

“Not as the Gentiles”: Sexual Issues at the Interface between Judaism and Its Greco-Roman World

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Abstract: Sexual issues played a significant role in Judaism’s engagement with its Greco-Roman world. This paper will examine that engagement from the Hellenistic Greco-Roman era to the end of the first century CE. In part, sexual issues were a key element of the demarcation between Jews and the wider community, alongside such matters as circumcision, food laws, the sabbath keeping, and idolatry. Jewish writers, such as Philo of Alexandria, made much of the alleged sexual profligacy of their Gentile contemporaries, not least in association with wild drunken parties, same-sex relations, and pederasty. Jews, including the emerging Christian movement, claimed the moral high ground. In part, however, matters of sexuality were also areas where intercultural influence was evident, such as in the shift in the Jewish tradition from polygyny to monogyny, but also in the way Jewish and Christian writers adapted the suspicion, and sometimes rejection, of the passions that were characteristic of some of the popular philosophies of their day, seeing each other as allies in their moral crusade.

Keywords: sexuality; Judaism; Greco-Roman

1. Introduction

When the apostle Paul wrote to his recently founded community of believers in Thessalonica that they were to behave “not as the Gentiles” in relation to sexual matters (1 Thess 4: 5), he was, as a Jew, standing in a long tradition of Jews demarcating themselves from the rest of their world over sexual issues. Already in Leviticus 18, written some centuries before the emergence of the Greco-Roman empires but seen as an authoritative text, we find the following message: “You shall not do as they do in the land of Egypt, where you lived, and you shall not do as they do in the land of Canaan, to which I am bringing you. You shall not follow their statutes” (18:3). Their doings, which the chapter goes on to forbid, included incestuous marriage, intercourse during menstruation, same-sex relations, and bestiality (18:6–23). During the Greco-Roman period, it became a feature of early Jewish writings, including those of the incipient Christian movement, to continue to deplore what Jewish writers saw as sexual immorality, as well as idolatry, as one of the main ways of differentiating their communities from their non-Jewish world.

This article reviews the way in which the diverse body of early Jewish writings, including those of the early Christian movement, dealt with what their authors saw as sexual issues in their Greco-Roman world. In that sense, the article uses the comments of early Jewish writers as a window into that world, identifying how it was seen and sometimes construed for propaganda and self-assurance purposes, whether or not the accusations matched reality. This paper uses the terms sexual and sexuality in the broad sense to refer to sexual desire and its expression and focuses on what these authors saw as sexual wrongdoing. This may include acts, but also attitudes and sexual orientation. There is inevitably a degree of overlap between issues of sexuality and issues that pertain more to gender and gender roles and to social relationships. Marriage, for instance, is much more than a sexual issue and can sometimes have little or nothing to do with sexual interaction. Issues of

intermarriage, which featured regularly in the literature surveyed, may have been directly related to the view that intermarriage would expose Jews to what was claimed to be sexually depraved behavior, as in Jubilees, but intermarriage may have been deemed problematic on grounds, which had little or nothing to do with sexual matters, such as fear of idolatry and the concern for ethnic/genealogical purity. This paper will include a discussion of sexually related matters where, for instance, the alleged effects included matters of gender roles and gender identity. Typical of this interrelatedness of sexuality and gender is the argument found in Philo's writing, for instance, that same-sex relations between men undermined the virility of the passive partners, rendering them feminine—what Philo called the “female disease”—a matter of shame in a culture that celebrated masculinity.

There is similar overlap between understandings of sexual wrongdoing and matters of ritual purity related to sexuality, such as the observance of purity rites after seminal emission, during menstruation, and after childbirth, which were not in themselves sexual matters, let alone relating to sexual morality, but their neglect could go hand in hand with sexual wrongdoing and produce not only ritual contamination—pollution of the sacred—but also moral impurity. This became a major issue in the conflicts that generated the Essene movement (Loader 2018). Proper handling of broadly sexual matters, in that sense, was often a matter of appropriate place and time: for instance, no sex or nakedness in sacred places.

The literature surveyed derives from the Greco-Roman period up to the end of the first century CE. The author has detailed a comprehensive discussion of the documents in his five-volume treatment of attitudes towards sexuality, to which the reader is referred for further background (Loader 2007, 2009, 2011a, 2011b, 2012), and it should be noted that the conclusion volume has a subject index to the whole set (Loader 2013). Those discussions pertain to sexuality and sexually related matters more generally, whereas this paper is confined to identifying and discussing the understandings these writings reflected or projected about sexual issues in the Gentile world, with which Jews were engaged.

Judaism in this period was far from monochrome. This paper includes the writings of Paul, whose extant writings are preserved in the New Testament of the Christian Bible, because he clearly identified himself as a Jew who had embraced the claims that the Jewish Messiah had come in Jesus of Nazareth. His relationship with his Jewish co-religionists was complex. He was part of a movement that would eventually separate from Judaism, though that process, too, was complex and diverse. For our purposes of observing what Jewish authors were saying and alleging about sexual matters in the Gentile world, Paul is an important resource, because, as in the allusion in the title of this essay to one of his many statements, he saw the ethical values of his faith as standing in contrast to those of the Gentile world. He and his converts, including former Gentiles, were not to behave “as the Gentiles who d[id] not know God” (1 Thess 4: 5).

The early Christian movement was not the only Jewish group to lay claim to being Judaism's sole legitimate interpreters. Despite the diversity in the various forms of Judaism and, specifically, the writings we shall consider, their authors had in common a concern to differentiate themselves from the Gentile world and from what they saw or alleged as its depraved sexual mores, as part of the rhetoric of demarcation. We also find instances, however, where writers saw allies among writers of the Greco-Roman world who were also critical of its values and admired and adopted some of their ethical perspectives, for example, in relation to sexual passions and their control—a counterinfluence to which we return in the final section of this essay.

The paper divides the literature into two categories, encounters in the Jewish homeland and encounters in the Jewish diaspora. During the period under consideration, there was an extensive diaspora of Jews living outside of the homeland, including in large settlements in Egypt, especially in Alexandria, but also across Asia Minor, Greece, and Italy, especially in Rome. Maintaining one's Jewish identity in foreign cities was paramount for most and included closely knit settlement patterns, careful observance of rituals and laws that reinforced Jewish identity, such as the sabbath observance and food laws, and the rejection of what were perceived as the dangers to which they were exposed, including idolatry and what they saw as sexual immorality. The influence of

Hellenistic thought and fashion (later in Roman guise) was pervasive. This was also the case in the Jewish homeland, to some extent, especially until the early second century BCE, when its influence in Judea, combined with political power struggles, provoked a crisis, leading to the Maccabean revolt in 167 BCE, but also to diverse religious responses, which, in the period that followed, included controversy over sexual matters and led to such movements as the Essenes, some of whom settled in Qumran by the Dead Sea.

