

ARTIGOS

SEXUALITY IN THE OLD TESTAMENT: A REVIEW ARTICLE

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Flame of Yahweh: Sexuality in the Old Testament, by Richard M. Davidson. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007. pp. xxix + 844. \$29.95 (paper). ISBN 9781565638471.

Flame of Yahweh is a broad and detailed research written from a conservative perspective by Richard Davidson. As the author himself states, this work “undertakes the Brobdingnagian task of examining every passage of the Hebrew Bible (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” (p. 2). In order to accomplish this goal, Davidson builds on previous research and provides his own original exegesis in several of the passages and topics discussed. One of the central premises of Davidson’s work is the notion that the Edenic pattern for sexuality constitutes the foundation for the rest of the OT perspective on the topic (p. 3). Consistent with this premise, he provides a comprehensive and, at the same time, detailed exposition of the Old Testament concept of sexuality. An introduction, providing a helpful survey the OT sexual vocabulary, is followed by fourteen chapters divided into three sections. An afterword, drawing some implications for a New Testament theology of sexuality, closes the book.

The first section (chap. 1 and 2) deals with sexuality in Eden, which, according to Davidson’s major premise, reveals the divine design for human sexuality. Chapter 1 expounds a theology of sexuality in the beginning in ten topics emphasizing sexuality as a creation order, heterosexual human duality and marital form, monogamous marital form, equality of the sexes without hierarchy, exclusivity, permanence, intimacy, procreation, and the wholesome and holy beauty of sexuality. In chapter 3, Davidson demonstrates how the fall has affected the relationship between man and woman, and asserts that the fallen condition of humans prompted God to ascribe a servant-leadership role to man. In a careful and detailed exegesis of Gen 3:16, Davidson interacts with six major views regarding man-woman relationship in Gen 1-3. He rejects any kind of ontological subordination or inferiority of woman to man and affirms the



equality of both sexes as a creation ordinance. According to him, after the fall, “there is a *qualified prescriptive divine sentence announcing the voluntary submission of the wife to her husband’s servant leadership as a result of sin*” (p. 76, italics his). Thus, submission of woman to man must be restricted to the domain of marriage and family and, therefore, does not apply to that of society or church. But even in the context of marriage and family, the original plan of harmony and union between equal partners without hierarchy remains the ideal.

The second section (chaps.3-12) undertakes a major survey of various aspects, dimensions and distortions of sexuality, such as cultic sexuality, heterosexuality, homosexuality, monogamy, polygamy, concubinage, elevation versus denigration of women, prostitution, mixed marriages, adultery, premarital sex, divorce remarriage, incest, procreation, rape. Most of the chapters, as appropriate, begin with a helpful survey of the Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) background of the topic under discussion, followed by an organized discussion according to the three major divisions of the Hebrew Bible (i.e. Pentateuch, Prophets, and Writings). In chapter 3, discussing sexuality as a creation ordinance versus sacred marriage, Davidson provides an insightful survey of ANE views regarding sex, according to which the processes of nature are controlled by the relations of the gods and goddesses. Such perceptions led naturally to the development of a fertility cult theology in which the sex activity of the god (e.g. Baal) is emulated in the high place by sacred prostitutes (males and females) in order to stimulate the god to send rain and thus fertilize the earth. In contrast, the OT “unambiguously, vehemently, and uncompromisingly opposes the sacralization of sex that appears in fertility cult theology and practice” (p. 130).

A sustained discussion of human heterosexuality versus homosexuality, transvestism, and bestiality is undertaken in chapter 4. After a brief survey of ANE texts, Davidson investigates the biblical bearing on these topics. By examining Pentateuchal legislation and narratives, as well as material from the Prophets and Writings the author makes clear that the canonical text of the Bible utterly rejects these sexual practices as a distortion of God’s creation of a heterosexual union between male and female. Particularly interesting in this chapter is Davidson’s assessment and rebuttal of those views which see Ruth and Naomi along with David and Jonathan as biblical examples of homosexual relationships condoned by the Bible. Engaging in exegesis and interacting with relevant scholarship on these matters, Davidson agrees with those who regard such views as “speculation read into the text” and demonstrates that the narrative about Jonathan and David does not portray a “homosexual relationship but [a relationship] of friends who rose to the heights of self abnegation” (p. 167).

