

QUESTION: What does the Bible say about homosexuality?

ANSWER: The Bible takes a dim view of homosexuality/lesbianism. However, as with any other practice which goes against God's directives, a person can be forgiven and fully restored if they are willing to repent.

It is not the purpose of this entry to incite others against homosexuals. It is also not our purpose to heap extra guilt upon those who struggle with homosexuality and are seeking God's help to turn away from homosexuality. If this is your situation, seek the help of God's people, whether they be pastoral staff, Christian friends, or Christian counselors.

It is our purpose is to lay out the Biblical data for a society (including some conservative Christians) which either denies that the Bible even addresses the issue or claims that the Biblical view does not apply to today. Anyone seeking Biblical endorsement of homosexuality will not find what we write acceptable.

This entry is a work in progress, and we are updating it on a frequent basis. We are in the process of adding a number of elements to it, including discussions of Hebrew and Greek terminology/phraseology, euphemistic references, rabbinic and intertestamental parallels, classifications of Torah (e.g., to'avah), ancient Near Eastern parallels, cross-cultural applications of the Biblical principles, etc.

We apologize to those of you who would prefer an analysis which is much less technical. It is our plan to write a shorter/abstracted version along with this analysis.

OUTLINE:

1. The Biblical Data.
2. Comment: Theological Problems.
3. Conclusion: Warning and Hope.

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## 1. THE BIBLICAL DATA.

### OLD TESTAMENT

Homosexuality of any kind is first mentioned in Genesis 18:20-19:29, when the men of Sodom and Gomorrah wanted to commit homosexual rape of angels (whom they perceived to be humans, not angels [angels in the Bible are described as looking like humans, and they do not have wings; cherubs and seraphs have wings]). The cities were destroyed by God. Elsewhere in the Bible (and in the Talmud) these cities are used as examples of extreme sin, sexual immorality, and God's judgment (e.g., Isaiah 1; Ezekiel 16; Jude).

The Law of Moses explicitly forbids the practice, and prescribes the death penalty for the offense (Leviticus 18:22; 20:13).<sup>1</sup> It does not have a term for homosexuals, but instead uses the descriptive expression, “You [masculine] shall not lie with a male as one lies with a woman” (Lev 18:22), and “If a man lies with a male as one lies with a woman” (Lev 20:13). Both of these passages describe the activity as an abomination (תועבה),<sup>2</sup> and Lev 20:13 is emphatic when it calls for capital punishment (שְׁנֵיהֶם מוֹת יוּמָתוּ דְּמֵיהֶם בָּם). While not asserting that homosexuals are also into bestiality, the Old Testament describes homosexuality and bestiality as similar sins (Leviticus 18:23; 20:15; Deuteronomy 27:21). Further, Leviticus 18 and 20 class homosexuality as an abomination similar to incest and adultery, Israel is told not to do the abominations of the Canaanites (Lev 18:30), and it is for all these types of practices that God would drive the Canaanites out of their land (Lev 20:22-23).

The Old Testament gives no specific examples of lesbianism (although the New Testament explicitly condemns it [see below]). However, it is a mistake to think that “if a man lies with a man as one lies with a woman” does not also apply to women. Hebrew is a language which is inflected for gender. General statements are usually said with reference to a man, but include women as well. For instance, “Blessed is the man who...” in Psalm 1 is not saying “blessed is the male who...,” but is making a gender neutral statement which applies to women as well. There are a few laws which specifically apply to men or women, but these are both rare and clear from context (e.g., seducing a virgin [Exod 22:15]; treatment of multiple wives [Deut 21:15]; vows [Num 30:2-15]). Instead, most other general statements are given in masculine terms but are considered equally applicable to males and females. For example, when it says, “If a man takes the life of any human being, he shall surely be put to death (Lev 24:17),” that by no means is saying that a woman will be given a lesser sentence. Likewise, all the instructions in the 10 Commandments (Exod 20; Deut 5) are given using masculine terms (imperatives and negated imperfects). The penalties for violating these and other commands are also given using masculine terminology (e.g., violating the Sabbath [Exod 35:2]; intercourse with animals [Exod 22:19]; striking a parent [Exod 21:15]; injuring a neighbor [Lev 24:19-20]). Nevertheless, these laws equally apply to women.

Some have made the argument that David and Jonathan had a homosexual relationship, but there is NO evidence that their strong friendship had any sexual component (2 Samuel 1:26).<sup>3</sup>

Similar to the Sodom and Gomorrah situation, in the Judges 19-20 the men of Gibeah wanted to engage in (forced?) homosexual relations with a visiting Levite. The head of the household, in a move similar to what Lot offered concerning his own daughters, threw the Levite’s concubine outside who was raped and beaten, the result of which was her death. The tribe of Benjamin defended the perpetrators of this crime, and the result was civil war.

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<sup>1</sup>We are NOT calling for capital punishment for homosexuals. However, anything for which the Old Testament calls for the death penalty should be seen to be a serious offense in God’s eyes. (See the entry on Capital Punishment in the Old Testament,

<http://www.isitinthebible.com/ot/capitalpunishment.htm>)

<sup>2</sup>In context the term abomination(s) (תועבה) occurs a number of times. Verses 24-28, referring to practices such as child sacrifice (v. 21), various incestuous practices (vv. 8-16), adultery (v. 20), and bestiality (v. 23), indicate that these practices defile a land (cf. Romans 1:24-32).