In light of the two abovementioned categories, this article considers a range of writings that have survived. Sometimes, we are able to identify the date and provenance and do so. Sometimes, we can indicate the context and date only broadly. The Greco-Roman world had some commonality in reflecting the influence of Hellenistic culture but was far from uniform. Even when we can identify the provenance of a writing, it is quite another step to identify what were the prevailing values in relation to sexuality in that context. The purpose of this paper is to examine these writings in order to discern, as much as possible, what these writers claimed they saw in the Gentile world from which most wanted to differentiate themselves, whether or not their claims were accurate or just propagandistic denigration.

Unless otherwise indicated these writings are not to be understood as forming a connected corpus, though they stand under the influence of the collection known as the Jewish Torah or the first five books of the so-called Old Testament of the Christian Bible and its warnings about the sexual practices of surrounding cultures, such as we find in Leviticus 18. Some, such as the writings associated with the figure Enoch, appear to belong to a stream of dissenting Jews in tension with the established temple priesthood, a stream sometimes referred to as Enochic Judaism. Others may be formally linked, such as the various books of the Sibylline Oracles, but may have diverse origins. Most stand alone, so that, at most, we may by comparison observe similarities among them and, at times, recognize that they reflect common trends and attitudes evident in other works of the same period or foreshadow similar responses in later periods, such as the argument that links idolatry and sexual wrongdoing in the Book of Wisdom and the way Paul makes a similar connection in his writings some decades later.

2. Encounters in the Jewish Homeland

2.1. *The Book of the Watchers*

One of the earliest traces of Jewish engagement with the Hellenistic world comes in the earlier sections of the Book of the Watchers (1 Enoch 1–36), composed in Aramaic and now preserved in the collection of writings associated with the ancient figure Enoch, known as 1 Enoch. In 1 Enoch 6–11, which appears to have been composed in the Jewish homeland in the late fourth or early third century BCE, we have a rendering of the myth of the watchers, angels, who lusted after women, who conceived and gave birth to giants—a tradition also preserved in Genesis 6. The giants fought one another, wreaking devastation in their environment, and finally killed one another. The author appears to have applied the myth to the phenomenon of Alexander the Great and the wars among his generals after his death, which then continued over successive generations, especially between the Ptolemies and the Seleucids during the third century BCE, bringing devastation in their wake (Collins 1998, p. 50; Bedenbender 2000, pp. 184–86; Tigchelaar 1996, pp. 172–73; Nickelsburg 2001, pp. 166–71). Sexual adventure contrary to nature, namely heavenly beings with human beings, created chaos. The author made the watchers also responsible for the passing on of the knowledge of smelting iron and making weapons, but also ornaments and cosmetics, which then allegedly corrupted women to become seducers of men (Loader 2007, pp. 18–19, 46–48). Collins sees in 1 Enoch 8–9 an “expression of the author’s reaction to the novelties of the Hellenistic age, which was marked by technological progress, on the one hand, and exposure to Greek attitudes to the human body and sexuality, on the other” (Collins 2002, p. 60). Blaming foreign women in particular for their seductiveness and for carrying secrets of sorcery was ground for forbidding intermarriage between Jewish men and non-Jewish women.

In the slightly later 1 Enoch 13–16, which also centers upon the watchers' sexual intercourse with women, their actions were all the more condemned, because they were understood to be priests of the heavenly temple. The author uses the breaching of the divine order of creation by crossing forbidden boundaries as an etiology to explain the presence of evil spirits—half heavenly, half human—in the world, bringing sickness and distress. For these spirits emerged from the corpses of the giants, who had slaughtered each other (1 Enoch 15: 8–11; Loader 2007, pp. 31–34). The implication is clear: forbidden sexual liaisons spell disaster. While on its own making no direct links with such behaviors in the non-Jewish world, when set alongside 1 Enoch 6–11, this work is best understood as responding to what was seen as the corrupting influence of Hellenization (Collins 2015, pp. 276–80).

2.2. The Hellenistic Crisis, the Maccabean Revolt, and the Hasmoneans

The Hellenistic crisis, which led to the revolt of the Maccabees in the early second century BCE, had a complex background that included competing political and economic forces, as the Seleucids wrested control of the Jewish homeland from the Ptolemies at the end of the third century BCE (Portier-Young 2011, pp. 49–215). Underlying it was also a religious crisis, as Hellenism's cultural imperialism swayed elites to adopt Hellenistic fashion and would have inevitably raised the issue of intermarriage, though only indirectly attested. 2 Maccabees recorded how the brother of the high priest, Onias III, Jason, corruptly paid Antiochus to enable him to usurp his brother as high priest and then "at once shifted his compatriots over to the Greek way of life" (4:10), setting Jewish laws aside and establishing institutions typical of a Hellenistic city, including a gymnasium. Collins discusses the Jews' actual motivation, concluding that "there is little evidence that their deeper motives were cultural or religious" (Collins 2001, p. 46). 1 Maccabees noted that Antiochus, himself, "authorized them to observe the ordinances of the Gentiles ... So they built a gymnasium in Jerusalem, according to Gentile custom" (1:14). A gymnasium was a center, not only for sports, but also for education, an *ephebeion* (2 Macc 4:9), bringing together peoples of different languages and ethnic backgrounds (Bolyki 2007, p. 136).

One of the customs that caused offense was the practice of naked sports. On one level, it led to attempts by Jewish men to conceal their circumcision to avoid potential embarrassment: they "removed the marks of circumcision" (1 Macc 1:15) (VanderKam 1989, p. 21). They did so by what is described as *epispasm*, stretching the skin of the penis to create the appearance of having a foreskin, a practice that "prevailed throughout the Hellenistic and Roman ages and attained a plateau in popularity in the first century" (Hall 1988, p. 71; Collins 1973, p. 22). To seek to undo one's circumcision was seen as an act of denying one's faith and identity as a Jew, an act of apostasy. Furthermore, the Hellenistic gymnasium was also not far from the temple complex, which raised the possibility that priests might attend. Such nakedness in the context of holy space was considered a serious offense before God (Satlow 1997, pp. 449–51).

The writing, Jubilees (Loader 2007, pp. 113–306)—to which we will return below in discussing the dangers of sexual depravity, to which it described intermarriage exposing people—which retold the stories of Genesis with glosses and expansions to address issues of its day, appears to have its origins in this period. It, too, addressed, the issue of nakedness. In retelling the story of Adam and Eve, their sin, and their need to cover their nakedness, it stated:

Of all the animals and cattle he permitted Adam alone to cover his shame. For this reason it has been commanded in the tablets regarding all those who know the judgment of the law that they cover their shame and not uncover themselves as the nations uncover themselves (3:30–31).

Similarly, the story of Ham's son seeing the genitals of his father (Jub. 7:6–12; cf. Gen 9:20–27) belongs in the realm of such concerns (Loader 2007, pp. 146–49). Jubilees also alluded to the neglect of circumcision or the attempt to do it only partially (Jub. 15:33–34). The concern with nakedness was reflected also in the Testament of Moses, written around the turn of the millennia, according to which

Moses predicted that “their young sons will be cut by physicians to bring forward their foreskins” (8:3).

