal, male fertility and procreation not only cease to concern New Testament authors, but male circumcision is replaced by baptism of both sexes and has nothing to do with procreation (Gal 3:28; → Miller Chapter 5, Circumcision).

2 Ham and Noah (incestuous homosexual rape? → Genesis 9:20-25). Unlike Robert Gagnon (2001:64-71), Davidson (142-45) does not accept the common modern interpretation that the verb "see" is a euphemism for a sexual act and that Ham actually raped his father Noah. He agrees with Gagnon, however, in using the text to condemn homosexual acts, arguing that "from the very first hint of homosexual tendencies in Scripture...also the harboring of lustful [homosexual] thoughts and imaginations are sin" (145). Like Gagnon, then, he makes no distinction between the act or desire to rape and loving consensual homosexual acts, even though such a distinction remains firmly in place when he treats all the texts referring to heterosexual rape (503-542).

3 Sodom (→ Genesis 19:1-11). Generally Davidson (145-149) follows Gagnon (2001:71-78) and most recent commentators in recognizing that Sodom's sin involved the attempted gang rape of the two visiting angels, not any homosexual act per se (certainly not a consensual loving act). However, unlike most commentators, both bring to the text the conclusion of their sexual ideology that all homoerotic acts are sinful and thus insist that in addition to the attempted violence of gang rape, homosexual lust constitutes an element in the sinfulness of Sodom. Both find support from Ezekiel for including homosexual lust in Sodom's sin (see below on Ezekiel). In addition Davidson (148) includes a silly argument on the meaning of *yada* (know) from Victor Hamilton (1995:34-35), which Gagnon wisely avoided. Hamilton argued that if know means "rape" in Gen 19:5, then we must translate Lot's words: "Do not rape my visitors; here are my daughters, both virgins—rape them". Of course, as James Barr pointed out half a century ago, we must distinguish between a word's meaning and what it may refer to in a given context—and as Davidson himself extensively documents, biblical references to sexual matters are commonly euphemistic (see his excellent list, 7-12, including references to *yada*, know). In the subtle uses of "know" in the rhetoric of Genesis 19:1-11, the speakers obviously hide their intentions with euphemistic references to "know" (the verb is a euphemism for sex in some 16 of its 943 uses in the Hebrew Bible; see Gen 4:1). Obviously, Gagnon did well to avoid Hamilton's argument. But do Gagnon and Davidson do well to insist that Sodom's judgment implies condemnation of homosexual acts as well as sexual violence?

4 Male-male anal sex abuse (→ Leviticus 18:22; 20:13). Both Davidson (149-59) and Gagnon (111-46) conclude that the two texts in the Leviticus Holiness code condemn male-male anal sex generally/universally, not just when it is idolatrous (in the context of pagan fertility cults) or abusive (non-consensual humiliation). They both recognize that female homoeroticism is not condemned in Leviticus (cf female bestiality/zoophilia in Lev 18: 20:), so strictly speaking it is erroneous to refer to a condemnation of "homosexuality" (which would include lesbians; → Rom 1:26). However, both also then muddle their arguments and mislead readers by continually slipping in references to "homosexuality." Both survey alternative interpretations that argue for contextually signaled limitations of the condemnations in Lev 18:22 and 20:13 but pretend to defend the

church's "historic/traditional" view (forgetting until the beginning of the 20th century this involved the death penalty, as it still does in many Moslem countries).

5 Male cult prostitutes (→ Deut 23:18-19; ET 17-18) + 1-2 Kings, Job 36:13-14. Both Gagnon (2001:100-110) and Davidson (159-61) recognize that all these texts refer to male cult prostitutes (*qedishim*), and not "sodomites" as in older translations (King James; Reina Valera in Spanish). However, neither acknowledges the homophobic prejudice behind the traditional readings and the tragic violent results (especially the death penalty for "sodomites" enshrined in laws for centuries).

