



# Introduction

Sexuality is writ large in the pages of the OT, yet when I first began researching this subject a quarter century ago, it had scarcely entered the footnotes in the literature of OT scholarship. Only in the last few decades—particularly in the wake of the modern feminist movement, the new literary criticism, and the sexual research of social scientists—has there begun a concerted effort to lay down the biblical foundations for understanding human sexuality. At present, despite an abundance of OT research on certain aspects of sexuality (notably the role of women and the feminine dimension of divinity), only scant attention has been given to a wholistic<sup>1</sup> theology of sexuality in the OT.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Throughout this study I use the term “wholistic” instead of the more commonly used “holistic” to avoid popular associations of the latter term with New Age holism and also to emphasize a biblical view of “wholism” that in my view is broader than that normally denoted by the term “holism.”

<sup>2</sup>Only three monographs deal directly with this subject in any depth and breadth: Phyllis Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (OBT; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978); Samuel Terrien, *Till the Heart Sings: A Biblical Theology of Manhood and Womanhood* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985); and David M. Carr, *The Erotic Word: Sexuality, Spirituality, and the Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003). None of these works attempts a comprehensive theology of sexuality in the OT. Some books on sexual ethics present a theology of human sexuality in a very cursory manner, with little or no detailed analysis of relevant biblical passages. See, e.g., Sakae Kubo, *Theology and Ethics of Sex* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1980); and Daniel R. Heimbach, *True Sexual Morality: Recovering Biblical Standards for a Culture in Crisis* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2004). Some books cover major terminology and phenomena related to sexuality in the HB, but attempt no theology; see, e.g., Athalya Brenner, *The Intercourse of Knowledge: On Gendering Desire and “Sexuality” in the Hebrew Bible* (BIS 26; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1997). Many books provide a popularized, cursory survey of sex in the Bible. See, e.g., William G. Cole, *Sex and Love in the Bible* (New York: Association, 1959); Michael R. Cosby, *Sex in the Bible: An Introduction to What the Scriptures Teach Us About Sexuality* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1984); Ronald L. Ecker, *And Adam Knew Eve: A Dictionary of Sex in the Bible* (Palatka, Fla.: Hodge & Braddock, 1995); J. Harold Ellens, *Sex in the Bible: A New Consideration* (Psychology, Religion, and Spirituality; Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2006); Thomas M. Horner, *Sex in the Bible* (Rutland, Vt.: C. E. Tuttle, 1974); Gerald A. Larue, *Sex and the Bible* (Buffalo, N.Y.: Prometheus, 1983); F. L. Perry, *Sex and the Bible* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1982); Otto A. Piper, *The Biblical View of Sex and Marriage* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1960); and Stephen Sapp, *Sexuality, the Bible, and Science* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977).

In the HB there is no general term for “sexuality” that can supply terminological parameters for investigation of the topic. In this study the term “human sexuality” (or “sexuality”) is used to encompass both the concepts of human gender differentiation (male and female as a duality and their interrelationships) and sexual endowment (with its various biological, psychological, and social dimensions).<sup>3</sup>

## The Purpose of the Work

This study undertakes the Brobdingnagian task of examining every passage in the HB dealing with human sexuality, in an attempt to lay bare the basic contours of a theology of human sexuality in the final (canonical) form of the OT, building on previous research and engaging in original exegesis where necessary. Studies dealing with specific aspects of sexuality in the OT—particularly from a feminist perspective—have become legion in the last twenty-five years, numbering literally in the thousands, but since the turn of the millennium appear to have reached a plateau. The time is ripe for a review and synthesis of this vast corpus of literature.

This study specifically analyzes the theology of the final canonical form of the OT.<sup>4</sup> It utilizes insights from such widely accepted synchronic methodologies

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<sup>3</sup> See James B. Nelson, *Embodiment: An Approach to Sexuality and Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1978), 17–18; and Lisa Sowle Cahill, *Between the Sexes: Foundations for a Christian Ethics of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), passim. Among those who study the social roles of men and women, it is common to distinguish between “sex” (which refers to “the biological differences between males and females, especially in their roles of procreation”) and “gender” (which denotes “the culturally specific patterns that are imposed upon these biological differences”). Sex is considered a “natural and hence a universal category” whereas gender is “a socially constructed category that, although not reducible to or directly derived from the biological facts, has some connection to these sex differences” (Ronald A. Simkins, “Gender Construction in the Yahwist Creation Myth,” in *Genesis* [ed. Athalya Brenner; FCB<sup>2</sup> 1; Sheffield, Eng.: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998], 35). Cf. John S. Grabowski, *Sex and Virtue: An Introduction to Sexual Ethics* (Catholic Moral Thought; Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2003), 96–97, who points to the common differentiation between “sex” (which denotes “our physicality, our embodiment as male and female”), “gender” (which, mainly in the wake of feminist arguments, “has come to be understood in terms of the way in which education and environment condition us to understand the biological givens of sex”), and “sexuality” (which “refers to how individuals relate to others as men and women because of the dynamic interplay between nature and nurture within their personalities”). In this study I treat all of these aspects wholistically as they emerge from the text of the OT. For a defense of the appropriateness of using the term “sexuality” with reference to ancient Israel (contra those who consider sexuality to be only a modern historical construct), see Hilary B. Lipka, “‘Such a Thing is Not Done in Israel’: The Construction of Sexual Transgression in the Hebrew Bible” (PhD diss., Brandeis University, 2004), 13 (with bibliography).