The discussion of monogamy versus polygamy/concubinage in chapter 5 commences with a notice of the Bible’s positive affirmations of the Edenic divine design of a heterosexual and monogamous pattern of marital relationship. A sample list of heterosexual monogamous marriage partnerships mentioned in the Bible include couples such as Adam and Eve, Noah and his wife, Isaac and Rebekah, Joseph and Asenath, Moses and Zippora. Thus it becomes clear that



although Bible narratives record several polygamous relationships (e.g. David, Solomon), they never met with divine approval. As a matter of fact, the biblical narrators convey a tacit condemnation of this practice, inasmuch as the polygamists themselves faced insurmountable problems due to conflicts and rivalry between wives and children. Furthermore, Pentateuchal legislation seems to recognize polygamy as a distortion of God's design and provides several restrictive measures against it (Exod 21:7-11; Lev 18;18; Deut 21:15-17).

Chapter 6, the largest chapter of the book, provides an insightful discussion of the idea of elevation versus denigration of women in the OT. In interaction with and responding to feminist writers, who see the OT as fundamentally a patriarchal book, being therefore oppressive towards women, Davidson successfully demonstrates that "the pattern for husband-wife relationships established in Eden (both before and after the fall) constitutes the assumed paradigm throughout the rest of the OT" (p. 212). He argues that "there is a trend toward parity between the sexes in the marriage as in Eden before the Fall" (p. 212), aptly illustrated by OT narratives portraying a high valuation of women, as seen in the Genesis matriarchs Sarah, Hagar, Rebekah, Rachel and Leah, Tamar, Shiphrah and Puah, the Egyptian princess, Jochebed, Miriam, the seven daughters of Jethro, including Zipporah, the daughters of Zelophead. These women were far from being passive instruments in the hands of oppressive men/husbands. On the contrary, although submissive their husbands leadership, they are proactive, taking initiative, and interacting with men in very positive ways. They also participated in the yearly festivals, shared in the rejoicing, singing and prayers, and joined in the sacrificial meals. Pointing to the Pentateuchal legislation regarding women, Davidson notes that although the legal codes of the Pentateuch have been very often interpreted as setting forth a view of women as inferior persons, more recent research has revealed that this legislation actually intended to protect women, since they were the more vulnerable members of society. After examining several passages usually alleged to indicate the inferior status of women in ancient Israel (e.g. Num 5; Lev 12:1-8; Lev 27:1-8; Num 30:4-17; Deut 25:11-12), Davidson concludes that "the biblical evidence does not support a lowered and oppressed status for women in the Pentateuchal legislation and accompanying narratives" (p. 255).

The case of the suspected adulteress provides an instructive example. Some feminists have considered this legislation to be the prime example of a sexist passage in the Scriptures, since there is no reciprocal provision for a suspected husband. In contrast, Davidson argues that the purpose of the law was not to humiliate or punish the woman, but to protect and defend her. After all, this is the only case in the legislation in which Yahweh promised to render a verdict by supernatural means. The woman, therefore, would be protected from any hasty decision by the husband or people. "This law, then, does not reflect a lower valuation of women than that of men, but underscores the motivation to protect the weaker members of society from oppression and abuse" (p. 245).

In this connection, Davidson also addresses the fact of an Israelite priesthood confined only to men. This situation, according to liberal feminists, indicates



male oppression over women; and according to evangelical Christian hierarchicalists is a crucial indication that women are impeded from having a leadership role over men in the covenant community. Responding to both liberal feminists and hierarchicalists, Davidson argues that priesthood was barred not only from women, but from most men in Israel, since only males from the family of Aaron qualified as priests. Although the exclusion of women from priesthood may have been due to reasons, such as monthly ritual uncleanness, low upper body strength to work at the sanctuary, and place of women within the family, Davidson suggests that the main reason may have been a polemic against ANE fertility cult. "Yahweh's institution of a male priesthood in Israel in the immediate aftermath of the worship of the golden calf, linked to Egyptian/Canaanite fertility cults-seems to have constituted a strong polemic against the religions of surrounding nations, which included goddess worship and fertility cult rituals. Since a primary function of the priestesses in the ancient Near East during the last half of the second millennium and in the first millennium was to serve as a 'wife of the god,' such a function for a woman in the religion of Yahweh was out of the question. The exclusion of women in the Israelite priesthood helped to prevent the syncretistic contamination of Israel's cultus with the introduction of the divinization of sex and sexual immorality, which was so deeply imbedded in Canaanite Baal/Asherah worship" (pp. 252-53). Thus, a male priesthood in Israel "in no way implies denigration of women and likewise in no way implies that women are barred from leadership (teaching/administrative) roles over men in the covenant community" (p. 253). Mentioning a previous study on Deut 33:8-10, Davidson mentions three essential duties of the Levites-judging, teaching; oracular techniques; cultic functions noting that only the cultic function was barred to women, "probably because of polemical concerns against ANE priestesses involvement in the divinization of sex" (p. 253).