6 Heterosexual gang rape of the Levite's concubine (Judges 19). Although explicitly describing only the horrendous heterosexual gang rape of a Levite's concubine, both Gagnon (91-97) and Davidson (147, 521-23) bring in Judges 19 as part of their argument that the Bible has a universal sexual ethic condemning all "homosexual acts." However, as the note in the new Spanish *Biblia de Nuestro Pueblo* (2006) points out:

Muchas personas han querido encontrar tanto en la historia de Sodoma, como en esta historia una condenación a la "homosexualidad". Debemos evitar el anacronismo al interpretar la Biblia. La palabra homosexual aparece recién en el s. XIX. En estas dos historias el verdadero crimen es la inhospitalidad, violencia y agresión fálica contra los extranjeros. En ambas historias, el fabo sirve como arma de agresión que establece la relación de dominio y sumisión, prácticas muy usadas en las guerras (466).

7 → Ezek 16 and 18. Both Gagnon and Davidson continually attempt to compel the "fructification and multiplication" of those very few texts still cited as supposed condemnations of "homosexuality" in the Bible. In this struggle to prove that the reference to Sodom's "abomination" (Ezek 16:49-51) refers to homoerotic relations (79-87), Gagnon accepts the common conclusion that the Holiness Code (Lev 17-26) does not come directly from Moses (in the 13th Century B.C.) but priestly circles, perhaps as late as the Exile (586-539), the same epoch when Ezekiel also prophesied. Gagnon thus has a more solid basis than Davidson, who accepts the traditional Mosaic date for the Pentateuch, whereas Gagnon even assigns the "cycle of Sodom" [Genesis 18-19] to the Yahwist source. The golden rule of hermeneutics (the context) demands that we first keep in mind the significance of "abomination" in *Ezekiel itself* (43 times plus two of the verb), before resorting to another source such as the Holiness Code (Lev 17-26), with its two references to anal sex between men as an "abomination" (18:22; 20:13). As George Edwards has shown (1984:53), "abomination" (*to'eba*) in Ezekiel mainly refers to idolatry and twice to the heterosexual sin of adultery (Ezek 22:11; 33:26), but never to anal sex between males (see also Daniel Block 1997:509). The immediate context in Ezekiel 16 confirms this conclusion, since it says *of Jerusalem*:

49 This was the guilt of your sister Sodom:

(1) *arrogance*

(2) *gluttony* [excess of food]

(3) she and her sisters [surrounding villages] had prosperous ease and were apathetic

(4) and did not aid the poor and the needy

50 (5) but were haughty

(6) and did **abomination** [*to'eba*, singular] before me, therefore I removed them when I saw it.

51 Samaria has not committed half your sins: you [Jerusalem] have committed more **abominations** [*to'eba*, plural] than they, and have made your sisters appear righteous by all the **abominations** [*to'eba*, plural] that you have committed.

Note: The Spanish version, *La Biblia de Nuestro Pueblo* wisely translates "prácticas idolátricas" (idolatrous practices) instead of "abomination/s" in 16:50-51.

Davidson (162-164) follows Gagnon (2001:57-58, 80-85) and Moshe Greenberg (1983:289) and sees in Ezekiel's reference to Sodom's sin as an "abomination" (16:48-50) an allusion to the sin of Sodom, which is then taken to condemn "homosexuality" universally (see "abomination" in Lev 18:22 and 20:13) and not just the offense against hospitality expressed in attempted gang rape or the male-male anal sex of Leviticus.

Excursus. “Abomination(s) in the Hebrew Bible (116x) and Ezekiel (45x):

1. Of the 116 references in the Hebrew Bible, only twice does it refer to relations (anal) between two males (Lev 18:22; 20:13, singular). Even in Lev 18, it is used 4 times in a broader sense to refer to various repugnant sexual practices and once for an idolatrous practice (infant sacrifice).
2. Of 45 uses in Ezekiel, 42 refer to other practices: idolatry (24x), violence (10x), only twice to sexual sins and each of those is heterosexual (adultery, prostitution).
3. Of the 45 references in Ezekiel, only one (16:50) could “conceivably” refer to anal relations between two males (the “abomination” of Lev 18:22 and 20:13) applied to the attempt made by two men from Sodom to sexually violate the two visiting angels (instead of showing them proper hospitality). If such was Ezekiel’s intention (highly improbable), very few of the listeners/readers would have grasped the meaning, since elsewhere in Ezekiel “abomination” always referred to other sins, mainly with idolatry.
4. Obviously, Ezekiel wanted to emphasize social injustice, and as Sodom oppressed the poor – did not explicitly refer to any sexual sin (Gagnon 2001:80).
5. “The context is a comparison of the ‘abominations’ of Jerusalem/Judah with those of her ‘sisters’ Samaria and Sodom. In ch. 16, Jerusalem’s ‘abominations’ are idolatrous actions (image making, child sacrifices, foreign alliances)...Thus, on the level of allegory, Jerusalem’s ‘abominations’ are sexual sins; on the level of reality, Jerusalem’s ‘abominations’ are idolatrous practices.”(Gagnon 2001:80).
6. Instead of treating Sodom’s abomination (16:50) as a description of social injustice (16:49), Gagnon prefers to understand it as referring to a distinctly different sin, homosexual practice.
7. Still, Gagnon admits an alternative (citing Loader 65): that the Sodomites’ *sexual violence* is also an expression of oppression and social violence (2001:81). If we accept this interpretation, Gagnon seeks to qualify it thus: the “‘abomination’ may have in view the rape of defenseless visitors, sheltered by a resident alien, made doubly offensive by the inherent degradation of same-sex intercourse, as a particularly vivid instance of crimes against ‘the poor and the needy’”. (81).