The account in 1 Maccabees suggested indirectly that something more than nakedness was the concern. The words with which 1:15 concludes—“They joined with the Gentiles and sold themselves to do evil”—appear to use biblical phraseology alluding to 2 Kings 17:17 (“they sold themselves to do evil”), concerned with sorcery, and Num 25:3 (“Israel yoked itself [τῷ εἰς ἐξευγίσθη; cf. LXX ἐτελέσθη] to the Baal of Peor”), an allusion to forbidden intermarriage with non-Jews and linked with the exploits of Phinehas, who executed God’s judgement on perpetrators (25:6–10) (Doran 1990, p. 107; Kugel 2006, p. 79). The imagery of yoking, in particular, was frequently used to depict marriage or sexual union (e.g., Sir 26:7; 2 Cor 6:14), including in the Hellenistic world by Musonius and Hierocles and in an inscription from Mantinea (Deming 2004, p. 143). As Lange writes, “not only did they build a gymnasium and remove their circumcision, thus abandoning the holy covenant, they also joined the nations sexually by way of intermarriage” (Lange 2011, p. 208; similarly, Loader 2011a, pp. 245–48). The concern with sorcery and sexuality might echo the particular warnings of the Book of Watchers about foreign women’s influence (cf. also Jub. 11:7–8, 14–17; 22:16–17).

Appropriating Hellenistic fashions would have touched many areas of life and come into conflict with Jewish law at a number of points beyond just circumcision, nakedness, and intermarriage. These would include food laws, prostitution, male same-sex relations, and sexual promiscuity associated with symposia generally. The period prior to Antiochus’ intervention is to be distinguished from the period when he sought to impose changes, such as forbidding circumcision and observance of the sabbath, and pervert cultic traditions, erecting the offensive altar and probably introducing forbidden acts of revelry into the temple.

In contrast to the implied reference to intermarriage and illicit sexual relations in 1 Macc 1:14–15, in Jubilees, we find extensive explicit warnings about intermarriage, in particular as leading to exposure to the sexual depravity of the non-Jewish world. While these concerns were applicable to the period of the Hellenistic crisis, they would have had currency also after the Maccabean revolt in the Hasmonean period, where some prefer to date the final form of the work.

Jubilees portrayed Abraham as warning Jacob about the dangers which the Gentiles posed:

Separate from the nations, and do not eat with them. Do not act as they do, and do not become their companion, for their actions are something that is impure, and all their ways are defiled and something abominable and detestable (22:16).

While the allusion could be to Gentile cultic meals generally, it was more likely targeting symposia. Shimoff notes the influence of the Hellenistic banquet among Jews, pointing to Aristeeas and Ben Sira 31:12–19; 32:1–13 (p. 445). The focus was not only on eating forbidden food, such as food containing blood, but doubtless also included the sexual profligacy frequently associated with symposia. Forbidden mixing also included forbidden intermarriage. Jubilees made the dangers explicit. Thus, it depicted Rebecca warning Jacob that “Canaanite women are evil” (27:8) and that “[e]verything that they do (consists of) sexual impurity and lewdness” (25:1)—statements which the author’s hearers would know applied just as much to foreign nations in their Hellenistic context. The failure to heed such warnings, it claimed, led to disaster, citing Judah’s marriage to the Canaanite Beduel, which eventually trapped him into engaging unwittingly in incest (41:1–21). While the author employed such warnings within the narrative world of the text, which the author extrapolated, occasionally the author referred to his own, as in the mention of the Kittim, probably referring to the coastal cities of Phoenicia and Philistia, which were significant channels of Hellenistic influence (24:24–30) (Anderson 2005, p. 66).

The author of Jubilees used the story of the abduction of Jacob’s daughter, Dinah, by Shechem of Samaria, as the basis for an extrapolation attacking intermarriage with Gentiles by both women and men and demanding dissolution of existing mixed marriages (30:7–23; as in Ezra 9–10) (Loader 2007, pp. 165–76; Frevel 2011, pp. 239–42). That reflected an additional concern about intermarriage beyond the danger that non-Jews’ sexual depravity represented, namely that Israel’s sacred seed was to be preserved (Hayes 2002, p. 77), because, as Halpern-Amaru observes, Jubilees thus made all the

people “adjuncts to the priestly class” (Halpern-Amaru 1999, p. 154), ruling out intermarriage even with converts, who had turned their backs on sexual depravity.

The theme of intermarriage was also significant in the Aramaic Levi Document, upon which Jubilees appears to draw, but it lacks any reference to Hellenism and its alleged sexual depravity (Drawnel 2004, p. 65; Loader 2007, pp. 87–112). Hultgård locates the Aramaic Levi Document in the pre-Maccabean conflicts in the context of anti-Hellenistic movements (pp. 94–95). Objections to intermarriage in times of local conquest by the Hasmonean rulers, who emerged in the aftermath of the Maccabean revolt, may have had more to do with the enslavement of women prisoners—deplored, it seems, in one of the earliest documents produced by the group who settled by the Dead Sea, 4QMMT (Loader 2009, pp. 53–90; Sharp 1997, p. 220)—than with the encounter with foreign culture, though such women would still have been seen as potential sources of moral corruption. Documents of that sect were sometimes more concerned with whom priests married, though the broader concern remained (Loader 2009, pp. 356–59).

3. Encounters in the Jewish Diaspora

Concern with what was seen as the sexual depravity of the Greco-Roman world was more acute where Jews found themselves part of the very large diaspora found throughout the Hellenistic cultural empire. It was often found in association with the rejection of idolatry, often to the extent of attributing moral depravity to the failure to acknowledge the true nature of God. Aside from Philo, Josephus, and Paul, the works considered in this category are pseudonymous, appealing for their authority to an ancient figure from the past, sometimes Jewish, sometimes belonging to the Hellenistic tradition