<sup>4</sup> For discussion and justification of this approach, with a review of recent proponents, see esp. the article by Johnson T. K. Lim, “Towards a Final Form Approach to Biblical Interpretation,” *STJ* 7, nos. 1–2 (1999): 1–11.

as the new literary criticism<sup>5</sup> and the new biblical theology,<sup>6</sup> which focus upon the final form of the OT text. It will not inquire about the possible precanonical history of the text but seek to understand the overriding theological thrust of Scripture wholistically as it now presents itself in the biblical canon. This canonical, close-reading approach does not ignore, however, the unique settings and theological emphases of different sections of the canonical OT. By focusing upon the final form of the OT text, I believe it is possible that the interests of both liberal-critical and evangelical OT scholarship may merge in seeking to understand what constitutes the canonical theological message of the OT regarding human sexuality. Although I have profited enormously from feminist scholarship, this study does not employ the feminist hermeneutic of suspicion and resistance but rather the hermeneutic of consent. In other words, I read not *against* but *with* the grain of the text in its final form.<sup>7</sup>

One of the central premises of this book is that the Edenic pattern for sexuality constitutes the foundation for the rest of the OT perspective on this topic. A radical, even “tectonic,” paradigm shift in modern critical scholarship in the last few decades now sees creation, and not just salvation history, as foundational to the rest of the OT canon.<sup>8</sup> It is now widely recognized that in the theological ground plan of the final editor(s) of the OT canon, Gen 1–3 has been situated as the introduction to the canon, and the whole rest of the canon regularly harks back to and builds upon this Edenic pattern. An emerging consensus on this point is apparent within evangelical OT scholarship,<sup>9</sup> as well as within more

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<sup>5</sup>As pioneered by Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic, 1981), and developed by numerous recent scholars.

<sup>6</sup>As “fathered” and popularized by Brevard S. Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1970); idem, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992).

<sup>7</sup>See Robin Parry, “Feminist Hermeneutics and Evangelical Concerns: The Rape of Dinah as a Case Study,” *TynBul* 53 (2002): 1–28, for a helpful elaboration of these two different approaches as viewed from an evangelical Christian perspective.

<sup>8</sup>This is evidenced, e.g., by William P. Brown and S. Dean McBride Jr., eds., *God Who Creates: Essays in Honor of W. Sibley Towner* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans: 2000), whose contributors document the “tectonic shift . . . nothing short of a paradigm shift from a once-exclusive stress upon the mighty interventions of God in history to God’s formative and sustaining ways in creation” (editors’ preface, xi.). The first chapter of that monograph, by S. Dean McBride Jr., is entitled “Divine Protocol: Genesis 1:1–2:3 as Prologue to the Pentateuch.” Succeeding essays show how creation theology is foundational to other parts of the HB. See also Jesus M. Arambarri, “Gen 1,1–2,4a: Ein Prolog und ein Programm für Israel,” in *Gottes Wege suchend—Beiträge zum Verständnis der Bibel und Ihrer Botschaft: Festschrift für Rudolf Mosis zum 70. Geburtstag* (ed. Franz Sedlmeier; Würzburg: Echter, 2003), 65–86.

<sup>9</sup>Among evangelicals, see, e.g., Dan B. Allender and Tremper Longman, III, *Intimate Allies: Rediscovering God’s Design for Marriage and Becoming Soul Mates for Life* (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale, 1995), 13–14: “The first three chapters of Genesis provide the picture [of God’s plan for sexuality and marriage]. . . . They offer not only a perspective on the problem but all the cure. If I want to know God’s design for my marriage, I must begin at the ground floor of the Bible to understand the foundational perspectives that guide my passage through life. . . . Genesis 1–3 establishes crucial principles that are to shape our

liberal scholarship.<sup>10</sup> Phyllis Bird articulates the widespread scholarly position: “Canonically, the understanding of human nature expressed or implied in the laws, wisdom literature, narratives, prophetic texts, and other genres of the Hebrew Scriptures may be viewed as commentary on the creation texts. . . . The Bible’s first statement concerning humankind remains the normative statement that governs all others.”<sup>11</sup> John Rankin summarizes, “Whether one is evangelical or liberal, it is clear that Gen 1–3 is the interpretive foundation of all Scripture.”<sup>12</sup>

Within the foundational, normative texts of Gen 1–3, the subject of human sexuality occupies a surprisingly extensive coverage. “While the topic of sexuality represents an exceedingly narrow focus within the universe-encompassing question of creation, it is given disproportionate attention in the primary Old Testament texts. By reason of this placement and prominence, the biblical interpreter is directed to consider the meaning and end of human sexuality in the context of