However, although highly improbable, the argument of Greenberg and Gagnon is less far-fetched, since they at least recognize the post/exilic date of the Leviticus Holiness Code (Lev 17-26), similar to that of Ezekiel, whereas Davidson adheres to a Mosaic date (13th century) for the entire Pentateuch. This means that the notion that Ezekiel departs from his own common linguistic usage of “abomination” as referring to idolatry to follow the Holiness Code references (Lev 18:22 and 20:13) to abomination as describing male-male anal sex, becomes even more far-fetched.

Possible Positive Texts? Given the stark silence in so many modern commentaries regarding all things sexual and especially homosexual/homoerotic, Davidson deserves credit for even raising the question regarding possible homoerotic implications in such texts as those featuring Ruth and Naomi, David and Jonathan, and the character of Qoheleth, and for interacting with some of the significant scholarly literature that supports a gay/queer reading of such texts. Of course, the reader has been forewarned that any subversive readings are ruled out in advance, first (as with Gagnon) by the heterosexist ideology attributed to Genesis 1-2, and (unlike Gagnon) because Davidson’s hypothesis of the Mosaic authorship of the entire Pentateuch (15th-13th century B.C., including Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13), implies that any later homosexual biblical character must have read Leviticus with fear and trembling and known he/she faced the death penalty for any homoerotic acts (at least as interpreted by Davidson). Since in antiquity property heirs did not commonly result from same-sex relations, it is much more difficult to prove to the skeptically minded that such relations did exist, in defiance of apparent proof texts from Leviticus, than is the case with polygamous unions.

8 → Ruth and Naomi (164-65). Davidson’s weakest treatment is that of Ruth and Naomi, where he cites only Tom Horner (1978) in defense of a homoerotic relationship and relies mainly on fellow-Adventist Ron Springett (1978) for refutation. Despite the pervasive use of Ruth’s declaration of love for Naomi (Ruth 1:16) in centuries of heterosexual marriage ceremonies, Davidson sees in these immortal words, not love, but only the “radical faith” of a convert of Judaism (164). Nor does Davidson recognize the couple’s intertwined lives and cohabitation thereafter as a manifestation of mutual love, but as focused only on “an attempt to find Ruth a husband” (164). One cannot help but wonder why, when Boaz enters the picture, Ruth did not express undying love for him as she had for Naomi (at least there would then be fewer twitters from the gay-lesbian pews in modern heterosexual marriage ceremonies). According to Davidson, both Naomi and Ruth were blessed with the experience of “heterosexual married love” (164), even though the texts are embarrassingly silent about such love and singularly focused on levirate style procreation (Deut 25:5-10). Finally, his Gen 1-2 Edenic paradigm notwithstanding, Davidson forgets all about “leaving father and mother” (Gen 2:24) and describes the Ruth-Naomi couple as a “mother and daughter model” (165). For a queer/gay reading, see now Mona West on “Ruth” in *The Queer Bible Commentary* (2006:190-194, with abundant points and references to literature Davidson overlooked).