<sup>3</sup>David’s sexual sin was of a heterosexual nature (see 2 Samuel 11), and for that he is soundly condemned (2 Sam 12:1-23).

Some argue that Judges 19-20 and Genesis 18-19 are both condemnations of breaches of hospitality, not condemnations of homosexual activity. True, it was a breach of hospitality when one allowed a guest to be raped, and the prevalence of homosexual activity in some cities made it incumbent upon hosts to protect their guests.<sup>4</sup> However, Genesis 18-19 describes lewd practices which, according to Leviticus 18:24-25, drove God to expel the Canaanites from the land. Further, the literary parallels between the Judges and Genesis passages connect these two events.

According to 1 Kings 14:24; 15:12; 2 Kings 23:7, male religious prostitutes were an abomination and associated with idolatry. While some argue that this is not a reference to homosexual cultic prostitution, there are parallels using the same linguistic root (שָׂדֵד [qdš]) in other ancient Near Eastern literature.<sup>5</sup> Deuteronomy 23:17 [Heb. v. 18] states that neither Israel's daughters nor sons shall be a female cult prostitute (הַשְּׂדֵדָה) or a male cult prostitute (שָׂדֵד), and v. 18 [Heb. v. 19] uses the expression "dog" (כֶּלֶב) as a euphemism for homosexual prostitute, pairing it with a non-cultic female prostitute (הַזֵּנָה). Once again, these actions are described as an abomination<sup>6</sup> to God.

## NEW TESTAMENT

According to Paul in the New Testament, homosexuals will not enter the Kingdom of Heaven (1 Corinthians 6:9; 1 Timothy 1:10 [see below for whether or not homosexuality is actually addressed in these passages]). Paul also indicates that homosexuality is a sign of people's extreme rejection of God, and a result of the same (Romans 1:26-27, 32), and that those who practice such things are worthy of death.<sup>7</sup> This passage also deals with homosexual desire as something which is against God's design (verses 26-27).

There is a lot of debate as to whether ἀρσενικοῖται (1 Cor 6:9)/ἀρσενικοῖταις (1 Tim 1:10) should be translated "homosexual" (as the NIV and NASB do).<sup>8</sup> The term, apparently coined by Paul by combining ἄρσεν (male) and κοίτη (bed),<sup>9</sup> occurs only twice in the New Testament (in these passages). However, consider the following data: first, ἄρσεν is a common term in the Septuagint for male. Second, κοίτη (bed) often has sexual connotations.<sup>10</sup> Third, these two terms are used in conjunction with each other in the Septuagint translation of both Lev 18:22 and 20:13! It is inconceivable that Paul, right after addressing and affirming incest laws which also occur in Lev 18 (i.e., 1 Cor 5),<sup>11</sup> would use essentially the same terminology which Leviticus does for *homosexual*

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<sup>4</sup>Marvin Pope, "Bible, Euphemism and Dysphemism in the," *AB* 1:722. Pope says, "It was a host's obligation to protect his guests from such abuse and there is a garbled reference to this duty in Job's negative confession (Job 31:31ff) (Pope *Job* AB 3: 207-8)."

<sup>5</sup>"שָׂדֵד," *TDOT* XII: 528; cf. Pope, 723.

<sup>6</sup>While this looks like bad English, all these things are an abomination (singular) to God.

<sup>7</sup>Paul appears to have had Leviticus 18 in mind when he wrote Romans 1.

<sup>8</sup>We would like to thank Josh Belcher for his analysis which provided some background for this paragraph (Josh Belcher, "ἀρσενικοῖται as it Appears in 1 Corinthians 6:9" [unpublished essay; Evangel University, 2004]).

<sup>9</sup>Liddell and Scott, *A Lexicon Abridged from Liddell and Scott's Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1974) 105.

<sup>10</sup>"κοίτη," *BAGD* 440.

<sup>11</sup>In 1 Cor 5 Paul was dealing with a group of Christians which evidently thought that they were enlightened beyond the need for the "archaic" regulations of the Levitical Holiness Code (specifically what occurs in chapters 18 and

and mean something different. It raises the question--on what grounds could it be argued that Paul is *not* referring to homosexual practice, especially when he used essentially the same terminology which occurs in Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13?

## 2. COMMENT: THEOLOGICAL (BIBLICAL) PROBLEMS WITH ACCEPTING HOMOSEXUALITY.

- A. It goes against God's created order.
  - (1) Male and female shall become one (Genesis 2:24; Mark 10:8).
  - (2) Biologically, God designed male and female to have intercourse, not male and male/female and female.
- B. God's purposes for sex, which only assume male-female relationships.
  - (1) Oneness of male and female (Genesis 2:24).
  - (2) Procreation (Genesis 1:28).
- C. Woman was created to be a companion for the man, not a man (Genesis 2:18-24).
- D. All extramarital sexual relationships are forbidden by the Bible.
- E. Homosexual "marriage" is not recognized by the Bible.

## 3. CONCLUSION: WARNING AND HOPE.

- A. On the one hand, the Bible is consistent: homosexuality is wrong, forbidden, evidence of rejection of God, subject to punishment by God, and ultimately will result in eternal condemnation by God.
- B. On the other hand, God is willing to forgive those who are willing to repent of anything which goes against His ways--including homosexuality.

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20). Paul's response to a situation which violated incest laws from Leviticus was to reaffirm the spirit of the Torah *and* the particulars of the Torah when it comes to issues of sexual immorality. When he says, "Remove the wicked from yourselves," is he not in a sense saying that the offender was to be "cut off from his people"?