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marriages. This story tells us all we ultimately need to know about marriage.” Cf. Lilian Calles Barger, *Eve’s Revenge: Women and a Spirituality of the Body* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2003), 128: “Its [the book of Genesis’s] first three chapters hold the key to understanding the entirety of the Bible.” Evangelical scholars would claim that this biblical phenomenon exists because of the inspiration of Scripture, the providential placement of Gen 1–3 at the beginning of the canon, and later individual authors’ consistent understanding of the previous Edenic pattern. Walter Kaiser terms this the “epigenetic” principle, in which “there was a growth of the record of events, meanings, and teachings as time went on around a fixed core that contributed life to the whole emerging mass” (Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *Toward an Old Testament Theology* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978], 8; cf. 14, 22, 34). This is my own personal theological/confessional orientation (see Richard M. Davidson, “Cosmic Metanarrative for the Coming Millennium,” *JATS* 11, nos. 1–2 [2000]: 103–4). My research for this topic was undertaken from a *solā* and *tota Scriptura* perspective that accepts the historicity, unity, and ongoing authority of the Bible, including both OT and NT (see *idem*, “Interpreting Scripture: An Hermeneutical ‘Decalogue,’” *JATS* 4, no. 2 [1993]: 95–114). At the same time, this study incorporates insights from, and dialogues with, the entire theological and methodological spectrum of OT scholarship, offering analyses and synthesis that, it is hoped, will be of value to all who are interested in a final-form theology of sexuality in the HB.

<sup>10</sup>Beyond the scholars cited below, see, e.g., Arambarri, “Gen 1,1–2,4a,” 65–86; and S. Dean McBride Jr., “Divine Protocol: Genesis 1:1–2:3 as Prologue to the Pentateuch,” in *God Who Creates: Essays in Honor of W. Sibley Towner* (ed. William P. Brown and S. Dean McBride Jr.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans: 2000), 3–41. Many liberal-critical scholars would maintain that an overarching general consistency of biblical material has come about through the editorial shaping and redacting by the final canonical “Master Editor or Redactor.” See, e.g., David Noel Freedman, in David Noel Freedman with Jeffrey C. Geoghegan and Michael M. Homan, *The Nine Commandments: Uncovering a Hidden Pattern of Crime and Punishment in the Hebrew Bible* (ed. Astrid Billes Beck; New York: Doubleday, 2000), 168–80 and *passim*, who sees this “Master Weaver/Editor” responsible for the “Primary History” of Genesis through Kings, and its “scarlet thread of commandment violations” (p. 180) in which each of the nine books of this Primary History illustrate respectively the violation of the first nine commandments of the Decalogue.

<sup>11</sup>Phyllis A. Bird, “‘Bone of My Bone and Flesh of My Flesh,’” *ThTo* 50 (1994): 525, 527.

<sup>12</sup>John Rankin, “Power and Gender at the Divinity School,” in *Finding God at Harvard: Spiritual Journeys of Thinking Christians* (ed. Kelly Monroe; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 203.

theological reflection on creation.”<sup>13</sup> Thus the opening chapters of Scripture may be seen as of “seminal character” and “determinative” for the biblical view of sexuality. Here “the pattern is established and adjudged good. From then until the close of the biblical corpus it is the assumed norm.”<sup>14</sup>

The main title of this book, *Flame of Yahweh*, is derived from my own translation and exegesis of Song 8:6 (a passage that I will argue is the climactic biblical statement on human sexuality). Because of my desire to be sensitive to and respectful of the reticence on the part of some to pronounce the Tetragrammaton, I contemplated using other references to the deity in the book title, such as “Yah” (the most literal translation of Song 8:6), “YHWH” (supplying only the consonants of the divine name), or “the Lord” (utilizing English translation). None of these seemed suitable for various reasons. Finally, in consultation with my editor, I have settled on the originally conceived title, *Flame of Yahweh*, because (at least in the Christian tradition) “Yahweh” is probably the most common scholarly way to represent in writing the Hebrew divine covenant name and the title *Flame of Yahweh* seems to most effectively link the contents of the book with the powerful and sublime imagery of the book title’s source, the Song of Songs. But I invite readers whose personal convictions or religious tradition avoids pronouncing this name to substitute “Adonai,” “Ha-Shem,” “YHWH,” or some other appropriate circumlocution as they read the title and other references to Israel’s God throughout the book.

I have consciously employed the subtitle “Sexuality in the *Old Testament*.” I use the term “Old Testament” from my particular confessional stance as a Christian in which the theology of the HB is seen as part of a biblical theology of sexuality that encompasses both Testaments. Granted, the bulk of the present work is focused upon examining the contents of the HB, which I trust will be of value to readers of various theological traditions beyond Christianity. I will occasionally suggest, however, some specific applications of the exegesis to the Christian (and specifically evangelical) community and to issues in contemporary Christian sexual ethics, and an afterword will explore implications of the study for a theology of human sexuality in the NT.

I acknowledge that the OT understanding of human sexuality is a topic hotly debated in pastoral and theological circles—hardly a merely academic topic—and that different theological persuasions digest the exegetical results in different ways, based upon church tradition and councils, science and reason, and so on. I do not claim to have the final or exclusive word on sexual theology in the OT. Hence this work constitutes *a* (not *the*) theology of sexuality in the OT.