3.1. Pseudonymous Works Attributed to Significant Jewish Figures

3.1.1. The Wisdom of Solomon

The Wisdom of Solomon, composed most likely in the early first century CE in Alexandria, possibly in the aftermath of the riots of 38 CE, as Winston suggests (Winston 1979, pp. 24–25), purported to be a work of King Solomon of some 900 years earlier, who was celebrated for his wisdom. It was typical in that it highlighted the connection between idolatry and what its author saw as sexual depravity (13:1–14:31) (Loader 2011a, pp. 420–22), a connection foreshadowing the arguments of Paul in Romans 1. Its author appears to have been conversant with Middle Platonic and Stoic thought, probably more through general education than through direct encounter (Gilbert 1984, p. 312). Its author adopted a common stance of assuming that the good in Hellenistic culture was something to be embraced and so was quite happy to employ its language (Winston 1979, pp. 14–28; Grabbe 1997, pp. 32, 35) and ideas (Collins 2000, p. 201), such as the notion of laws of nature and the ways of wisdom and justice (Collins 2000, pp. 199–200; Winston 2001b, p. 91), although Barclay sees the work rather as “an educated and deeply Hellenized exercise in cultural aggression” (Barclay 1996, p. 184). Sophisticated Greek and Roman critics could also deplore the excesses of idolatry. This author also employed erotic imagery in speaking of wisdom and the pursuit of knowledge (Kloppenborg 1982, pp. 76–78), reflecting Greco-Roman imagery. Winston notes the trend of “Greek models for the personification of Virtue/Wisdom as a beautiful maiden. In the famous parable known as the ‘Choice of Heracles’ and later adapted by Philo (*Sacr.* 21–29), the Sophist Prodicus of Ceos had personified virtue as a fair maiden of high bearing who invited Heracles to choose her (Xenophon *Mem.* 2:1:21–33)” (Winston 2001a, p. 105), pointing also to a eulogy of Aristotle (Winston 2001a, p. 105) and to Philo’s use of erotic imagery in speaking of the relationship between the sage and Wisdom in *Congr.* 74; *Contempl.* 68; and *Spec.* 4.14 (Winston 2001a, pp. 102, 106). Collins draws attention to the influence of the Isis tradition and Middle Platonic and Stoic thought in Wisdom (Collins 2000, p. 196) and in detail: Stoicism (Collins 1997, pp. 197–99), Middle Platonism (Collins 1997, pp. 200–202); and Isis (Collins 1997, pp. 203–204). There are also strong Jewish precedents for erotic wisdom imagery in Proverbs 8 and Ben Sira 24 and 51.

3.1.2. 2 Enoch

In 2 Enoch, a pseudonymous writing within a Jewish tradition of compositions attributed to the ancient figure of authority Enoch and penned around the turn of the millennia in Egypt (Loader 2011a, pp. 37–45), we find the condemnation of same-sex relations, or what it called unnatural intercourse, namely anal sex and sex between mutually consenting adults, targeting one of the standard abuses, which Jews saw in the Hellenistic world. Thus, MS P, arguably preserving the text of the original version, which was later expunged by church editors (Böttrich 1995, p. 789; Böttrich 1992, p. 187), spoke of those “who practice[d] on the earth the sin which [wa]s against nature, which [wa]s child corruption in the anus in the manner of Sodom” (10:4), setting it at the head of a list of sins. In 34:2, it referenced “abominable fornications that is, friend with friend in the anus, and every other kind of wicked uncleanness which it is disgusting to report”. It also condemned bestiality (58:6).

3.1.3. The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs

The *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, in its current form, a work edited by Christians in the second century CE, preserves much earlier material, which belonged to the period under review (Loader 2011b, pp. 368–435). As Collins puts it, “Ultimately the ethics of the *Testaments* cannot be pinpointed as the product of a specific situation. They are of interest for our purpose as material which seems to have accumulated and circulated in Hellenized Jewish circles over two hundred years and which was eventually taken over by Christianity” (Collins 2000, p. 177). It depicted each of the twelve patriarchs offering parting words to their descendants and, within this framework, offering teachings, much of it as ethical discourse. In it, we find typically Jewish abhorrence of same-sex relations (T. Levi 14:6; T. Naph. 4:1; T. Benj. 9:1; T. Naph. 3:4–5), depicted as disorder and unnatural and the result of a perverted understanding of God’s nature (T. Naph. 2:2 – 3:5), and condemnations of prostitution (T. Levi 14:5–6; T. Jud. 23:2); pederasty (T. Levi 17:11); bestiality (T. Levi 17:11), adultery (T. Levi 14:6 T. Ash. 2:8; 3:3; T. Jos. 4:4–7), and rape and incest (T. Reub. 1:6–10; 3:11–15; 4:2–4; (T. Levi 5:3–4; 6:3 – 7:4). It is also remarkable, however, for its emphasis on passions and, in this respect, appears to be strongly influenced by Stoic philosophy (Kee 1983, pp. 778–90; Kee 1978, p. 263; Kugler 2001, pp. 17–18, 21–25). Divine law was expounded less through specific commandments and not in relation to Jewish cultic requirements, but rather in relation to universal law as developed by Stoics (Kee 1978, p. 262; Collins 2000, pp. 178, 183; De Jonge 2003, p. 148; Hollander and De Jonge 1985, p. 43). Biblical stories served as ethical teachings, such as Reuben on incest; Judah on intermarriage, drunkenness, and incest; Joseph on resisting seduction, in each case, focusing on the role of passions, but also providing warnings about alcohol and women as essentially inferior and dangerous (T. Reub. 5:5; T. Benj. 8:2) and showing that uncontrolled passions produced disaster.

3.2. Works Attributed to Significant Figures of the Greco-Roman Tradition

3.2.1. The Sentences of Phocylides

While the Wisdom of Solomon is pseudonymously attributed to the Jewish sage King Solomon of the 10th century BCE, the poetic work of 231 hexameter lines The Sentences of Phocylides masquerades as the words of a 6th or 7th century BCE Miletian philosopher while giving voice to the views of a sophisticated Greek-speaking Jewish author writing around the turn of the millennia, between mid-first century BCE and mid-first century CE, provenance uncertain but probably also related to Egyptian Judaism. Following the pattern of adopting the persona of a significant figure of Hellenistic culture to attack its abuses, the author deplored the sexual misconduct of the Gentile world (3–8, 175–194, and parts of 195–227) (Loader 2011a, 457–76). This was about offering guidance to Jews to remain faithful to their tradition and its teachings (Wilson 2005, pp. 11–12; similarly, Weber 2000, p. 292) as they engaged with Hellenistic culture. As Wilson observed, “Demonstrating the indebtedness of the founders of Greek culture to Mosaic wisdom in this way would have facilitated for Jews the task of reconciling their pride in Judaism with their engagement in Hellenistic civilization” (Wilson 2005, p. 4; similarly, Oegema 2002, p. 68; Weber 2000, p. 290; van der Horst 1978,

pp. 15–16). The author drew on Jewish sources, in particular the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the Septuagint (LXX) (Küchler 1979, pp. 280–81), but also non-Jewish sources (Wilson 2005, pp. 14–17; Derron 1986, pp. 35–54 with an extensive list), with Thomas noting the dependence on Homer and Theognis (195–97, 201–204). These influences were probably already well merged within the framework of the tradition of teaching (Niebuhr 1987, pp. 8, 20; Weber 2000, pp. 286–87).

It elaborated upon what was a standard pattern of instructions about household order, the roles of parents, children, and slaves (Balch 1988, pp. 25–50; Crouch, on Stoic lists: Crouch 1972, pp. 37–73, their use in Hellenistic Judaism: pp. 74–101, in Colossians: pp. 103–145, and in *Pseudo-Phocylides*: p. 76), by relating it to the substance of the prohibitions of Leviticus 18, without alluding to them directly, perhaps deliberately (Thomas 1992, pp. 59, 64–71), and supporting it with arguments found in wisdom discourse, including those typical of Hellenistic ethical discourse, such as Stoic arguments from nature (176, 190, 191) and discussions about Eros (“Be not inclined to utterly unrestrained lust for a woman. For *Erōs* is no god, but a passion destructive of all”) (193–94) (Thomas 1992, p. 87).