God's original purpose for the priesthood on earth included both male and female, since according to Davidson Adam and Eve had the same role as the Levites and priests in the original Eden sanctuary, being clothed by God as priests. Moreover, in Sinai Yahweh's original intention was for Israel to be a kingdom of priests (Exod 19:6), an ideal restored by the New Testament church (1 Pet 2:4-5, 9). Although Davidson's line of reasoning seems very compelling, one might ask whether God's clothing Adam and Eve really meant their investiture as priests or was simply a gesture of grace due to their nakedness, as the biblical text implies. Also a question might be raised about the precise sense in which the concept of priesthood is being used. Israel might have been intended to function as a priestly nation in the sense of being a witness of God's presence to the nations at large (Exod 19:6). Likewise the NT idea of a priesthood of all believers (1 Pet 2:4-5, 9) might simply indicate that all church members would have immediate access by faith to God's presence, without necessarily implying that women are to be ordained to ministry.

Proceeding to the prophets and writings, Davidson demonstrates how the canonical structure of these books highlights the value of women. Rahab, for example, is valued by God for who she is, i.e. a treasured testimony of the mercy of God upon all humanity, her courage, her faith, and as an agent of salvation, being eventually integrated into the community of Israel. Other



prominent and proactive women are Achsah, daughter of Caleb, Deborah, Manoah's wife, Hannah, Ruth, Esther, among others. It should be noted, however, that the author is not oblivious to the fact that the OT reports some cases of exploitation, denigration, and abuse of women, such as Hagar, Jephthah's daughter, the Levite's concubine. Furthermore, it is mentioned that with the rise of the monarchy there entered a systematic abuse of patriarchy and abuse of women. But it remains clear that such outrageous situations are by no means met with approval by the inspired narrators of the Scriptures.

In chapter seven, Davidson addresses complex topics such as prostitution, mixed marriages, masturbation, sexual blemishes and impurities. At the outset, he emphasizes the positive affirmations of the Edenic ideal for sexual behavior shaping the theological contours of the OT Scriptures. From the Edenic ideal of sexuality emerges the concepts of wholistic anthropology, whole family, complementarity and the wholeness of sexual organs and freedom from ritual impurity. Contrary to Egypt and Mesopotamia, where prostitution/harlotry was tolerated and even recognized as a social institution, and the cases of prostitution/prostitutes reported in the narrative texts of the OT, Pentateuchal legislation clearly prohibits this practice and the rest of the Hebrew canon gives no endorsement to prostitution, sacred or otherwise. Mixed (interfaith marriages) also represented a threat to the Edenic ideal of sexuality. Such distortion of God's design was blatant at the time of the Flood (Gen 6:1-4) and continued to be a temptation to God's people throughout history. A deep concern for spiritual as well as physical wholeness in marriage seems to underlie the decision of the patriarchs in not providing pagan wives for their children (e.g. Isaac, Jacob). That this is not an issue of ethnic purity, but of preserving the faith in Yahweh, may be noted in the marriages of, e.g., Joseph and Moses, who married non Israelite women but who presumably accepted the religion of the true God. In the case of mixed marriages faced by Ezra, Davidson argues that terminological indicators suggest that the issue was not a breaking of legitimate marriages, but of nullifying those which were contrary to the law, in order to preserve the spiritual heritage of Israel (p. 322). As regards masturbation, Davidson observes that there is no clear reference to it in the OT. The narrative concerning Onan (Gen 38:9) does not suggest masturbation, but coitus interruptus. However, in the light of the seventh commandment, sexual lust or sexual fantasies about a person other than one's spouse is prohibited, and by implication it may be said that the act of masturbation is opposed to the will of God. Davidson still adds that "habitual substitution of masturbation for regular sexual relations with one's spouse when the latter is available is not fulfilling the highest ideal for sexual wholeness in marriage" (p. 325).