At the same time, I set forth a *theology* (not *theologies*) of sexuality in the Old Testament. Although various OT witnesses present different emphases and unique insights, nevertheless I have found that the final canonical form of the HB

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<sup>13</sup>Phyllis A. Bird, *Missing Persons and Mistaken Identities: Women and Gender in Ancient Israel* (OBT; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 156.

<sup>14</sup>Dennis F. Kinlaw, “A Biblical View of Homosexuality,” in *The Secrets of Our Sexuality: Role Liberation for the Christian* (ed. Gary R. Collins; Waco, Tex.: Word, 1976), 105.

presents a unified, consistent, overarching theological portrait of human sexuality.<sup>15</sup> This theology is allowed to emerge from exegetical analysis of relevant passages; thus it is an “exegetical theology,”<sup>16</sup> building upon the exegetical work of others where I have found adequate treatment of the material and providing my own analysis where no satisfactory one has been undertaken.

## The Plan and Scope of the Work

In order to provide the full impact of this unified perspective of the OT canon and yet allow for the canonical development of sexual theology, this study is organized both topically and diacanonicaly (i.e., through the canon).<sup>17</sup> Within the structure of each basic facet of sexual theology that emerges from the foundational chapters of Gen 1–3, it moves systematically through the three divisions of the HB (Pentateuch, Prophets, Writings).

The first major section of this study concentrates on the divine Edenic design for human sexuality as set forth in Gen 1–3. Some ten basic facets of sexual theology emerge inductively from the material in these opening pages of Scripture. As noted above and substantiated throughout this book, the foundational insights set the Edenic pattern for the rest of the OT materials in their final canonical form.

The second major section examines the OT canonical development of the theology of human sexuality “outside the garden,” including the further illumina-

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<sup>15</sup>This conclusion is consistent with the evangelical understanding of *sola Scriptura* and *tota Scriptura* and also with the critical understanding of a master editor or redactor for the entire OT canon. It is contrary, however, to many modern and (especially) postmodern studies of the subject. See, e.g., Carr, *The Erotic Word*, passim, who argues that “the Bible has *multiple* pictures of sexual eros” (p. 87) radically diverging from one another and that today one must selectively move beyond the “childlike existence of rules and regulations” (55), beyond the laws of Torah, which affirm men as “sexual owners and aggressors” (52), and beyond the Prophets, where God is “an abusive male” (87), to the garden scenes of Gen 1–2 and the Song of Songs, where one finds “a picture of love not so dominated by violence, in which God can be male or female, an evocative drama of love that we might wish to enter” (87). So also David Biale, *Eros and the Jews: From Biblical Israel to Contemporary America* (New York: Basic, 1992), 11. I acknowledge that there were divergent attitudes toward sexuality in the culture of ancient Israel. For an attempt to lay bare the “construction of sexuality” within the society of biblical Israel, see, e.g., Lipka, “‘Such a Thing Is Not Done in Israel,’” passim. My attempt, by contrast, is not to lay bare the varying attitudes toward sexuality among individuals and groups at different places and times within ancient Israelite society but to set forth the theology of sexuality presented by the final form of the HB, which I have found to be essentially unified and consistent, albeit with different emphases in the various relevant passages.

<sup>16</sup>See Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *Toward an Exegetical Theology: Biblical Exegesis for Preaching and Teaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), passim, for a model of exegetical theology that is most useful.

<sup>17</sup>In this approach I am applying (at least part of) the multiplex theological methodology of my Doktorvater, the late Gerhard F. Hasel (see his *Old Testament Theology: Basic Issues in the Current Debate* [rev. and expanded 4th ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991], 194–208). Hasel favored the term “Old Testament biblical theology” for this approach.

tion of both God's Edenic ideal and humanity's distortion of God's design. The major focus of attention in this section is the pentateuchal narratives and legal material, where I have found virtually all the issues in a theology of sexuality directly and decisively addressed. Elucidation of these constituent elements of sexual theology are further traced as they reemerge and are more fully developed throughout the Prophets and Writings (except the Song of Songs).<sup>18</sup>

The third major section constitutes a "return to Eden," with a theological journey through the Song of Songs, the one book in the HB that is entirely devoted to extolling the beauty and virtue of sexual love. In my estimation, the Song of Songs represents the canonical "holy of holies" in human sexuality, providing a full-orbed theology of sexuality with profound implications for contemporary sexual issues.

An afterword explores the implications of the OT findings for a theology of sexuality in the NT, although a comprehensive NT theology of sexuality is obviously beyond the scope of this work. Furthermore, although this is, for the most part, a biblical theology of sexuality in the OT, not a contemporary handbook of Christian sexual ethics, I do not completely refrain from indicating the relevance of an OT theology of sexuality for current sexual and sex-related issues in the church (and my evangelical tradition in particular) occasionally in the main chapters and particularly in the afterword. I am convinced that the theology of sexuality found in the OT is surprisingly up to date and comprehensive in regard to sexual concerns at the beginning of the third Christian millennium.

