Controversial Same-Sex Texts in the Bible

Part 1 of 2: Queen James Passages in the Old Testament
with Jay E. Smith, Joe Fantin, Darrell L. Bock, and Robert B. Chisholm
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**The Table Podcast**  
*Controversial Same-Sex Texts in the Bible*

**Darrell Bock:** Welcome to The Table, where we discuss issues involving God and culture. Today we’re looking at Biblical passages related to same-sex sexuality. These are the passages that come up in relationship to discussion of these issues and some of them are debated. We thought it would be good to dedicate an entire podcast to working through passages both in the Old and New Testaments that touch on these themes.

We actually have a way into this conversation by something that has been produced recently in the culture. Within the last year there is a Bible that is called The Queen James Bible. Now you heard that right. That was not King James that was Queen James. I remember telling my wife about this and thinking about doing this podcast and she says, “You’ve got to be joking.” My response was, “No I’m actually very serious.”

There is a group that sat down with the King James Scripture and worked their way through eight passages. We’ll be discussing more than that today, but eight passages that they altered in light of what they claim is the proper way to render these texts. We thought this is a great way into discussing this material.

Let me give you the introduction to this Bible and what it has to say, and you should be seeing a picture of it on your screen. It says, “Homosexuality was first mentioned in the Bible in 1946 in the revised standard version.” So it talks about the mention of LGBT Bible interpretations and it says, “The Queen James Bible seeks to resolve interpretative ambiguity in the Bible as it pertains to homosexuality.”

That is the way in. Even beyond that it goes on to discuss who is Queen James and of course it’s King James, but King James did have a reputation for having same-sex relationships and so he was nicknamed Queen James. So there actually is an historical element to the background of this that most people are not aware of. They called this version, which was released last year, in 2012, the Queen James Bible.

We’re going to work our way through some of the texts that they discuss, plus a few others that often come up in this conversation.

Let me introduce our panel of experts that we’ve assembled to have this discussion. Over to my far right is Dr. Robert Chisholm whom be referring to as Bob, probably during the broadcast. He is Department Chair of Old Testament Studies here at Dallas Theological Seminary. You’ve taught here what, 30 –

**Robert Chisholm:** Thirty-two years.

**Darrell Bock:** Thirty-two years, all right, so he’s got me by one.
Then to my immediate right is Dr. Joe Fantin who is a professor in the New Testament Studies Department. I of course, teach in the New Testament Studies Department as well as being Executive Director for Cultural Engagement at the Howard G. Hendricks Center for Christian Leadership and Cultural Engagement.

Then finally over here to my left is Jay Smith, who also teaches in the New Testament Department. Jay, how long have you been teaching here?

Jay Smith: It’s like 16 or 17 years

Darrell Bock: You don’t ask him his birthday either; he doesn’t know how old he is.

Jay Smith: Numerical things kind of throw me.

Darrell Bock: Joe how long have you been?

Joe Fantin: This is my tenth.

Darrell Bock: This is his tenth year. Okay. So, this is – we’re a group that has been together, although I don’t think we’ve ever sat around the table to discuss what we’re about to discuss in any detail so I’m actually looking forward to doing this.

Let’s launch in. The first passage we’re going to discuss is not on the Queen James Bible list. It’s a passage that does sometimes come up however, and that’s Genesis 9. This is a passage in which Ham is said to uncover his father’s nakedness. It’s Genesis 9:2027. Bob why don’t you take us through the important parts of what’s going on in this passage.

Robert Chisholm: Well, Noah has a vineyard and Noah gets drunk and it says that he uncovered himself inside his tent. People sometimes do things they regret when they’re drunk, and Noah apparently unclothed himself and was lying there exposed. Then his son, Ham, actually it doesn’t say that he uncovered father’s nakedness, he saw his father’s nakedness. Then he went and told his brothers about this and Shem and Japheth took a garment, placed it on their shoulders, walked in backward so that they would see their father’s nakedness and they covered him up.
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When he awoke, verse 24, he learned what his youngest son had done to him and then he pronounces a curse, not on Ham but on one of Ham’s sons, Canaan. So this is really in the larger context of the story explaining something about the nature of the Canaanites and their origins and that sort of thing.