In the discussion sexual blemishes and ritual uncleanness related to sexuality, Davidson addresses issues regarding the prohibition of the "one whose testicles are crushed" or whose penis is cut off" (Deut 23:2) from entering the assembly of the Lord. This may represent a protest against some acts of mutilation performed in the context of fertility cults. The rationale for such prohibition is given in the previous verse (Deut 23:15): "For you are a people holy, therefore your camp must be holy." Further developing this idea, Davidson suggests that "this legislation, while theologically pointing to a divine call for holiness, may be



seen as a ritual regulation, intrinsically bound up with the presence of the holy Shechinah dwelling in the midst of Israel. Consequences for violating this ritual regulation included exclusion from the assembly of Yahweh, which presumably met in session at the cultic center of the sanctuary. When the sanctuary and Shechinah no longer existed on earth, however, this ritual exclusion no longer retained its applicability" (p. 326). Other important Pentateuchal legislations deal with sexual matters in the context of ritual uncleanness. Particularly noticeable are those defiling impurities resulting from body fluids or genital discharges.

A first rationale for such legislations may be inferred from Lev 15:31-33: "Thus you shall keep the sons of Israel separated from their uncleanness, so that they will not die in their uncleanness by their defiling My tabernacle that is among them. This is the law for the one with a discharge, and for the man who has a seminal emission so that he is unclean by it, and for the woman who is ill because of menstrual impurity, and for the one who has a discharge, whether a male or a female, or a man who lies with an unclean woman" (NASB). It becomes evident that "God radically separates sexuality from any ritual activity in the cultus. As part of a polemic against the divinization of sex in the fertility cults, God makes a clear and distinct separation between sex and sanctuary" (p. 329). Approvingly quoting Hyam Maccoby, Davidson adds a second point: "Everything that is a feature of the cycle of life and death must be banished from the Temple of the God who does not die and was not born. Not that there is anything sinful about birth and death, which are the God-given lot of humankind. But the One place in the world which has been allotted for the resting of the Divine Presence must be protected from mortality. When entering the Temple, one is entering the domain of eternity" (p. 330 quoting Maccoby, *Ritual and Morality: The Ritual Purity System and Its Place in Judaism* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 199], 207). Davidson further observes that this life/death opposition is not only linked to holiness, but goes back to creation and the separation of boundaries between life, creation, and death, uncreation (p. 333).

A third rationale identified by Davidson helps one to see the relevance, at least in principle, of the laws of impurity. The Hebrew term *qōdeš* includes in its conceptual field the idea of "health/wellness" which points to a hygienic or humane component in some of these laws. Worthy of attention are those laws concerning female uncleanness, particularly regarding menstruation. One law that has continuing universal applicability and transcends a ritual context, according to Davidson, is the one prohibiting sexual intercourse during menstruation (Lev 18:19; 20:18). This prohibition is placed among laws of universal significance applicable to both Israelites and the stranger/alien. Davidson points out that there is no provision for ritual cleansing, if this provision is violated, because most probable it is not related to ritual uncleanness. And Ezek (18:6; 22:10) places this prohibition in the midst of list of ethical moral, not ritual laws (p. 333). Thus it seems that this legislation concerns the woman's physical and physiological well-being. Davidson further argues that "a growing body of scientific evidence seems to point out toward a health related (i.e. holiness/wholeness-related) rationale for this legislation. For example, studies have revealed a markedly lower incidence of cervical cancer



among observant Jewish women, who refrain from sexual intercourse during menstruation, compared with the general population. Regardless of the rationale, a biblical theology of sexuality must highlight what is often overlooked in modern sexual ethics: the prohibition against sexual intercourse with a menstruating spouse is placed on the same universal level with the prohibition of incest, polygamy, homosexuality, and bestiality” (p. 334).