9 David and Jonathan (165-67). Davidson does much better on David and Jonathan, citing Horner’s pioneering work (1978), Silvia Schroer and Thomas Staubli’s gay/queer reading (2000) and another by Yaron Peleg (2005). He also provides detailed data on male-male (lip)-kissing in the Hebrew Bible and seeks to explain the explicit covenant between David and Jonathan—an explicitness notably absent in Davidson’s lengthy attempt to find a marriage covenant between husband and wife in the Bible. Of the key textual data, he omits only Saul’s significant accusation of Jonathan shaming his mother by his relationship with David (1 Sam 20:30 → 1-2 Samuel). As in the case of Ruth, however, the reader knows in advance that the purported marriage “covenant” between Adam and Eve (Gen 1-2) and the divine imperative to engage in sex for procreation (Gen 1:28) imply that David and Jonathan must be “just friends.” And since each must have read Lev 18:22 and 20:13 only three centuries after Moses wrote the book, they know they will face the death penalty if they engage in anal sex with one another (obviously no other kind of sex would occur to them).

10 Wisdom literature (especially → Qoheleth/Ecclesiastes; 167-69). Best of all, however, is Davidson’s treatment of Qoheleth, whom almost all commentators find exceedingly queer (without raising the question of his homosexuality). In a lengthy footnote Davidson (168 note 131) summarizes Uri Wernik’s recent excellent article (2005, *Theology and Sexuality*) as well as the attempted refutation by William John Lyons in a following issue (2006). For my reasons for agreeing more with Wernik, → Qoheleth/Ecclesiastes. Davidson strangely attributes to Wernik arguments “implying *Solomon’s* homosexual activity,” as though Wernik agreed with Davidson’s adherence to traditional authorship (here and in several other places I suspect Davidson’s Adventist graduate students supplied material for the Encyclopedia that the editor and chief did not sufficiently revise). Again, however, unless we imagine the young “Solomon” carefully studying Leviticus 18 and 20 under the tutelage of David and Bathsheba, the effort to portray old professor Qoheleth as a happy heterosexual enthusiastically recommending marriage according to the Adam and Eve Gen 1-2 Edenic paradigm (exclusive and permanent), will not seem very convincing—especially after all those romances with 700 wives and 300 concubines.

New Testament

1 Mark 10:1-12 (634-35; → Gen 1:27; 2:23). Davidson eisegetes, thus (634):

The quotation of Gen 1:27 and 2:23 by Jesus (Mark 10:6-8; cf. the quotation of only Gen 2:23 in Matt 19:5 and by Paul in 1 Cor 6:16; Eph 5:31) makes the point of heterosexual relationship: “But from the beginning of creation, ‘God made them male and female.’ ‘For this reason a *man* shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his *wife*, and the two [man and woman] shall become one flesh.” Jesus’ emphasis on the fact that “God made” this arrangement “from the beginning of creation” demonstrates his acceptance of the prescriptive nature of the creation texts and his understanding that heterosexual (not homosexual) relations as divine ordained in Gen 1 and 2 remain normative in NT times.

Unfortunately for the eisegete, if the reader checks out the question Jesus was asked about (divorce, Mk 10:2) and the point Jesus makes, it is addressed to heterosexual males and is quite clear: “Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate” (Mk 10:9). Jesus’ “point” is not that gays and lesbians should all enroll in a fraudulent “Ex-Gay” program and get married (a sure prescription for divorce and often suicide), but that married heterosexual males should not divorce their spouses (elsewhere Davidson explains in great detail that exceptions are permitted which do not surface in Mark’s version; 377-423). Of course, were Davidson to be consistent in his advocacy of “the prescriptive nature of the creation texts” not only would he have to make procreation a universal ethical absolute for everyone (Gen 1:28), but also shameless nudity (2:25), vegetarianism (1:29-30) and strict Sabbath observance (the Jewish author of Gen 2:2-3 obviously was preparing readers for the 4th of the Ten Commandments; Ex 20:8-11).

2 Mark 7:21 (*porneia*; Mat 5:32; 15:19; 19:9; Acts 15:29). See above under methodological errors 2.

3 Rom 1:26-27 (Lev 18:22; 20:13). Since Davidson’s book treats of sexuality in the Old Testament, he does not elaborate his position on the New Testament texts and even in the case of Romans 1:26-27 only summarizes briefly (636-37) Gagnon’s detailed argument (2001:229-303). Davidson does conclude that “In Rom 1:26-27 Paul condemns female as well as male same-sex relations, although lesbianism is not explicitly mentioned in Lev 18” (637). He thus fails to recognize that lesbianism is not explicitly referred to in Rom 1:26 either and church fathers until around 400 AD correctly understood the text to refer to “unnatural” *heterosexual* anal sex (to avoid procreation); → Romans.