The inclusion of not just the act, but also the attitude, was typical of Hellenistic moral philosophy (Nussbaum 1994, p. 485; Thomas 1992, p. 81) and was applied not just to women generally, but also to men’s wives, recalling Seneca’s disapproval of men who treated their wives like mistresses (*Matr.* 85; similarly, Philo *Spec.* 3.9; cf. 3.79, 113) (Wilson, p. 195). Moderation and control were fundamental values for the author. The failure to exercise such control, to master Eros, led to disaster, especially in relation to sexual appetites (Wilson, p. 199). The author thus reflected the values of the Hellenistic philosophy of his time. The prohibition of adultery (184, and already in the decalogue summary foreshadowed in the summary, 3–8) and of incest and bestiality was also consistent with the values of the Greco-Roman world. Wilson draws attention to Plato *Leg.* 838A–B; Euripides *Andr.* 173–175; Plutarch *Cic.* 29.4–5; Cicero *Pis.* 28; *Mil.* 73 and also notes Philo’s deploring of where incest was tolerated (pp. 192) and notes the high value put on marital harmony (pp. 202–203).

The author’s arguments against homosexual relations, that they do not occur in the animal kingdom and are contrary to nature, reflected those of critics in the wider world (e.g., Plutarch *Brut. an.* 990D; Ovid *Metam.* 9.733–734 on relations among females; and earlier Plato *Leg.* 836C) (van der Horst 1978, p. 239; Wilson, p. 197), as did his disapproval of lesbian relations where one woman usurped the male role and of a man’s taking of a female role (Wilson, p. 198) and his warning to parents not to let their pubescent boys wear long and plaited hair, rendering them vulnerable to the gaze of male predators (210–214). In other areas, the author parted company with his Hellenistic world, such as in the prohibiting of abortion, exposure of infants, and violence against a pregnant wife (184–186; cf. Exod 21:22–23), abuses frequently addressed by Jewish authors (e.g., Philo *Hypoth.* 7.7; Josephus *Ap.* 2.202). Van der Horst comments that “very probably the verse simply means: treat a pregnant woman gently, do not beat her (so as to prevent a miscarriage?)” (van der Horst 1978, p. 235; similarly, Wilson, p. 194; Thomas 1992, p. 71). For procreation was paramount, a value held in common but not so applied in his world.

3.2.2. The Sibylline Oracles

Another example of the pseudonymous ploy of directing famous figures of Hellenistic culture against their own culture came in the form of a body of 14 books of poetic literature written in hexameters, which appeared over some centuries, from the second century BCE to the 7th century CE, identified as the words of the ancient pagan Erithrean Sibyl, called the Sibylline Oracles (Loader 2011a, pp. 56–73). In the earliest section of these, in Book 3 (97–349, 489–829), almost certainly composed in Egypt in the second century BCE, the Sibyl deplored Rome: “Male will have intercourse with male and they will set up boys in houses of ill-fame (αἰσχροῖς ἐν τεγγέσσει) and in those days there will be a great affliction among men” (3:185–187). That theme returns when the Sibyl hailed the high moral standards of the Jews:

Greatly, surpassing all men, 595 they are mindful of holy wedlock, 596 and they do not engage in impious (or: impure, immoral) intercourse with male children, 597 as do Phoenicians, Egyptians, and Romans, 598, spacious Greece and many nations of others, 599

Persians and Galatians and all Asia, transgressing, 599 the holy law of immortal God, which they transgressed (3:594–600).

While alluding to the prohibitions of Leviticus, the Sibyl portrayed God's law as applicable to all humankind: "common to all" (3:248). The Sibyl warned of impending judgment: "Avoid adultery and indiscriminate intercourse with males" (3:764). That exhortation continued: "rear your own offspring and do not kill it, for the Immortal is angry at whoever commits these sins (3:765–66). A later section of Book 3, probably dated to the late first century BCE or early first century CE, attacked Romans as "a crafty and evil race of impious and false double-tongued men and immoral adulterous idol worshippers" (3:36–38). It went on to state that "[t]hey will have no fidelity at all. Many widowed women will love other men secretly for gain; and those who have husbands will not keep hold of the rope of life" (3:43–45).

In the Jewish revision of Book 4, made probably in Syria or the Jordan Valley sometime after the fall of Jerusalem in 70 CE (4:116) and probably shortly after the eruption of Vesuvius in 79 CE (4:130–35), the Sibyl hailed the righteous as those who "commit no wicked murder, nor deal in dishonest gain, which are most horrible things. Neither have they disgraceful desire for another's spouse or for hateful and repulsive abuse of a male" (4:31–33). Book 5, deriving from the early second century CE in Egypt, depicted Nero as one who "destroyed many men and laid hands on the womb. He sinned against spouses, and was sprung from abominable people". This reference may be to his killing of his mother or possibly his wife, Poppaea, by kicking her when she was pregnant (Suetonius, *Nero*, 35) (Van Henten 2000, p. 67) and so reversing the claims about his divine birth. It went on to condemn Rome: "With you are found adulteries and illicit intercourse with boys. 167 Effeminate and unjust, evil city, ill-fated above all. 168 Alas, city of the Latin land, unclean in all things" (5:166–168). Similarly:

Matricides, desist from boldness and evil daring, 387 you who formerly impiously catered for pederasty 388 and set up in houses prostitutes who were pure before, 389 with insults and punishment and toilsome disgrace. 390 For in you mother had intercourse with child unlawfully, 391 and daughter was joined to her begetter as bride. 392 In you also kings defiled their ill-fated mouths. 393 In you also evil men practiced bestiality. 394 Be silent, most lamentable evil city, which indulges in revelry. 395 For no longer in you will virgin maidens tend the divine fire of sacred nourishing wood (5:386–96).

This catalogue of sexual wrongdoing, as seen by the Jewish author of this book, thus included pederasty, prostitution, incest with mother and daughter (similarly *Pss. Sol.* 8:9), fellatio, bestiality, and possibly the violation of vestal virgins.

3.2.3. Aristeas

Another pseudonymous work composed in the late second century BCE is the Letter of Aristeas, allegedly written by Aristeas (Loader 2011a, pp. 337–71; Murray 1967, pp. 337–71), the envoy of Ptolemy II Philadelphus (283–246 B.C.E.) to Eleazar, the high priest of Jerusalem, but probably composed in the latter third of the second century BCE during the reign of Ptolemy VIII Euergetes II (Physcon) 145–125 BCE (Collins 2000, pp. 88–101; Bickerman 1976, pp. 108–36). It purported to record a conversation between Ptolemy and 72 Jews (187–294), following the Hellenistic literary topos of a symposium discussion. The author's goal, it appears, was to show the superiority of Jewish wisdom, mainly on topics of governance. As Gruen observes, for the author, "Jews have not only digested Hellenic culture, they have also surmounted it. The *Letter* plainly addresses itself, first and foremost, at Jews" (Gruen 1998, p. 221). It also alleged sexual abuse as typical of non-Jewish men:

The majority of other men defile themselves in their relationships, thereby committing a serious offense, and lands and whole cities take pride in it: they not only procure the males, they also defile mothers and daughters. We are quite separated from these practices (152).