**Darrell Bock:** We call that an etiology bite.

**Robert Chisholm:** That’s right. But, in the early 70s there were some interpretations that came along about this incident where they saw Ham as doing more than just seeing his father. I think the traditional reading of the text and the one that I would still support, is that Ham looked at his father, and in this culture whether he intended to do that or not, some will say it’s voyeurism – that he was getting a kick out of this or something. Some will say that. But it may just have been unintentional, but this is a culture where honor, shame are really important and so it would be humiliating for a father to be seen in this condition by his son.

I think that the traditional view is supported by what the brothers do. They walk in backward to make sure they don’t see him. So I think see is being used in a rather literal way here. But some have suggested that he did more than that. Because, over in Leviticus chapter 20, verse 17 it talks about if a man has sexual intercourse with his sister whether the daughter of his father or his mother so that he sees her nakedness and she sees his nakedness it is a disgrace. There there’s some kind of sexual contact that’s involved and the see is idiomatic. It means more than that.

**Joe Fantin:** It’s a euphemism.

**Robert Chisholm:** Right, it’s a euphemism. But I don’t believe the same thing is going on in the Genesis passage. They’ll also argue that verse 24, where it says when he found out what his youngest son had done, that to do something involves more than just seeing and telling. I don’t think that’s the case. I think it’s, the verb can cover just seeing and telling.

The NET Bible, by the way, which I’m referring to here, has an excellent note on this. For chapter 9, verse 22 and then another one attached to verse 24. So I would recommend that readers look at the NET Bible which can be accessed through Bible.org online.
Darrell Bock: So this is a passage that although sometimes it ends up in the database of passages to be discussed, really in some ways doesn’t belong in this conversation, which may explain –

Joe Fantin: I don’t think so.

Darrell Bock: -- why the Queen James Bible didn’t do anything with it.

Robert Chisholm: Right. And even if it were some kind of homosexual contact it’s viewed very negatively I think in this but I don’t think that’s what happened at all.

Joe Fantin: What did he do that was so negative though, Bob? Is it that he didn’t cover his father?

Robert Chisholm: He probably should have covered him up, but the fact that he just saw him seems to have been considered inappropriate. We’re not sure. You see we don’t know his motives. Some people refer to this, as I said, as voyeurism but I’m not so sure the text really implies that or states it. It just says he saw him and then he told his brothers. Some will say that he should have covered him up and kept it quiet. He didn’t need to go tell his brothers.

Darrell Bock: It might be said, just as an aside, that some of the principles of modesty that we see developed in Judeo-Christian context come from texts like this. Would that be fair?

Robert Chisholm: Yes. Yes.

Darrell Bock: All right, well that’s our first passage. That one isn’t on the list but the next one is. This is Genesis 19. This is the discussion of what took place at Sodom and Gomorrah and the editor’s notes on the Gay Bible discuss this text and treat the issues here. This is a passage where Lot encounters some visitors and they want to, euphemistically, engage –

Robert Chisholm: “Know,” in the language of the text.
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Darrell Bock: “Know,” in the language of the text, that’s right. And then there’s dispute about exactly how this text works in this conversation. I’ll just read a portion of this text. I am reading from the NET Bible. It says, “Before they could lie down to sleep all the men, both young and old, from every part of the City of Sodom surrounded the house. They shouted to Lot, “Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us so we can” and I take it this is know them. The NET actually has “so we can have sex with them!” But it is a euphemism in this case.

Robert Chisholm: The following context makes that clear. They’re not just asking we would like to meet these fellows and say hi to them. No, there’s more going on than that, as you can see in the following verses.

Darrell Bock: And so, the text goes on in verse 6, “Lot went outside to them, shutting the door behind him. He said, “No, my brothers! Don’t act so wickedly! Look, I have two daughters who have never had sexual relations with a man. Let me bring them out to you, and you can do to them whatever you please. Only don’t do anything to these men, for they have come under the protection of my roof.” So we have a hospitality issue going on, on the one hand and we have this expressed desire to have a forcible sexual encounter with these other men, and Lot, and this is shocking but it shows the nature of the conflict. Lot’s willing to have his daughters take the place of these men rather than to allow the men to go through this. That’s the background.

Bob, what more can we know about this text?

Robert Chisholm: Well, some will argue that this is not so much a sexual issue as it is a hospitality issue and they will point to the fact that he offers the daughters and that it’s inappropriate for visitors to be treated this way. So he’s offering his daughters before he allows that to happen. It is a hospitality issue; it is more than a sexual issue. But I would argue that that’s a false dichotomy. To say well it’s a hospitality issue and therefore it’s not a sexual issue I think is to miss the point of what’s going on here.