## Overview of Old Testament Sexual Vocabulary

Before turning to the major sections of this study, we first survey the sexual vocabulary employed in the OT as a whole.<sup>19</sup> As already noted, no single word

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<sup>18</sup>What scholars have labeled as dissonance and patterns of sexual subversiveness within this material (see, e.g., Biale, *Eros and the Jews*, 11–32) I find largely to be pointers back to the original divine program for sexuality set forth in Gen 1–3.

<sup>19</sup>I am aware of the limitations regarding word studies for biblical theology, as cogently pointed out by James Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), and others, but when conducted cautiously, avoiding the fallacies that Barr exposes, and paying attention to the immediate context of each occurrence of words, word studies can contribute to the overall theology of sexuality in the OT. The lexical work throughout this study represents my own word studies in consultation with the standard lexicons, word books, and Bible dictionaries (such as *ABD*, *BDB*, *DCH*, *HALOT*, *IDB*, *KBL*, *NIDOTTE*, *TDNT*, *TDOT*, *TLOT*, and *TWOT*) as well as various specialized studies on specific words. Only the specialized studies are normally cited in the footnotes unless a specific quotation from the standard works is cited. All biblical references are to the Hebrew (MT) versification, with English translation (ET) verse numbers in brackets where different from the Hebrew. English citations of Scripture are taken from the NRSV, unless otherwise noted, inasmuch as this translation is particularly sensitive to gender inclusive language, and is so widely recognized within Protestant, Roman Catholic, Orthodox, and Jewish traditions. In quotations of OT poetry, space is frequently saved by not placing the poetry in block format.

exists for the general concept of sex or sexuality despite the numerous manifestations of sexual behavior and relationships in the Hebrew Scriptures. Furthermore, there is practically no sexual terminology proper in the OT. Reference to sexual organs and activities is almost invariably couched in euphemistic terms. This is due partly to the limitations of the classical Hebrew language: the modern range of scientific anatomical vocabulary did not exist. The language limitation in turn reflects the Hebrew wholistic view of humanity: individual organs often also refer metaphorically to various attitudinal manifestations of the total self, and therefore both male and female genitalia are “frequently described in terms of their relation to the entire body.”<sup>20</sup>

Circumlocutions are also employed because of the sense of impropriety and shame involved in public exposure of the sexual organs. Euphemisms “conceal in language what must not be exposed in fact—the male and female organs of sexual intercourse and reproduction.”<sup>21</sup> The sense of reserve in the euphemistic mention of sexual organs and acts is often accompanied, however, by a surprisingly frank and free discussion of sexuality and therefore does not support the contention that the biblical materials reflect a negative view of sexuality itself.<sup>22</sup>

Note first the terminology for the human sexual organs. There is no specific term for the male organ of regeneration in the OT, only euphemisms. The penis is sometimes referred to as “flesh” (*bāšār*), as in Gen 17:11: “You shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskins.”<sup>23</sup> Again the word *yārēk*, “thigh” or “loin,” indicates the general region of the body that constitutes the seat of the procreative power, and serves occasionally as a circumlocution for the male genitalia, especially when particular refinement of language is called for.<sup>24</sup> Other terms for the male sex organs are *šopkā* (Deut 23:2 [ET 23:1]), literally, “outflow” (with reference to the “fluid duct” of the penis); *mēbūšīm* (Deut 25:11), the “genitals,” literally, “that which excites shame” (with reference to a woman seizing the “genitals” of a man fighting with her husband); and *šēt* (Isa 20:4; pl. 2 Sam 10:4), perhaps a term for the male genitalia in general.<sup>25</sup> Additional euphemisms for the penis/genitals include the term *yād* “hand/forearm” (Isa 57:8, 10); *kap* “hand/socket/concavity”

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<sup>20</sup>R. K. Harrison, *Leviticus: An Introduction and Commentary* (TOTC 3; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1980), 248.

<sup>21</sup>O. J. Baab, “Sex, Sexual Behavior,” *IDB* 4:298. For discussion of biblical euphemisms in light of recent cross-cultural sociolinguistic research on euphemism, see John H. Elliott, “Deuteronomy—Shameful Encroachment on Shameful Parts: Deuteronomy 25:11–12 and Biblical Euphemism,” in *Ancient Israel: The Old Testament in Its Social Context* (ed. Philip F. Esler; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006), 161–76.

<sup>22</sup>Contra C. R. Taber, “Sex, Sexual Behavior,” *IDBSup* 818; see esp. his discussion under the heading “Sex is Bad.”

<sup>23</sup>See also Gen 17:14, 23–25; Exod 28:42; Lev 6:10 (ET 6:3); 15:2–18, 19; Ezek 16:26; 23:20; 44:7, 9.

<sup>24</sup>See Gen 24:2, 9; 46:26; 47:29; Exod 1:5; Judg 8:30. In one passage, Num 5:21–29, the female uterus seems to be intended by this term. Although this term is used especially to describe the male organ of regeneration as a symbol of procreative power, *yārēk* also appears with reference to the female genitalia in Deut 28:57 and Num 5:21, 22.

<sup>25</sup>Brenner, *The Intercourse of Knowledge*, 36.