3.3. Philo of Alexandria

The first century CE Jewish philosopher, Philo of Alexandria (ca. 20 BCE–50 CE), is a major resource for observing the attitudes of Jews toward their Hellenistic world (Loader 2011b, pp. 2–258). He wrote extensively. A large body of his works has survived. He was a deeply committed Jew, highly educated in both Jewish tradition and Hellenistic philosophy, and, in addition, well connected in elite circles of both Jews and Roman authorities, with family members holding significant commercial and political positions (Schwartz 2009, pp. 9–31; Schenck 2005, pp. 9–14, 29–48; Borgen 2005, pp. 14–45). He used his wealth of knowledge to advocate for his Jewish faith, primarily, it seems, to boost the confidence of his fellow Jews in the midst of a foreign culture, not only holding on to a tradition, which deserved respect, but which was also superior to the religions and philosophies of the world around them. To this end, he employed the arguments of contemporary Hellenistic philosophy to showcase that superiority through expositions of the laws and heroes of the Jewish scriptures, primarily its first five books, Genesis to Deuteronomy. It is not possible to review all his expositions and their relevance for how he viewed sexual attitudes and behavior in his world. What follows focuses on those sections where he expounds Jewish law (see also Loader 2011b, pp. 188–224).

He was on common ground with his Hellenistic world when condemning adultery. He saw it as “the greatest of crimes” (*Decal.* 123), a claim repeated in Joseph’s rejection of Potiphar’s wife (*Ios.* 44a). He saw this confirmed in the fact that in the biblical tradition, as he knew it from the Septuagint translation, it came as the first commandment on the second table of the decalogue and was buttressed later (*Decal.* 131, similarly 168; *Spec.* 3.8), though this is not the case in most manuscripts of the original Hebrew (Exod 20:14; Deut 5:18), where it comes second after murder (Loader 2004, pp. 5–8). His supporting arguments, however, were typical of the Hellenistic philosophy of his time. Adultery was the result of excessive uncontrolled passion. The dangers of desire were a constant theme in his writings. Thus, he wrote the following:

For in the first place it has its source in the love of pleasure which enervates the bodies of those who entertain it, relaxes the sinews of the soul and wastes away the means of subsistence, consuming like an unquenchable fire all that it touches and leaving nothing wholesome in human life (*Decal.* 122).

He went on to note how the adulterer led another into the act and also had major family and social consequences. In addition, such excess was out of place in marriage:

Now even natural pleasure is often greatly to blame when the craving for it is immoderate and insatiable, as for instance when it takes the form of voracious gluttony, even though none of the food taken is of the forbidden kind, or again the passionate desire for women shewn by those who in their craze for sexual intercourse behave unchastely, not with the wives of others, but with their own. (*Spec.* 3.9)

Similarly, Philo stood on common ground in condemning incest, which he cited as a Persian custom (*Spec.* 3.13), though Jewish restrictions were tighter than those of his non-Jewish world, and he was critical of Solon’s law permitting marriage to half-sisters, the Spartans for allowing it with sisters but not half-sisters, and the Egyptian lawgiver who allowed both (*Spec.* 3.22–25). Of Solon, he wrote the following: “With a lavish hand he bestowed on bodies and souls the poisonous bane of incontinence and gave full liberty to marry sisters of every degree whether they belonged to one of their brother’s parents or to both” (*Spec.* 3.23).

On intermarriage, Philo parted company with his non-Jewish world: “Do not enter into the partnership of marriage with a member of a foreign nation, lest someday conquered by the forces of opposing customs you surrender and stray unawares from the path that leads to piety and turn aside into a pathless wild” (*Spec.* 3.29). Similarly, he parted company on the prohibition of sexual intercourse during menstruation: “Whenever the menstrual issue occurs, a man must not touch a woman, but must during the period refrain from intercourse and respect the law of nature” (*Spec.* 3.32). The rationale, however, reflected a common concern: “He must also remember the lesson that the generative seeds should not be wasted fruitlessly for the sake of a gross and untimely pleasure” (*Spec.* 3.32). The rationale for condemning sex with sterile women was similar: “They too must be

branded with reproach, who plough the hard and stony land ... For in the quest of mere licentious pleasure like the most lecherous of men they destroy the procreative germs with deliberate purpose" (*Spec.* 3.34).

Philo reserved some of his strongest condemnations for homosexual relations. "Much graver than the above is another evil, which has ramped its way into the cities, namely pederasty ... In former days the very mention of it was a great disgrace" (*Spec.* 3.37). Many of his objections he would have in common with critics from his world, such as the wasting of semen; female disease; males becoming passive; males losing their virility, which so important in the Roman world (*Spec.* 3.37), even warning of impotence as a result (*Abr.* 135); and the depopulation of cities (*Spec.* 3.32–33, 39; *Abr.* 135–36).

Those of them who by way of heightening still further their youthful beauty have desired to be completely changed into women and gone on to mutilate their genital organs, are clad in purple like signal benefactors of their native lands, and march in front escorted by a bodyguard, attracting the attention of those who meet them (*Spec.* 3.41).

Like the author of Pseudo-Phocylides, he cited the dangers of hairstyles that seduce: "Mark how conspicuously they braid and adorn the hair of their heads, and how they scrub and paint their faces with cosmetics and pigments and the like, and smother themselves with fragrant unguents" (*Spec.* 3.37). Like Plato, he depicted such behavior as contrary to nature.

And the lover of such may be assured that he is the subject of the same penalty. He pursues an unnatural pleasure and does his best to render cities desolate and uninhabited by destroying the means of procreation ... like a bad husbandman he lets the deep-soiled and fruitful fields lie sterile, by taking steps to keep them from bearing, while he spends his labour night and day on soil from which no growth at all can be expected (*Spec.* 3.39).

But beyond that, Philo appealed to his tradition, citing the death penalty in Lev 20:13 but urging that it be immediate (*Spec.* 3.38). Philo also addressed what he saw as the causes of such depravity:

The reason is, I think, to be found in the prizes awarded in many nations to licentiousness and effeminacy. Certainly, you may see these hybrids of man and woman continually strutting about through the thick of the market, heading the processions at the feasts, appointed to serve as unholy ministers of holy things, leading the mysteries and initiations and celebrating the rites of Demeter (*Spec.* 3.40).