I think an ancient Israelite reader, reading this in the larger context of the canon, in light of some passages in Leviticus which we will get to, would look at this and say, “This is horrible. Treating visitors this way. It’s especially horrible treating visitors this way when you want to do this to them.” Because they would be assuming that this same-sex relationship is wrong from Leviticus, and it’s especially wrong when you try to treat visitors this way. So I think that’s a false dichotomy. Hospitality versus sex.
Then the other issue that comes up is what is their motive for having sex with these individuals? Are they just motivated by homosexual lust, or sexual lust we could say? Or, are they trying to humiliate the visitors? I think again, it may be a little bit of both. Lot’s response where he offers them the women would suggest that there is a sexual lust aspect to this. But there may very well be an attempt to humiliate these people. A power rape as it were.

So, I’m not so sure about that. Now there is a passage in Judges 19, which you could call Sodom and Gomorrah revisited. Where the Levite comes to an Israelite town, Gavar or Gibeah, and the same scenario unfolds, and the men of the town come and want to rape the Levite. He sends his concubine out to them and they rape her. So some will say in the Judges 19 it’s – they just have no respect for religious authority. They want to humiliate this Levite. It shows the depths, the moral depths of Israel at this time. That may be so. That may be part of what’s going on.

But again, I think it’s a false dichotomy to pit hospitality versus sexuality. The fact is they do rape the concubine. Now that may be, well if we can’t get at him we can humiliate him by raping his concubine. That may be involved. But again, an ancient Israelite would look at this and say, “Oh, not only do they show lack of respect for these people, and not only are they inhospitable, but they treat him this way.” Which we know is an abomination according to Leviticus. So it’s not an either or, it’s a both and.

You know, it’s interesting in 2 Samuel in the account of Tamar’s rape there’s further literary allusion to this and that’s a heterosexual rape in that case. It’s interesting that that’s not homosexual but it makes an allusion to this. So what we have are two cases, two different types of sexual offense. One homosexual, one heterosexual.

_Darrell Bock:_ But it is fair to say that because we’ve got a forced sexuality situation going on that this is actually a complicated passage.

_Robert Chisholm:_ Yes it is.

_Darrell Bock:_ It’s not a cut and dried situation by any means.

_Robert Chisholm:_ That’s right. I’ll acknowledge that and I think the note in the Bible that you referred to brings this issue up and it’s a legitimate issue to raise. It is more complicated.
Darrell Bock: Okay, that’s Genesis 19. Let’s turn our attention to the two texts of the Old Testament that probably will get the most discussion because in most people’s view they’re the most direct references to this kind of a situation. This is Leviticus 18:22 and Leviticus 20:13. I don’t know if we have the editor’s notes up on the screen, but if we could get to those so that people can see what the webpage is saying about the passage that will help us as we talk about these passages. The first editor’s note that you see there, deals with the Genesis 19 passage as we scroll down the page you’ll see the discussion start to come up as they talk about what they changed. They only changed eight passages in the entire Bible. Everything else is what you’re familiar with. It kind of shows the scope of what we’re dealing with.

If we work our way down we’ll see that they begin to discuss the individual passages. So John, sorry Genesis 19:5, it begins with the citation to the King James and then they go through their explanation of how they handled that passage and what the QJV, a new abbreviation, renders for it.

Now we come to Leviticus 20:13. This is a very important text so I am going to read this editor’s note, it says, “Leviticus is outdated as a moral code.” You can tell the passage makes them nervous; “But we still picked it as our most important book to address in our edits. So most anti-LGBT religious activities cite Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 as proof positive that homosexuality is a sin, and even worse is punishable by death.”

That introduces us to the fact that this a passage that many people do read in a direct way. So let’s address that question first, then we’ll come back to the notes and see how they handle it.

What is this passage doing in Leviticus 18, well these passages in Leviticus 18:22 and in Leviticus 20:13?

Robert Chisholm: Leviticus 18 is a warning to Israel. The notes suggest that this was a guide just for priests, if I’m reading the note in the Bible correctly, that this version that we have up here. But, if you go back to the beginning of the chapter, “Speak to the Israelites and tell them,” so this is material that is for all Israel, not just priests.