(Gen 32:26, 33 [ET 32:25, 32], possibly Deut 25:12); *kēli* “vessel” (1 Sam 21:6 [ET 21:5]); and *‘āqēb* “heel/hindpart” (Jer 13:22; possibly Gen 25:26 and Hos 12:4 [ET 12:3]).<sup>26</sup> The word *zera*<sup>c</sup>, “seed,” is employed several times in the sense of “semen.”<sup>27</sup> There is one occurrence of the term *zirmâ* (Ezek 23:20), “emission,” which may refer to a “phallus” in the sense of “erect penis” or alternatively to “ejaculation,” the “emission (of semen).”<sup>28</sup> The term *šēkōbet*, “lying,” in several Pentateuchal passages also probably also means “penis.”<sup>29</sup> A crude reference to a man’s penis is perhaps found in Rehoboam’s reference to his little finger being thicker than his father’s *motnayim*, “loins,” which may be a slang expression for “(royal) penis” (1 Kgs 12:10 = 2 Chr 10:14).<sup>30</sup> More generally, the word *’ōn* denotes a man’s “generative power” or “virility” (Gen 49:3; Deut 21:7; Ps 78:51; 105:36), and *ḥālāšayim*, “loins,” describes where a man’s descendants come from (Gen 35:11; 1 Kgs 8:19; 2 Chr 6:9).

Two precise anatomical terms for parts of the male genitals appear in the OT. The “testicle” (*’ēšek*) is mentioned once in a list of physical deformities excluding the priest from temple service (Lev 21:20), and the “foreskin” (*’orlâ*) is referred to repeatedly in Scripture, since circumcision (*mûl*)—the cutting away of the foreskin—played such a central role in Israel’s religious life.<sup>31</sup> In this context may also be mentioned castration, described by the expression *pēšûa<sup>c</sup>-dakkâ<sup>3</sup>*, literally, “wounded by crushing” (Deut 23:2 [ET 23:1]), which implies, but does not explicitly mention, the testicles.

The genitalia of both male and female are sometimes indicated by the euphemisms *raglayim* “feet/legs,”<sup>32</sup> and probably also by *birkayim* “knees” (Judg 16:19, female; Ezek 7:17, 21:12 [ET 21:7], male). The term “flesh” (*bāšār*) can refer euphemistically to the vagina (Lev 15:19). Two other terms—*nablūt*, “shame” (Hos 2:12 [ET 2:10]), and *’erwāh*, “nakedness”<sup>33</sup>—are employed as circumlocutions for the female sex organs (in the context of their shameful

<sup>26</sup>For discussion of the “heel” euphemism in Scripture, see S. H. Smith, “‘Heel’ and ‘Thigh’: The Concept of Sexuality in the Jacob-Esau Narratives,” *VT* 40 (1990): 464–73.

<sup>27</sup>Lev 15:16; 22:4; Num 5:13, 28; Jer 31:27.

<sup>28</sup>*HALOT* 282, s.v. זֶרַע.

<sup>29</sup>See Lev 18:20, 23; 20:15; Num 5:20; and discussion in Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 17–22: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 3A; New York: Doubleday, 2000), 1550.

<sup>30</sup>Brenner, *The Intercourse of Knowledge*, 37.

<sup>31</sup>The feminine noun occurs fifteen times in the HB: Gen 17:11, 14, 23, 24, 25; 34:14; Exod 4:25; Lev 12:3; 19:23; Deut 10:16; 1 Sam 18:25, 27; 2 Sam 3:14; Jer 4:4; 9:24 (ET 9:25).

<sup>32</sup>The allusion to male genitalia seems most likely in Judg 3:24, 1 Sam 24:4 (ET 24:3), 2 Kgs 18:27, and Isa 36:12, all in the context of urine elimination; and in Isa 7:20, where the reference to the shaving of the “hair of the feet” could well indicate the pubic hair. This interpretation is possible in Exod 4:24 (Zipporah circumcises Moses’ son and touches Moses’ “feet” with the foreskin) but is far from certain with regard to Ruth 3:1–4, 7–9. For the use of the word “feet” to refer to female genitalia, see Deut 28:57 (in the context of afterbirth coming out between the “feet”) and Ezek 16:25 (in the context of Israel’s prostitution, offering her “feet” to passersby).

<sup>33</sup>Lev 18:6–19; 20:17–21, 30; Lam 1:8; Ezek 16:37; 23:10, 29.

exposure), and the latter term can also apply to both sexes.<sup>34</sup> A special word, *niddâ*, “menstruation,” is coined to denote a woman’s menstrual period;<sup>35</sup> this is also described as the “way [*derek*] of women” (Gen 31:35). Menstruation is described by the verb *zûb* or noun *zôb* (lit. “flow, discharge,” Lev 15:19–25), an expression that can also refer to both male and female abnormal discharge (Lev 15:2–15, 25–30; Num 5:2; 2 Sam 3:29). The term *mē<sup>c</sup>im* (lit. “intestines, internal body organs”) sometimes refers to the male loins<sup>36</sup> or the female womb,<sup>37</sup> denoting the part of the body through which people come into existence. The single occurrence of *nēhōšet* (Ezek 16:36), in light of its Akkadian cognate, probably means “female genital ‘distillation’ produced by sexual arousal” (in the context of lust).<sup>38</sup> In the Song of Songs, a number of other euphemistic expressions—utilizing metaphor, simile, or paranomasia (play on words)—allude to both the male and the female genitalia.<sup>39</sup>