Philo's grounds for objection were also reflected in his depiction of the men of Sodom: "The land of the Sodomites ... was brimful of innumerable iniquities, particularly such as arise from gluttony and lewdness, and multiplied and enlarged every other possible pleasure with so formidable a menace that it had at last been consumed by the Judge of All" (*Abr.* 133). Philo cited Menander with approval: "the chief beginning of evils, as one has aptly said, is goods in excess" (*Abr.* 134). Excess included excessive drinking:

[I]ncapable of bearing such satiety, plunging like cattle, they threw off from their necks the law of nature and applied themselves to deep drinking of strong liquor and dainty feeding and forbidden forms of intercourse ... Not only in their mad lust for women did they violate the marriages of their neighbours, but also men mounted males without respect for the sex nature which the active partner shares with the passive (*Abr.* 135) ... Then, as little by little they accustomed those who were by nature men to submit to play the part of women, they saddled them with the formidable curse of a female disease. For not only did they emasculate their bodies by luxury and voluptuousness, but they worked a further degeneration in their souls and, as far as in them lay, were corrupting the whole of mankind. (*Abr.* 136)

In *Contempl.* Philo contrasted the holy meals of the Therapeutae with the drunken banquets in his world:

For waiting there are slaves of the utmost comeliness and beauty, giving the idea that they have come not so much to render service as to give pleasure to the eyes of the beholders by appearing on the scene ... [some] who are still boys" ... [and others] full-grown lads fresh from the bath and smooth shaven, with their faces smeared with cosmetics and paint under the eyelids and the hair of the head prettily plaited and tightly bound (*Contempl.* 50).

He continued as follows: "In the background are others, grown lads newly bearded with the down just blooming on their cheeks, recently pets of the pederasts, elaborately dressed up for the heavier services, a proof of the opulence of the hosts as those who employ them know, but in reality of their bad taste" (*Contempl.* 52). He then turned his attention to the two accounts of banquets in which Socrates participated, as depicted in Xenophon and Plato (*Contempl.* 57). On Plato's *Symposium*, he observed the following: "the talk is almost entirely concerned with love, not merely with love-sickness of men for women, or women for men, passions recognized by the laws of nature, but of men for other males differing from them only in age" (*Contempl.* 59). In this context he cited Aristophanes' etiological myth, explaining the origins of homosexual and heterosexual attraction on the basis of bodies male, female, and androgynous beings sliced in half by Zeus for their arrogance and, so, ever since seeking their other half: "double-bodied men who were originally brought by unifying forces into cohesion with each other and afterwards came asunder, as an assemblage of separate parts might do when the bond of union which brought them together was loosened", which he declared as "seductive enough, calculated by the novelty of the notion to beguile the ear" but to be treated by "the disciples of Moses trained from their earliest years to love the truth ... with supreme contempt" (*Contempl.* 63).

Thus, Philo knew of the view that homosexuality is a natural state for some, but like other Jews, rejects it on the basis, not only of the prohibitions of Leviticus, but also on the account of creation in Gen 1:27 according to which God made humans male and female, by implication only male and female (Gen 1:27). Philo condemned same-sex relations between men and between women (see also Szesnat 1999, pp. 140–47). Thus, of life after Noah's flood, he wrote the following: "But after (the flood) had ceased and come to an end and they had been saved from the evil, he again instructed them through the order (of their leaving the ark) to hasten to procreate, by specifying not that men (should go out) with men nor women with women but females with males" (QG 2.49). He warned of "the mannish-woman as much as the womanish-man" (*Virt.* 20–21) and deplored the "hybrid, man-woman or woman-man" (*Her.* 274) (Szesnat 1999, pp. 143).

Men engaging their lusts towards other men might also have been engaging their lusts towards women as well, especially in the context of drunken parties. Thus, he wrote that such a man "not only attacks in his fury the marriage-bed of others, but even plays the pederast and forces the male type of nature to debase and convert itself into the feminine form, just to indulge a polluted and accursed passion" (*Spec.* 2.50). He knew of the trade in slave boys bought for pederasty and reported of one such slave: "It is said, for instance, that looking at one of the purchasers, an addict of effeminacy, whose face showed that he had nothing of the male about him, he went up to him and said, 'You should buy me, for you seem to me to need a husband'" (*Prob.* 124). While, much of the time, he was condemning pederasty, his censure also applied to consenting adults, male and female (Ellis 2003, p. 316). The truly masculine man was "not lured by any of them to embrace like some hybrid, man-woman or woman-man, the pleasant-seeming evils, but holding to its own nature of true manhood has the strength to be victor instead of victim in the wrestling-bout" (*Her.* 274).

Of bestiality, in contrast to homosexual behavior, Philo wrote the following:

Even worse than this is the conduct of some who have emulated the lusts of the Sybarites and those of others even more lascivious than they ... These persons begin with making themselves experts in dainty feeding, wine-bibbing and the other pleasures of the belly and the parts below it ... Sated with these they reach such a pitch of wantonness, the natural offspring of satiety, that losing their senses they conceive a frantic passion, no longer for human beings male or female, but even for brute beasts (*Spec.* 3.43).

He pointed to the cultural tradition of his world by citing the myth of Pasiphaë, the wife of King Minos of Crete, who mated with a bull, as a result of which the half-beast Minotaur was born (*Spec.* 3.44) and commented as follows: “Probably, if passions are suffered to go unbridled, there will be other Pasiphaës, and not only women but also men will be frantically in love with wild beasts, which will produce unnatural monsters to serve as monuments of the disgusting excesses of mankind” (*Spec.* 3.45). The Testament of Solomon similarly alluded to the legend of Onoskelis, the half-human half-donkey offspring of the sodomizing of a donkey by Aristonymos of Ephesus (4:1–5) (Busch 2006, p. 111). It made, however, no references to bestiality in the contemporary society.

Philo saw the prostitute as “a pest, a scourge, a plague-spot – she who has corrupted the graces bestowed by nature, instead of making them, as she should, the ornament of noble conduct” (*Spec.* 3.51) and differentiated Jewish law on such matters from what he claimed were the norms of his world:

Other nations are permitted after the fourteenth year to deal without interference with harlots and strumpets and all those who make a traffic of their bodies, but with us a courtesan is not even permitted to live, and death is the penalty appointed for women who ply this trade (*Ios.* 43).

3.4. Josephus

The Jewish historian, Josephus, writing in Rome in the late first century CE, is a major source for our history of the Jewish people in the period under review (on sexuality see Loader 2011b, pp. 258–367). Like Philo, he was concerned with presenting the credentials of his Jewish faith and demonstrated its superiority above all else while at the same time being sensitive to his Roman audience. Some of his comments about the sexual behavior of his world were related directly to key figures in his account. His educated Roman audience, who would have applauded his depiction of the depravity of Cleopatra’s Antony, who sought without success to lay both Mariamme, the wife of Herod the Great (37 – 4 BCE), Rome’s puppet king in Jerusalem, and her brother (*A.J.* 15.25, 30). He reported that in his latter days, Herod was inappropriately fond of his eunuchs (*A.J.* 16.229) and deeply offended when his son Alexander, in an act of subversion, paid them for sex (*A.J.* 16.229–234; *B.J.* 1.488–492). He did not hesitate to report sexual abuses, such as when John Hyrcanus bought 100 boys and 100 virgins and gave them as a gift to the Egyptian king and Cleopatra (*A.J.* 12.209, 218).