Darrell Bock: So it’s not a cultically limited text?
Robert Chisholm: Exactly. If you go to the end of the chapter, verse 24, “Don’t defile yourselves with any of these things for the nations which I am about to drive out before you have been defiled with all these things. The land has become unclean.” The kind of activities described in this chapter were practiced by the Canaanites and as far as the Lord is concerned those practices have defiled the very land. “It’s become unclean and I have brought the punishment for its inequity upon it, so that the land has vomited out its inhabitants.” And he makes the point that if you repeat these offenses the same thing will happen to you. So you can see this is broadly for Israel and I, quite frankly, when I’m talking about the whole issue of Canaanite genocide, just as a little bit of a side bar, this is a really important passage because it gives us insight into why the lord felt that this culture needed to be exterminated.

Darrell Bock: Yes.

Robert Chisholm: And that’s a topic for another day I know. It’s a very important passage. It’s as if the Lord is saying their time is up. The Lord had given them ample time and they had failed, so this is a warning to Israel. The bulk of the chapter involves crossing sexual boundaries. Maybe we’ll talk later about Jesus’ statement when he’s asked by the Jewish leaders about divorce and remarriage and he goes back to Genesis 2 and he quotes the text in its alternative form there. The two will become one. He talks about man and woman, and “the two will become one” kind of rules out polygamy, and any other option really.

This is a chapter that describes the crossing of sexual boundaries.

Darrell Bock: So when we look at this in context and, let me just read 18:22 so that people can get the text in mind that we’re talking about. It says, “You must not have sexual intercourse with a male as one has sexual intercourse with a woman; it is a detestable act.”

There are a couple of observations to make here right off the bat, and that is first of all the code is presented from a male point of view. This is very common in the culture. In fact, finding text anywhere or often in the ancient world that deal with women in this light is pretty rare, because of how common this is to always approach it from the male perspective. So that’s the first thing to notice.
The second thing to notice is that there are all kinds of other sexual acts that surround this text, even though the verse before, and this is the point that the Queen James Bible is going to make is going to be, “You must not give any of your children as an offering to Molech, so that you do not profane the name of your God.” The verse before is about child sacrifice that happened in pagan temple context, but most of the rest of the chapter is about various forms of sexual intercourse.

Verse 19, “You must not approach a woman in her menstrual impurity to have sexual intercourse with her.” Verse 20, “You must not have sexual intercourse with the wife of your fellow citizen to become unclean with her.”

Verse 23, the verse right after the verse that we’re discussing, “You must not have sexual intercourse with any animal to become defiled with it, and a woman must not stand before an animal to have sexual intercourse with it; it is a perversion.” So we are in a code that is dealing with sexual practices, is that correct?

Robert Chisholm: Yes, verses 6 through 18 as well, we could talk about. So, yes. But the Queen James note attempts to limit verse 22 to cultic, some type of cultic practice involving male prostitutes, which the language of the text doesn’t specifically indicate that. Because they try to relate it to the Molech worship which involved child sacrifice in verse 21. So they’re trying to explain verse 22 in light of 21, limit it to cult prostitution which had a homosexual dimension, and in fact in 1 Kings 14:24 there’s a reference to this.

There were also male cultic prostitutes in the land. They committed the same horrible sins as the nations that the Lord had driven out from before the Israelites and it’s related to idolatry so that kind of thing was going on in Israel. But I don’t believe that in this context you can make that connection. You’d have to show me that this Molech worship that’s in view here, which is typically associated with child sacrifice, has some kind of male cult prostitute dimension to it.

But furthermore, as you’ve said, the broader context of the passage is just talking about sexual boundaries. The focus is on the Canaanites’ practices in general. So I think Molech worship would have just horrified Israelites. Oh, offering your children. Then verse 22 is right in there with it. So I don’t think that verse 21 limits verse 22. These are just examples throughout the chapter of what the Canaanites were doing that had brought them to the point where God was ready to eliminate them.
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**Darrell Bock:** Now the key term in this passage, is the idea of this is an abomination is the way a lot of –

**Robert Chisholm:** Toi-va

**Darrell Bock:** Toi va, that’s right. The NET Bible translates this as a “detestable act.” The Queen James Bible tries to soften this to a certain degree and make it basically say taboo. It’s like a slap on the wrist if I can say it that way, as opposed to something more serious. How should we view that term?