In contrast to the preponderance of euphemisms noted thus far in the biblical references to sex organs, the OT writers speak with candor (and often delight) of the female womb (*rehem*)<sup>40</sup> and breast (*šad*)<sup>41</sup> or nipple (*dad*).<sup>42</sup> The profound theological significance of uterine imagery is particularly underscored in the Prophets, and the high regard for the beauty and charm of the female breasts becomes especially apparent in Proverbs and the Song of Songs.

Turning to the OT vocabulary for sexual activity leads back into the realm of euphemisms. Sexual intercourse is expressed by various verbs (or verbal phrases). For sexual intercourse approved by God, the verb used is usually “to know” (*yādā<sup>c</sup>*).<sup>43</sup> For emphasis upon sexual intercourse for purposes of procreation, one often finds the verb “to go in unto” (*bô<sup>3</sup> ʿel*).<sup>44</sup> For illicit sexual relations, the terminology includes such expressions as “to approach” (*qārab* or *nāgaš*),<sup>45</sup> “to lie

<sup>34</sup>Lev 20:17. See Milgrom, *Leviticus 17–22*, 1534.

<sup>35</sup>Lev 12:2, 5; 15:19, 20, 24, 25 (three times), 26 (two times), 33; 18:19; Ezek 18:6; 22:10; 36:17.

<sup>36</sup>Gen 15:4; 2 Sam 7:12; 16:11; Isa 39:7; 48:19; 2 Kgs 20:18.

<sup>37</sup>Gen 25:23; Num 5:22; Isa 49:1.

<sup>38</sup>See Moshe Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1–20: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 22; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1983), 285.

<sup>39</sup>These will be discussed in chs. 13 and 14.

<sup>40</sup>This masculine noun appears thirty-one times in the HB.

<sup>41</sup>This masculine noun appears twenty-one times in the HB, most often in the Song of Songs (eight times).

<sup>42</sup>This masculine noun appears in Prov 5:19 and Ezek 23:3, 8, 21.

<sup>43</sup>The verb can have reference to the man as subject (e.g., Gen 4:1, 17, 25; 24:16; 38:26; Judg 19:25), woman as subject (e.g., Gen 19:18; Num 31:17, 35; Judg 11:39), and homosexual intercourse (Gen 19:5, 6; Judg 19:22; 21:11). The theological significance of *yādā<sup>c</sup>* as a term for sexual intercourse is discussed in connection with the first usage of this term in a sexual sense in Gen 4:1.

<sup>44</sup>Gen 6:4; 16:2, 4; 19:31; 29:21; 29:23, 30; 30:3, 4, 16; 38:2, 8, 9, 16, 18; Deut 21:13; 22:13; 25:5; Josh 15:18; Judg 16:1; 2 Sam 3:7, 12, 24; 16:21, 22; Ezek 17:44; Ps 51:2 (ET 51:1); 1 Chr 2:21; 7:23.

<sup>45</sup>*qārab*: Gen 20:4–6; Lev 18:6, 14, 19; 20:16; Deut 22:14; Ezek 18:6. *nāgaš*: Exod 19:15.

with” (*šākab* <sup>c</sup>*im*);<sup>46</sup> the related expression *nātan šēkōbet*, “use [one’s] penis for sex”;<sup>47</sup> and the further related terminology “lie . . . with a woman” (Lev 18:22) or emission of semen, lit., “lying of seed” (Lev 15:18). Sexual union also is implied in the expression “become one flesh” (Gen 2:24) and is sometimes connoted by the verbs “to love” (*ʿāhab/ʿāhēb*)<sup>48</sup> and “to take [a woman/wife]” (*lāqah*).<sup>49</sup> The clause *gālā ʿerwat*, “uncover the nakedness of,” is used to describe incestuous sexual intercourse (Lev 18:6–17; 20:19; Ezek 22:10) as well as other illicit sexual intercourse (Lev 18:18–19).<sup>50</sup> The term for “ravish” or “sexually violate” is *šāḡēl* (Deut 28:30; Isa 13:16; Jer 3:2; Zech 14:2).<sup>51</sup> The sex act of a human female with an animal (bestiality), or of an animal with another animal, utilizes the verb *rāba*<sup>c</sup>, probably an Aramaic loan word meaning “to copulate” (Lev 18:23; 20:16; cf. 19:19).<sup>52</sup> Especially in the Song of Songs, numerous other forms of metaphorical language and plays on words are employed to allude to sexual intercourse.