The affirmations of the divine ideal of exclusivity in the marriage relationship, the high value of virginity and the distortions of adultery and premarital sex are discussed in chapter 8. The model for relationships in marriage outside the Garden of Eden is provided by Gen 2:24, according to which the marital relationship between Man and Woman is to be characterized by exclusivity, permanence, and intimacy (p. 337). Adultery is distortion of this ideal and a violation of the Decalogue, which represented Israel’s commitment to Yahweh in the Sinaitic covenant. Adultery in Israel as in other ancient Near Eastern law codes, received the capital punishment. However, in contrast to ANE law, Israel understood adultery as a sin against God and not just a civil offense. God takes adultery so seriously because it threatens the stability of the household, which was “the basis upon which the people’s relationship with God rested, therefore any attack upon the stability of the family in Israel constituted a potential threat to Israel relationship with God” (p. 349). Another distortion of the divine ideal consists of premarital sex which in Biblical law received varied degrees of punishment ranging from capital punishment to payment of fine according to order of responsibility. E.g., if a man had sexual relations with a virgin betrothed to another man, such a crime received capital punishment (Deut 23:23-27). However, if the woman was not betrothed, the man was to marry her without any permission to divorce (Deut 22:28-29; Exod 22:16-17). The Prophets and Writings portray the devastating results of sexual impurity and are consistent with the Pentateuchal ideals demanding sexual purity from God’s people.

In chapter 9, Davidson tackles the thorny issue of divorce/remarriage, which is regarded as a distortion of God’s ideal of man to cling to his wife in permanent relationship. In a detailed investigation of Deut 24:1-4, in what might appear to be a passage legitimating divorce, Davidson points out that this legislation, in the larger context of Deuteronomy, corresponds not to the seventh commandment, but belongs within the section dealing with theft. This law prevents a man from treating the woman as mere chattel or property, serving “to protect the woman from being robbed of her personhood” (p. 403). After a survey of several texts referring to divorce in the Pentateuch, Prophets and Writings, Davidson asserts that although “divorce is tolerated, conceded, permitted,” it is “never commanded, commended, or approved by divine legislation” (p. 384).

Intimacy versus incest is the topic discussed in chapter 10. In contrast to several strands of ANE literature, which depicted gods, goddesses, and humans of royal descent engaged in incest, the OT contains specific legislation against incestuous relationships (e.g. Lev 18:7-17). Cases of incest mentioned in the OT receive attention, such as the incident of Lot and his daughters (Gen 19:30-38), Reuben and Bilhah (Gen 35:22; 49:4), Judah and Tamar (Gen 38),



Absalom and his father's concubines (2 Sam 15-16), Amnom and Tamar (2 Sam 13). Davidson also undertakes a brief examination of the alleged incestuous relationship between Ham and his mother (Gen 9). Although some interpreters have suggested that "uncovering the nakedness" of the father would indicate an incestuous relationship with the father's wife (see Lev 7, 8, 14, 16), Davidson rightly argues that Ham's sin consisted in viewing his father's nakedness with an attitude of disrespect, a case of "visual incest" (p. 430).

Chapter 11 offers an instructive research on procreative sexuality versus problems/distortions such as childlessness, children born out of wedlock, and abortion. To deal with the problem of childlessness, adoption was largely employed in the ancient Near East, and possibly in Israel. The latter can be inferred by the frequent metaphors of Yahweh's adoption of the nation Israel and the David king, which suggests that adoption might have been a common experience in the daily life of ancient Israel. Davidson also reminds the reader that all the matriarchs of the Hebrew people experienced childlessness, indicating that, above the differentiation of sex, it is Yahweh who is the God of Fertility and Israel should depend on him in order to obtain the fulfillment of the promises (p. 455). An instructive section on Levirate marriage considers purpose and qualifications for someone to act as levir. Along with ensuring the continuation of the line of descent and thus perpetuating the family property, Davidson notes that protection of the widow may also have been in view. Based mainly on intertextual linkages within the Hebrew Bible, the author holds that the one to perform the duty of levir should be an unmarried brother or other unmarried relative. Commenting on Gen 38:8-10, the author concludes that the sin Onan was not masturbation as the misleading English term onanism indicates but "coitus interruptus," an act intended to avoid fulfilling the levirate duty.