**Robert Chisholm:** However, whatever gloss you want to use to translate it. Even if you want to use taboo, this is serious stuff. This is very serious stuff, because look at verses 24 and following. These actions are so serious that from God’s perspective they justify eliminating a society from the face of the earth. So that’s what toi va is. Let’s not water it down. This is repulsive to God. Serious business that justifies this very harsh judgment that he was ready to bring upon these people. And he says the land has been defiled by these kinds of actions. Even if you want to say, well toi va is just used a few times on the specifics, in those later verses it characterizes all of these actions as being of this nature.

**Darrell Bock:** Another question that often comes up in relation to this passage and I’ve alluded to this by citing the context is the scope of what is prohibited here and seen as detestable in one way or another includes something as basic, if I can say it that way, as approaching a woman who’s menstruating. So, how do we view that act in relationship to the list that comes later? Should we make a distinction between the first verse which is simply descriptive and doesn’t put any kind of sanction I guess on what’s being said? You come to the next one and it says that you become unclean if you do the act of verse 20; this is the wife of your fellow citizen. But if you – you profane the name of the Lord if you engage in child sacrifice, but you commit an abomination if you have sexual intercourse with a male. Is that an observation worth making as we move through this list, that what is attached to each act is put in a slightly separate category as we move along?

**Robert Chisholm:** Yeah, then in verse 23 there’s an even different word that’s used, which is not as common, and it’s translated as perversion. There may be an escalation here. They’re all wrong. They’re all violations, but there may be an escalation of sorts.
Darrell Bock: Because in the law there are violations and then there are violations.

Robert Chisholm: Exactly.

Darrell Bock: Yeah, exactly.

Robert Chisholm: Some people will look at verse 19 in particular and say well that doesn’t sound so bad, and therefore they’ll maybe try to question the relevance of everything here. We wouldn’t think that was wrong in the way they did, but I think that’s wrong to look at that one verse and then say well the other things may not be so wrong either. No, from the ancient Israelite perspective verse 19 would be serious business. We can’t impose our modern attitude on that.

Darrell Bock: That has to do with the ancient attitude towards blood.

Robert Chisholm: Blood and cleanness. If you go back to chapter 15, you get the female bodily discharge section there in chapter 15 and this menstruation issues are mentioned there as well. So again, yeah, this would be more serious for them than it would be for us. But I think that’s an excellent point, Darrell, that there may be some escalation here as these illustrations are being used.

Jay Smith: Do we also, through, need to think through the purity codes and things like that? These ancient peoples would have had separate purity codes and some of these things might have seemed, to us may not seem so bad, but in those cases like you said they would have made a huge distinction what’s pure and what’s impure?

Joe Fantin: Oh yeah.

Robert Chisholm: Like they say, go back to chapter 15 with the male discharges, the female discharges and it actually refers there to a man having sexual intercourse with a woman so that her menstrual impurity touches him. How does that relate to chapter 18, verse 19 where it seems to be more serious? I think some would interpret 15:24 as if she begins to have her period while they are having intercourse, that’s what that’s referring to, whereas chapter 18 is talking about a more deliberate sort of action. I’m trying to be delicate here.
Darrell Bock: Right, I understand. I think it’s important to understand that there are several things that are happening in these passages all at once. We’ve got cultural factors. We’ve got, if we want to think about it, there are – and these cultural factors are impinging on some of what is said, is going on at a moral level. So it isn’t just a matter of reading the text, saying I’ve got an action and boom that takes care of the text. That’s what I think is important to be sensitive to as we have these conversations about these texts.

Robert Chisholm: But I think there is a cultural dimension. But I think we need to remember these are not just taboos for priests. These are Canaanite practices that in the sight of God were serious enough that he would tell Israel, wipe out this society, man, woman and child. Topic for another day.

Darrell Bock: Right.

Robert Chisholm: But it shows that God is not pleased with this kind of activity, and the land has vomited them out.

Darrell Bock: Right, so – and really that’s the point. The point is that Israel’s supposed to be a different kind of people. They’re supposed to live in a different kind of way. Their practices are supposed to be distinctive. We could use the term set apart, we could even use more religious language, sanctified. You know they’re to be, they’re to have a distinct quality in terms of who they are. Okay, that’s –

Joe Fantin: Darrell, if I could jump in here, in the parallel in chapter 20, verse 13 –

Darrell Bock: That’s actually where we’re going next.