These various ways of indicating sexual intercourse may be described as euphemistic if it is remembered that such “euphemisms” do not necessarily entail an avoidance of more explicit sexual terminology by substituting less offensive expressions. The “euphemisms” frequently *were* the most precise terminology available. Far from representing an impoverishment of expressive capability, moreover, these euphemistic expressions were often able to connote what modern scientific sexual terms cannot, namely, the essential meaning of the act as well as an objective description. This is true, for instance, in the usage of the verb *yāda*<sup>c</sup>, “to know,” to indicate sexual intercourse.

A survey of sexual vocabulary calls for some reference to the larger perspective of sexual differentiation within the OT. This could lead us into a lengthy list of terms denoting the broadest spectrum of vocabulary for aspects of sexuality from

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<sup>46</sup> Gen 19:32–35; 26:10; 30:15, 16; 34:2; 35:22; 39:7, 10, 12, 14; Exod 22:16; Lev 15:18, 33; 19:20; 20:11–13, 18, 20; Num 5:13, 19; Deut 22:22, 23, 25, 28, 29; 27:20–23; 28:30; 1 Sam 2:22; 2 Sam 11:4; 11:11; 12:11, 24; 13:11, 14; Ezek 23:8. For reference to homosexuality and bestiality, see Lev 18:22; Exod 22:18 (ET 22:19); Deut 27:21.

<sup>47</sup> So, e.g., Lev 18:20 should be translated, “You shall not use your penis for sex.” See Milgrom, *Leviticus 17–22*, 1550. See also Lev 18:23; 20:15; Num 5:20.

<sup>48</sup> See, e.g., Gen 24:67; 1 Kgs 11:1; Ezek 16:37. The emphasis of this term, when used of sexual intercourse, is more on the experiencing and desiring of sexual relations than on the act itself. Sometimes a distinction of meaning is connoted by using the active form rather than the stative; this is discussed below in ch. 7 in the contrast between the love of Solomon (1 Kgs 11:1) and Hosea (Hos 3:1).

<sup>49</sup> See esp. Gen 34:2; Exod 2:1; 2 Sam 11:4.

<sup>50</sup> The parallel clause, *raʿā ʿerwat*, “see the nakedness of” in Lev 20:17 (bis) also refers to incestuous sexual intercourse. For a discussion of Lev 18:18 (and arguments that, unlike vv. 6–17, this verse does not refer to incest), see ch. 5, below.

<sup>51</sup> The Masoretes thought this term so offensive that the term “to lie with” was substituted in the Qere of the MT. For other terms related to rape, see the discussion in ch. 12, below.

<sup>52</sup> See Milgrom, *Leviticus 17–22*, 1571. Ibn Ezra claimed that the root was related to the Hebrew word for “four” (*ʿarbāʿā*; derived from the homonym *rb*<sup>c</sup>), since an animal copulates while standing on all fours. In the biblical description of female bestiality, however, it is the woman who crouches on all fours.

pregnancy and birth to death, including the entire range of words denoting human gender.<sup>53</sup> Although such a survey is not provided here, this overview concludes with the basic terms expressing the bipolarity of the sexes: Sexual distinctions in the OT are indicated primarily by the word pairs *zākār/nēqēbā*, “male/female,” and *ʾiš/ʾiššā*, “man/woman.” The former word pair denotes the gender differentiation of both animals and humans<sup>54</sup> whereas the latter is limited primarily to humans, with the same terms denoting either “man/woman” or “husband/wife,” depending upon the context.<sup>55</sup> The significance of these two word pairs with regard to the theology of sexuality is examined in the discussion of their crucial initial appearance in Gen 1 and 2. These foundational chapters of Scripture call for attention in the first chapter of this study.

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<sup>53</sup> Some of this terminology will be taken up when relevant to the specific topics at hand. E.g., chs. 3 and 7 treat vocabulary of prostitution; ch. 8, terms denoting virginity; ch. 11, vocabulary related to childbearing and childlessness (and ways of dealing with childlessness, such as the levirate marriage and adoption); and ch. 12, verbs associated with rape.

<sup>54</sup> The masculine noun *zākār* appears eighty-two times in the OT, and another three times as an adjective (Num 3:40, 43; Jer 20:15). See also the four occurrences of the related noun *zēkūr* (Exod 23:17; 34:23; Deut 16:16; 20:13) with the same meaning. The assumed etymology of these words is from the root conception of “to be sharp, pointed”—obviously alluding to the male penis. The feminine noun *nēqēbā*, “female,” appears twenty-two times in the HB and is derived from the root *nqb*, “to bore, make a hole, pierce”; the etymological reference is no doubt to the female sex organ that is “pierced” by the male penis.

<sup>55</sup> The masculine *ʾiš* appears about 2,160 times in the OT, and *ʾiššā* occurs about 775 times. Both *ʾiš* and *ʾiššā* are of uncertain etymology; one suggestion derives the former from the verb *ʾyš*, *ʾwš*, “to be strong,” and the latter from *ʾnš*, “to be weak,” but these may well be primary nouns not based upon verbal roots (see N. P. Bratsiotis, “אִישׁ *ʾish*; אִשָּׁה *ʾishāh*,” *TDOT* 1:222–23). According to most lexicographers, the two terms are related only by popular etymology. If one takes Gen 2:23 at face value, however, this popular etymology was present from the beginning in Eden.