4 → 1 Cor 6:9 and → 1 Tim 1:10 (Lev 18:22; 20:13). Davidson (636-38) agrees with Gagnon (306-12) that *malakoi* in Paul’s vice list in 1 Cor 6:9 (lit. “soft males”) “probably refers to the passive partner described in Lev 18:22 and 20:13 who is lain with as though a woman” (637). Both thus recognize that the texts do not refer to “homosexuality” generically (which refers to orientation and includes lesbians), and that the male act condemned is limited to anal penetration (as is now generally recognized in the case in Leviticus, which says nothing about mutual masturbation, oral sex, etc). However, Davidson then insists that the second term in 1 Cor 6:9 (*arsenokoitai*, which also occurs in 1 Tim 1:10) is not limited to the active partner in male-male anal sex, but rather denotes “homosexual intercourse” and “forbids all same-sex intercourse” (638, again forgetting that women exist and that “homosexual” and “same-sex” includes lesbians and also that male same-sex intercourse is not limited to anal penetration). Davidson points out that *arsenokoitai* (from *arsen*, “male” and *koite*, “lying”) probably reflect the LXX translation of Lev 18:22 and 20:13, since the term never appears in the secular Greek of Paul’s day. But he fails to explain why Paul would first specify the vice of the passive partner in male-male anal intercourse, but then create an overlap with a generic term that condemns both passive and active (still limited to anal sex), nor why → 1 Timothy 1:10 should omit the specific condemnation of the passive male partner (*malakoi*) and link the vice of *arsenokoitai* with slave traders. If *arsenokoita* clearly condemns both partners in male-male anal sex acts, why pair it with a term specifying the passive partner? Obviously, both Gagnon and Davidson are panicked by the lack of biblical basis for their positions, which leads them to follow their often accurate linguistic information with bloated conclusions that contradict the data they supply. More accurately, Davidson introduces his treatment of Paul, affirming that the apostle “denounces homosexual lust and practice in several passages” (636). As is evident in the contexts, Paul’s concern is with the lust and coveting that harms the neighbor and makes Christian community impossible, not with loving consensual relations that do no harm (→ Rom 13:8-10).

5 Jude 6-7 (Gen 6:1-4; 19). Although Gagnon (87-88) recognizes that → Jude 7 should be translated as referring to “other/strange flesh” since the males of Sodom attempted to rape the “other flesh” of the two visiting angels, Davidson virtually ignores the text, except for a footnote identifying it as treating “homosexual practice” (635, forgetting as usual that women exist and “homosexual” includes lesbians, absent from the Sodom narrative). As in their interpretation of Genesis 19:1-11, both authors bring their sexual ideology (with its condemnation of all homoerotic acts) *to* the text and thus conclude that Jude condemns Sodom not only for violence, the attempted gang rape of angel flesh, but also for “homosexual practice/lust.”

Return to Eden? Sexuality in the → Song of Songs (545-632). Davidson concludes his treatment of Sexuality in the Old Testament with two flaming chapters on the Song of Songs (13-14), interpreted as reechoing the paradigm of sexual ethics attributed to Gen 1-2 (Eden). Had he *begun* his work with Song of

Songs, the only canonical book in the Bible with sexual love as its exclusive theme, and given the erotic poetry a less ideological reading, a very different Encyclopedia might have resulted (same trees for the most part, but a very different forest). According to Davidson, the Song returns us to Eden, where we can forget the sordid realities portrayed elsewhere throughout the Bible and happily rediscover a sexuality characterized by

1 Sexuality as a Creation Order (554-56). Davidson admits that procreation, so fundamental to the concerns of Gen 1-2, is “conspicuous by its absence” from the Song (604), but then extricating a long list of ethical absolutes from a collection of erotic poems, we realize, can be even more difficult than extracting them from creation narratives that take shameless nudity for granted and demand maximum procreation, vegetarianism and Jewish Sabbath observance. No wonder he took 25 years to write the book!