Joe Fantin: Okay, all right, well I was just going to say the penalty here is death. So this is not to be taken lightly.
Robert Chisholm: And in chapter 20 it’s in a list of again, crossing sexual boundaries and there’s no connection with the Molech in chapter 20 verse 13. It’s clearly of a sexual nature. There’s no question of a Molech involvement as far as I can see in chapter 20. So I think you have to interpret 18:22 in light of 20:13 and a very good point, this is serious enough that it’s a capital offense in the site of God.

Joe Fantin: This is a taboo, you know –

Jay Smith: it’s a pretty serious penalty.

Joe Fantin: It’s a capital T.

Darrell Bock: It’s a capital T taboo.

Robert Chisholm: And we are – the Molech is earlier in the chapter for sure, but again we are not just talking about priestly rules because4: “You are to say to the Israelites, any man from the Israelites or from foreigners who reside in Israel, who gives his children to Molech” and then it goes on. So it seems like the chapter has a broader context than just priestly rules.

Darrell Bock: Let me read Leviticus 20 and again put it in context because it brings in some of the themes that we’ve already talked about. I’m going to start on verse 7. “You must sanctify yourselves and be holy, because I am the Lord your God.” That’s the point. You’re to have a distinct lifestyle and live in a way that’s different from the nations around you. “You must be sure to obey my statutes. I am the Lord who sanctifies you.”
Verse 9, “If anyone curses his father and mother he must be put to death. He has cursed his father and mother; his blood guilt is on himself. If a man commits adultery with his neighbor’s wife, both the adulterer and the adulteress must be put to death. If a man has sexual intercourse with his father’s wife, he has exposed his father’s nakedness. Both of them must be put to death; their blood guilt is on themselves. If a man has sexual intercourse with his daughter-in-law, both of them must be put to death. They have committed perversion; their blood guilt is on themselves. If a man has sexual intercourse with a male as one has sexual intercourse with a woman, the two of them have committed an abomination. They must be put to death; their blood guilt is on themselves. If a man has sexual intercourse with both a woman and her mother, it is lewdness. Both he and they must be burned to death, so there is no lewdness in your midst.” Then it goes on to talk about sex with an animal etcetera.

Robert Chisholm: Both man and woman in this case, in verse 16 a woman approaches an animal.

Darrell Bock: Now this is a very strict code. There’s no doubt about that, and it’s a strict code covering a variety of offenses. That’s also important to note. We aren’t just highlighting one thing here. There’s a set apartness in Israel for holiness that runs across a whole gamut of actions.

But one can read this and say, this is a pretty serious list of violations that we’re talking about.

Robert Chisholm: Yes, and tucked right in there in verse 13 is this same sex violation. But it is important and I think you alluded to this is that we’re not picking on that. There are all of these other boundary crossings in the areas of sexuality are also wrong and they’re going to be treated very harshly.

Darrell Bock: So this term that we’ve translated as an abomination is this toi va term again. It’s the same term that we saw in Leviticus 18. So, if you were to summarize where Moses takes us in the Torah on this issue what kind of a summary would you give us?
Robert Chisholm: That God expects his people to be holy. They are to reject the practices of the Canaanites that are described here, so many of which involve crossing sexual boundaries, whether it be incest, bestiality, same sex. And he is warning Israel that if they violate God’s command in this regard they, like the Canaanites, will forfeit their place in the land. They need to be a holy people set apart.

Darrell Bock: And this is a way of communicating an intense offense to God in terms of the way he has created people to live.

Robert Chisholm: That’s right. This transcends culture. It’s got a cultural dimension to it, but it transcends culture. It’s not limited to priests and it’s – God is upset by these things. He has created human beings to function in a certain way sexually. Jesus refers to this later and he is upset when they violate the design. They need to stick to the owner’s manual provided by the Creator.

Darrell Bock: Now we have one other text that we want to discuss. It’s not listed in the Queen James Bible but it is a part of the conversation that sometimes comes up and this is the relationship between Jonathan and David which is sometimes alluded to having been more than a friendship. I’ll just let you deal with that in general and how should we look at the way in which this relationship is handled?