In a discussion of Pentateuchal legislation forbidding children born out of wedlock to enter the assembly of the Lord (Deut 23:2), the author argues that such legislation intended to underscore the sanctity of marriage, a vital issue in the survival of the community of the covenant. Regarding reproduction/population control and abortion, he notes that several birth control practices were employed throughout the ancient Near East, such as celibacy, coitus interruptus, exotic potions, castration, and the abandonment of unwanted female babies (see the allegorical allusion in Ezek 16:4-5). As for abortion, it seems that Sumerian laws and the Code of Hammurabi do not seem to give the human fetus the legal status of person, since the penalty of miscarriage is just a monetary fine (491-92). In contrast, argues Davidson, the Pentateuchal legislation (Exod 21:22-25) and other OT passages (e.g. Job 10:8-12; Psa 139:13-16) grant the fetus the status of full human being, thus possessing a spiritual/moral nature already before birth.

Chapter 12 presents rape as major distortion of the wholesome beauty of sexuality. After survey the ancient Near Eastern background, Davidson surveys Pentateuchal narratives (Gen 19 [Lot's daughters]; 34 [Dinah]) and laws (Exod 22:16-17; Deut 22:28-29) dealing with rape. Outside the Pentateuch the case of the Levite's concubine (Judg 19), Bathsheba (2 Sam 11), and Tamar (2 Sam



13) receive attention. But, understandably, it is the narrative of David's adultery with Bathsheba that receives a more detailed treatment. After careful analysis of the text and its broader context, Davidson concludes that "Bathsheba was not a sinister character, nor an accomplice in the events described in 2 Sam 11, but an innocent victim of power rape on the part of King David (p. 532).

Chapters 13 and 14, which make up the third section of the book, constitute the climactic point of the entire work. In these chapters Davidson argues that the Song of Songs, to be interpreted literally, portrays a return to the Garden of Eden, inasmuch as "the theology of sexuality in this song is the quintessence of profound theology in the OT the holy of holies" (p. 551). After stressing that "in the Song of Songs we have come full circle in the OT back to the garden of Eden" (p. 552) as woman and man are in harmony after the fall, ten facets of a theology sexuality emerge from Davidson's work. First, sexuality is a creation order and the Song extols and enhances the creation of sexuality in Gen 2. Second, sexuality is for heterosexual human couples. Third, sexuality is to be enjoyed in a monogamous marital form. Fourth, the song highlights egalitarianism, mutuality and reciprocity between the lovers, as suggested by an intertextual linkage with Gen 3. While Gen 3:16 reads: "Yet your desire (*těšûqātēk*) will be for your husband, and he will rule over you," Song 7:10 declares that "I am my beloved's, and his desire (*těšûqātô*) is for me." Thus, "whereas the judgment of God in Gen 3:16 stated that the woman's desire (*těšûqâ*) would be for her husband and he would "rule" (*māšal*) over her (in the sense of servant leadership), now the Song describes a reversal the man's desire (*těšûqâ*) is for his lover. But contrary to feminist readings that see here a movement away from a distorted use of male power (which is their [misguided] interpretation of Gen 3:16)," Davidson finds "here a reaffirmation of the divine ideal of full equality ('one-fleshness') between husband and wife as set forth in Gen 2:24, without denying the validity of Gen 3:16" (p. 577).

Fifth, the concept of wholeness is highlighted by the presence/absence of the lovers to each other. The lover's are eager for the each other's presence and becoming fused into one, thus implying a wholistic view of the human person as a sexual being (p. 581). Sixth, sexual love as described in the Song requires an exclusive relationship. As in Gen 2, lovers are to remain free of outside interferences in order to develop a spontaneous and intimate friendship. Seventh, the relationship is to be permanent. Davidson notes that 4:1-5:1 contains a description of the wedding ceremony between Solomon and the Shulamite. Two verses are central to the entire symmetrical structure of the Song (4:16 and 5:1). These verses seem to be equivalent to marriage vows or represent the consummation of marriage in the bridal chamber (p. 590) and the voice in 5:1e "is that of Yahweh himself, adding his divine blessing to the marriage, as he did in the first garden wedding in Eden" (p. 591). Eighth, the relationship between woman and man in marriage is to be characterized by intimacy, which is to be reserved for the matrimonial relationship. Davidson concurs with the idea that there is no indication that the woman lost her virginity prior to the consummation of marriage at 4:16-5:1 (p. 600). This intimacy, however, goes beyond the sexual union to include emotional, intellectual, aesthetic, creative, recreational, work, crisis, conflict, commitment, spiritual, and



communication intimacy (p. 601-602). Ninth, the conspicuous absence of the procreative function of sexuality in the Song is noted. If, on the one hand, this absence may have served as an implicit polemic against fertility cults, on the other, it may also have served to highlight that sexuality does not exist only for the purpose of reproduction. “Lovemaking” is “for the sake of (married) love, not procreation is the message of the Song” (p. 605).