2 Its heterosexual Marital Form (556-61). To Davidson’s credit he summarizes the ridiculous efforts of some scholars to give a queer/gay reading of the Song (556-57), overlooking only Paul Johnson (1990), who pointed out that in the Hebrew consonantal text, poems praising a woman’s beauty do not necessarily come from a male, nor do those praising male beauty necessarily indicate female authorship—the *heterosexualization* of the poems is the contribution of later Jewish scribes who added the vowel points. However, since the “daughters of Jerusalem” (not voyeurs but figments of the female imagination) said that “the maidens love you” (1:3) we can be sure that all the poems make heterosexuality an ethical absolute (557, 575, 618 note 38).

3 Its “monogamous marital form” (561-569): Solomon’s procession for marriage, 3:6-11 (596), followed by his acquisition of 699 additional wives and 300 concubines. Davidson, takes literally “Solomon’s” marriage procession but cites commentaries that take the more common view that rustic lovers metaphorically address each other as “King” and “Queen for the day” (Roland Murphy 1990:152; J. Cheryl Exum 2005:138-51; Tremper Longman 2001:133, 219, referring to the negative view of Solomon in 8:11-12).

4 Solomon as a pioneer-prophet of women’s lib, advocating “equality of the sexes without hierarchy” (569-578, calling for a return to the Genesis creation order, 22-35). In these remarkable pages, Davidson draws on his favorite earlier feminist studies which eloquently argue for a woman author, a radical feminist who systematically deconstructs the patriarchy of her culture and highlights “egalitarianism, mutuality, and reciprocity between the lovers” (569; see also Christopher King QBC 2006:361-365). He expresses disappointment with more recent postmodern/feminist studies that seek to deconstruct the earlier feminist reading of the Song (Davidson 583, note 134). I know of nothing remotely approaching Davidson’s concise and comprehensive summary of feminist studies and evangelical responses and debates on relevant texts biblical: However, the combination of such erudition and liberationist courage conjoined to his view that King Solomon authored Song of Songs and hence advocates all this liberationist theology will discourage many from taking Davidson seriously. Especially in the New Testament section (639-52) he struggles to harmonize women’s equality in ministry with her submission to her husband in the home (Gen 3:16; 1 Tim 2:8-15; also 1 Cor 14:34-35, but neglecting to mention the textual problem).

5 Wholeness (578-87). Davidson agrees with André LaCocque that the Song of Songs is “fundamentally a critique of...the dualism between body and soul prevalent in sophisticated as well as in popular mentalities” (2007:581, citing LaCocque 1998:7; see Plato and neoplatonism). Thus the lovers are also “friends” (585, citing 5:1, 16) whose praise of one another, although emphasizing physical attributes, also includes character and virtues: “Your *name* [character, reputation] is like perfume poured out” (1:3, cited 585). “The motif of wholism in sexuality also entails solidarity with the larger units of family and friends” (586; the man’s mother, of course, is Bathsheba, according to Davidson’s view of Solomonic authorship; see note 48). The Song’s emphasis on wholeness is especially manifest in the importance of physical closeness and “the presence and/or absence of the lovers to each other” (Murphy, cited 578 and note 118). Finally, “The motif of wholeness is...best summarized and sustained throughout the Song in the play on words between Solomon, the Shulamite, and *shalom* ‘peace,’” (587, citing 1:1, 5:3:7, 9, 11; 6:13/7:1; 8:10-12; see 1 Cor 7:15 and the peace that characterized the same-sex relations of David and Jonathan, Ruth and Naomi, Jesus and the Beloved Disciple).

6 Exclusivity (587-88). The Shulamite “refers to exclusivity as well as mutuality when she says, ‘My beloved is mine and I am his’ (2:16 [similarly 6:3; 7:11/ET7:10]). Duane Garrett comments: “If it means anything at all, it means that the two belong to each other exclusively” (1993:379, cited on 588). The

Shulammitte, on this reading, must have been somewhat disappointed when “Solomon” went on to acquire a total of 700 wives and 300 concubines. Davidson, however, points out the progression in the claim, which in the third refrain almost seems to succumb to King Solomon’s polygamy (“I am his”), but relinquishes the claim “he is mine” (“I am my beloved’s and his desire is for me,” 7:11/ET7:10]; cf Gen 3:16). This might also be interpreted as an abandonment of jealous possession, recognizing the “love is not jealous” (1 Cor 13:4). Thus Christopher King interprets the refrain as an expression of “subversive equality and erotic *autonomy*” (2006:361-365; cp Davidson, 592!).