Robert Chisholm: Well David and Jonathan were very good friends. Jonathan saw that David was going to succeed his own father Saul, and he committed himself to David as the future king of Israel. In the story Jonathan is a foil for Saul. Saul resists God’s decision, refuses to own up to his own failure and tries to kill David. Jonathan, though, shows this is the way you should respond to God’s chosen king. That’s the larger context. Jonathan, of course, tragically dies with Saul in battle. Then in 2 Samuel 1:26 David is writing a lament for both of them and he says in verse 26, “I grieve over you, my brother Jonathan! You were very dear to me. Your love was more special to me than the love of women.” Some will interpret that as see, David had a same-sex relationship with Jonathan that meant more to him than any of his relationships with women, and David of course, had many such relationships that are described in these pages.
But I think the assumption there is that love is being used the same way with respect to Jonathan as it is the women. I don’t think that’s what’s in view. I think David is saying Jonathan’s loyal love to me was greater than anything that I experienced with any women. You see this, if you go back to chapter 18 of 1 Samuel, “When David had finished talking with Saul, Jonathan and David became bound together in close friendship. Jonathan loved David as much as he did his own life.”

Then Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as much as he did his own life, and he took off his robe and he gave it to David along with some of his military equipment. In the ancient near East sometimes in covenant context the word love is used for loyalty between parties. That’s what’s going on here. That’s the loyalty that’s in view. As you read through the story there are times when Jonathan helps David escape and he comes and visits him in an hour of need and assures him that God is going to see him through this.

So Jonathan demonstrates this loyal love to David and that’s what David is referring to. He’s not suggesting it’s the same kind of love. Love is very broad in its reference in Hebrew. It’s kind of a wordplay that David is developing there where Jonathan’s loyalty to me I never found that from women. As I look back that’s more satisfying to me than the purely physical love that I’ve had with women.

Jay Smith: I think a good comparison here would be the Homeric material. Which if we actually date, I mean we’re talking a bit of a distance, but when you talk about the ancient world, not that big of a difference. Homer has really no explicit discussion or example of any type of homoerotic experience by anyone there. Of course you have Achilles with Patroclus but there’s nothing explicit there. Just like the Old Testament, it seems like there’s no real resistance to these authors to make it clear what’s going on. Sure they use euphemisms in various places but they also make those euphemisms clear at times and again, this could be later interpretations reading it back into the text. There’s nothing explicit in the Homer material just like it doesn’t seem like it says anything explicit in the Samuel material.

Robert Chisholm: No, I think that it’s just a very superficial understanding of love and a failure to really appreciate what’s going on in 1 Samuel 18 and the ancient near eastern background for that kind of language which is being reflected in 2 Samuel 1:26. He’s referring back to that text and that experience.
Darrell Bock: That kind of completes our survey of the Old Testament so Bob you’re off the hook now.
Let’s turn our attention to the New Testament. Here it’s interesting. I think the place to begin is kind of in a space that might be a vacuum. That is most people when they engage in this discussion say well Jesus didn’t say anything about any of this.
You know, most of the texts that we’re going to be looking at come from Paul. There’s going to be one text we’ll discuss that comes out of Jude that looks back on the Sodom incident in a generalized kind of way, but really Jesus himself never addressed this. So that is often used as a kind of way of saying this is not such a big deal that the church has made far more out of it than ought to be made of it.
So gentlemen, how do you respond to someone who starts there? That Jesus didn’t say anything about this and so didn’t or wouldn’t have had any objections?

Jay Smith: I think you’re right. He doesn’t say anything explicitly about it. I doubt if he had many opportunities to in first-century Israel to address same-sex relationships. So that he doesn’t say anything positive or negative explicitly is hardly surprising. But what he does say about marriage and divorce is fairly exclusive. It’s one man, one woman intended for life. There doesn’t seem to be any other viewpoint that he has or holds or proposes. Now in some sense that’s an argument for silence.

Darrell Bock: It’s not as silent as Jesus saying nothing about the topic.

Robert Chisholm: If an Old Testament guy can jump in here. In Matthew 19:4 he actually goes with an alternative reading. The traditional Hebrew text just says “and they will become flesh.” He goes with that alternative reading: “the two of them will become one flesh.” It seems like he’s really stressing that as the model. Maybe with more of a polygamous kind of thing in mind involving, you know, divorce and remarriage, but that’s pretty exclusive. With all kinds of implications.

Darrell Bock: So what we get is we get a definition of what marriage is here but we don’t get a direct address of same-sex relationships. Jesus doesn’t deal with that topic explicitly.

Jay Smith: Directly. I think very implicitly he does.
Joe Fantin: That’s right.

Jay Smith: But again he doesn’t have much of an opportunity in first century Israel, I don’t think, to address such an issue. But he does reaffirm a very traditional understanding of marriage; one man, one woman.