The tenth and last facet, to which chapter 14 is devoted, affirms that sexuality is “beautiful, good, and wholesome, to be celebrated without fear and embarrassment” (p. 607). Several intertwined themes serve to emphasize this concept of paradisaic love. It is stunningly beautiful, wonderfully sensuous, an exuberant celebration, a thrilling adventure, an exquisite delight, highly erotic, a light-hearted play, a romantic love affair, powerfully passionate, and an awe-inspiring mystery. Finally, Davidson emphasizes the importance of the term *šalhebet̄yâ* (“flame of Ya[haweh]) in 8:6, which reads: “Put me like a seal over your heart, like a seal on your arm. For love is as strong as death, jealousy is as severe as Sheol; Its flashes are flashes of fire, the very ‘flame of the LORD’ (*šalhebet̄yâ*)” (NASB). “[I]f the blaze of love, ardent love, such as between a man and a woman, is indeed the flame of Yahweh, then this love is explicitly described as originating in God, a spark off the Holy Flame. It is therefore, in a word, holy love” (p. 630). Furthermore, “the love between a man and a woman is not just animal passion, or evolved natural attraction, but a holy love ignited by Yahweh himself! The love relationship is not only beautiful, wholesome, and good but holy. Lovers, then, will treat each other with godly self-giving because they are animated by a holy self giving love” (p. 630).

The work concludes with an afterword in which Davidson traces some of the trajectories of sexual theology from the OT to the NT and notes the unity and consistency in the way the two Testaments approach sexuality. A considerable amount of space is devoted to discussion of the role of women in the home and the church. On this issue, two major camps within evangelical scholarship have taken opposite views, which are denominated egalitarians and hierarchical complementarians. Davidson sides with egalitarians arguing that “NT passages [1 Cor 14:34; Eph 5:21, 24; Col 3:18; Tit 2:5; 1 Pet 3:1, 5] regarding headship and submission between men and women are limited to the marriage relationship between husbands and wives; never is there any widening of the Edenic pattern to include the headship of men over women in general or submission of women to men in general” (p. 648).

Throughout the work, Davidson keeps a very sober and irenic tone. Although discussing highly sensitive issues such as homosexuality, abortion, divorce, among others, he makes clear that restoration and healing can be achieved. Every chapter, as appropriate, concludes with a section pointing to the availability of divine grace and forgiveness for those who happened to be hurt or hurt others in matters of sexuality.

A few misspellings and typos were found. E.g. “qxc” instead of qxc (p. 98, n. 61); “*BibRev*” for “*BRev*” (p. 450, n. 13); “Judge” for “Judges” (p. 536); “hearth” for “heart” (p. 586); “is” for “it” (p. 623). The word “hand” seems to be missing in



the phrase “the word for [hand] used in the previous verse” (p. 478). Regarding the physical quality of the book, the reviewer’s main criticism would be directed toward the publisher who placed such a massive work in a paper binding. The pages are glued at the spine, and in fact some pages of the review copy easily got loose. These however are very minor afflictions.

Davidson’s work is a remarkable example of a thorough and careful research on what the Bible teaches on a single topic, i.e. sexuality. Furthermore, Davidson demonstrates a comprehensive mastery of the secondary literature, as shown by his extensive interaction with scholarship as reflected in 2368 footnotes and a 152-page bibliography. Indexes of modern authors and biblical and extra-biblical references are important adjuncts to the book, providing helpful resources for further study.

Summing up, this voluminous, broad, and detailed research has advanced the understanding of the canonical OT theology of sexuality. One may not agree with every single detail of Davidson’s exegesis and interpretation of the many biblical passages investigated; one may even take issue with his stance regarding the role of women in the church. However, no serious student of sexuality in the Bible can afford to ignore Davidson’s research. This is not merely another volume to be added to the scholar’s shelf, it is an encyclopedic research that will remain a reference work for years to come.