7 Permanence (588-92). Solomon’s commendable fidelity, exemplifying the Bible’s sexual theology that extols the value of permanence in marriage, is evident, I suppose, from the fact that in the process of acquiring a grand total of 700 wives and 300 concubines, Solomon never ditched his first wife (see especially 588, note 155). As the climactic versus of the Song say, “Love is strong as death, ardent/zealous/jealous love as relentless as Sheol” (8:7). Davidson agrees with Garrett, “Those who passionately love are passionately possessive. One cannot trifle with love or with one’s lover. Yahweh himself is a jealous God (Exod 20:5)” (cited 592, note 175). But how does this relate to the sacrificial love in the New Testament, which is “not jealous” (1 Cor 13:4; Eph 5::25-33)?

8 Intimacy (592-604). Like Robert Alter, Davidson understands the entire Song to be “an ode to intimacy” (cited 592, note 178). The intimacy implied in the “clinging” and “one-flesh” reference in Gen 2:24 (46-48) is developed in the Song and then completed in the New Testament section on “intimacy versus incest, understood as an excess/distortion of intimacy” (657; see the role of intimacy in Davidson’s biblical “12-step program” to achieving/maintaining sexual purity, note 93). Although not accepting the dramatic interpretations of the Song popularized by 19-century commentators (Delitzsch (1851), Davidson argues that the Song evidences “distinct movement from somewhat restrained and reserved to more intense and intimate sexual language as one moves from the prenuptial to the postnuptial sections of the Song” (599; the Song is thus morally divided into “premarital”, marriage [3:6-11], and “postmarital” sex-tions). Davidson even detects evidence in the Song for each of the twelve types of intimacy expounded by Howard and Charlotte Clinebell: physical, emotional, intellectual, aesthetic, creative, recreational, work, crisis, conflict, commitment, spiritual/lifesharing, communication (cited 601-602). Examples of “communication intimacy” are found in the 10 names of endearment used for the woman, which build up a sense of self-worth (603-04). Dr. Ralph Blair also has written extensively on intimacy, arguing that gay men need to have exclusive male partners, since what they really seek is not sex but intimacy with someone they can trust with their secrets (www.ecinc.org). In → Judges Samson’s compulsion to spill the secret of his strength to Delilah exemplifies this common need (Judges 16; cf. the compulsion of sexual minorities to “come out” with the secret of their orientation). Davidson, of course, recognizes that many modern commentators do not accept his moralistic perspective on intimacy in the Song: “The entire Song strums the chord of ‘free love,’ neither recognized or institutionalized [by marriage]” (LeCocque, cited 593, note 179)

9 Procreation (604-605, NT 658). Although Sexuality is a ‘Creation Order’ (554-56), the Song’s “deafening silence” (604) regarding the Genesis procreation imperative is a bone swiftly swallowed with no audible choking (“conspicuous by its absence,” in contrast to pagan fertility cults, 604). The possibility that the Song’s deconstruction of the procreation imperative might be understood as opening the door for permanent committed loving homoerotic relations (David and Jonathan with their explicit covenant) is sternly rejected (556 note 40) Since Davidson admits that procreation, so fundamental to the concerns of Gen 1-2, is “conspicuous by its absence” from the Song (604), extricating a long list of ethical absolutes from this collection of erotic poems, proves even more difficult than extracting them from creation narratives that take shameless nudity for granted and demand maximum procreation, vegetarianism and Jewish Sabbath observance.

Conclusion. For anyone seriously investigating (theses, term papers) or teaching in the area of sexuality in the Bible, especially in the Hebrew Bible, Davidson’s encyclopedic work is simply must reading and invaluable as a reference work for interpretive options, linguistic and exegetical details and bibliography. For the vast majority of readers who would not share much of his sexual ideology and theology, the work loses little of its value as a reference work, especially since other viewpoints are amply represented in text, notes and bibliographies. And in many cases attempts to interact with and critique his conclusions will be worth the

effort. I suspect that it will be a long time before we are gifted with such a thorough work and that future contributions largely will interact with a portion of the data and attempt to present more coherent “forests” with perhaps a few additional trees. My desire and prayer for the author would be that he come to manifest the same solidarity and passion with oppressed sexual minorities that he evidences in the cause of straight women.

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