His accounts portrayed the many and varied marriages among elites, which were often political and sometimes involved key Roman figures, such as when Vespasian arranged a wife for Josephus, himself (*Vit.* 414–415), Caesar arranged a marriage for Herod’s daughter upon his death (*B.J.* 2.99), and Agrippa I’s daughter, Drusilla, married Felix (*A.J.* 20.142), though, generally, Josephus disapproved of intermarriage with foreigners and appears to have seen the death of her son and his wife with the eruption of Vesuvius in 79 CE as divine judgement for the act (*A.J.* 20.144). He supported the biblical prohibition of same-sex intercourse with the common arguments about it being unnatural, a waste of procreative seed, a symptom of mindless pursuit of pleasure and excess, and leading to the shameful of effeminacy. Typically, he shared with Roman critics of homosexual relations the claim that it was a Greek habit (*Ap.* 2.269) and depicted it as one of the vices of the peoples of Sparta, Elis, and Thebes (*Ap.* 2.273–275). Rome declared such behavior as *stuprum* between citizens, though it was allowed among those of lower status, such as foreigners and slaves (Skinner 2005, pp. 199–200; Williams 1999, pp. 96–104; Treggiari 2003, p. 172; Loader 2012, pp. 83–91). Greeks countered the charge of it being a Greek disease by denouncing Roman homosexual practices on account of the fact that they went on way past the age of 30, at which point, according to Greek norms, such relationships should have ceased, and men should have married to beget children (Skinner 2005, pp. 213, 266).

3.5. Paul and the Early Christians

As to be expected, the common Jewish attitudes towards what was seen as the depravity of the Gentile world were echoed in the writings of the Jew Paul, a leading figure in the early decades of

the movement of the followers of Jesus. When Paul, for instance, planned to visit Rome, a community with a strongly Jewish constituency, and sought to clear the path of obstacles created by critics among Christian Jews of the way he presented the gospel, he began with common ground, namely a condemnation of same-sex relations. For he knew that this would receive a positive response among his Roman audience, not least because what they commonly saw as such depravity was known in the Roman imperial household in relation to Nero (Jewett, p. 171) and Caligula (Elliott 2008, pp. 79–82; Brownson, p. 157) and was condemned, though Paul's focus was universal in scope (Loader 2017; Loader 2012, pp. 293–338). His use of the condemnation of same-sex relations to depict the depravity that he, like other Jews, saw in the Gentile world served as a rhetorical ploy to draw in his audience, only to turn on them and declare his fellow Jews guilty of sin and so needing his gospel just as much as Gentiles. It does, however, provide another window through which we see how Jews of the time viewed the Greco-Roman world in which they lived and its sexual mores. In elaborating his condemnation, Paul could at the same time, like other Jews before him, such as the author of *Wisdom* and *Philo*, also employ the arguments used in that world by the critics of such behavior.

In a manner typical of his ethical discourses elsewhere, his focus was not so much of the behavior itself as the attitude that he traced to a perversion of the mind resulting from a perverted understanding of God, typical of Gentile idolatry. In this, he followed a pattern, already present in *Wisdom*, of seeing a perversion in the understanding of who God is leading to states and behaviors that are perverse (*Wisd.* 13:1–14:31). But, like *Philo* and others, Paul drew upon what he would have seen as the best of Hellenistic ethical philosophy, though filtered through Jewish presuppositions. Thus, Paul's warning included a reference to the danger of excessive passions (ἐν ταῖς ἐπιθυμίαις τῶν καρδιῶν αὐτῶν “in the passions of their minds” 1:24, πάθη ἀτιμίας “shameful passions” 26, ἐξεκαύθησαν ἐν τῇ ὀρέξει αὐτῶν “they burned in the passion” 27) (Loader 2017, pp. 131–35; Loader 2012, pp. 93–97; Fredrickson 2000, pp. 199–204; Swancutt 2003, p. 204). Paul's objection was not to passions themselves but to their misdirection and excess (Ellis 2007, pp. 168–69; Gagnon 2001, p. 178; cf. Martin 2006, p. 59; Fredrickson 2000, p. 205).

He also employed the argument of shame associated with taking a female role or making others do so (τοῦ ἀτιμάζεσθαι τὰ σώματα αὐτῶν ἐν αὐτοῖς “to dishonor their bodies in among themselves” 1:24; εἰς πάθη ἀτιμίας “to shameful passions” 26; τὴν ἀσχημοσύνην κατεργαζόμενοι “committing what is shameful” 27) (Loader 2017, pp. 135–37), a major concern in his world (Mayordomo-Marín 2008, pp. 99–115; Skinner 2005, pp. 212, 249–51). Malherbe draws attention to the importance of issues of honor and shame as a topic in Hellenistic discussions of marriage in *Plutarch Mor.* 143B, 754, 769A; *Aristotle Eth. nic.* 8.14 1163B, 1–5; *Xenophon Hier.* 3.4; *Oec.* 7.42; *Pseudo-Aristotle Oec.* 3.23–25 (Malherbe 2000, pp. 229).

Paul also appealed to arguments from nature, employed also in 2 *Enoch* 10:2 and the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* (T. Naph 3:4–5; 4:1; cf. also T. Levi 14:6; T. Benj 9:1): (μετήλλαξαν τὴν φυσικὴν χορῆσιν εἰς τὴν παρὰ φύσιν “they exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural” 1:26, τὴν φυσικὴν χορῆσιν τῆς θηλείας “natural intercourse with the female” 27) (Loader 2017, pp. 137–40; Du Toit 2003, pp. 100–101; Saylor 2005, pp. 85–86; Martin 2006, p. 59; Jewett 2007, pp. 175–76), but unlike *Philo* (and *Plato*) not in relation to wasted seed and failure to procreate.

Such arguments served to undergird what he denounced primarily, however, on the basis of the prohibitions in *Leviticus* 18 and 20 and the assumption implied in *Gen* 1:27 that there are only male and female people, and anything else is a distortion. As Nolland puts it, “We should not think of Paul drawing his views on homosexuality from his understanding of nature, but rather from revelation, in particular from *Lev* 18 and 20 in connection with *Gen* 1” (Nolland 2000, p. 54; cf. Nissinen 1998, p. 107). The focus was not only pederasty, but also mutual, consenting same-sex relations (ἐξεκαύθησαν ἐν τῇ ὀρέξει αὐτῶν εἰς ἀλλήλους “they burned in their passion for one another”). As Mark Smith observes, it is “much more probable that Paul was following the lead of his Jewish forebears, condemning homosexual activity, not because of its potential for dehumanizing relationships, but because males engaged in sexual activity with other males” (Smith 1996, p. 232).

We find a similar combination of values to what we find in *Romans* 1 in the succinct statement, which gives the title to this essay, which reads in full:

For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; ⁴that each one of you knows how to control your own body (τὸ ἑαυτοῦ σκεῦος κτᾶσθαι or “manage your own wife”) in holiness and honour, ⁵not with lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God (1 Thess 4: 3–5)

Like other Jews using such arguments, such as Philo, Paul did not go so far as to condemn passions absolutely, a difficult step for those who saw them as nevertheless part of how God made human beings; but, we find, under the influence of the popular philosophy, a much greater emphasis on moderation and temperance, especially from the first century CE onwards, in both Jewish and emerging Christian literature. A dualism, such as we find in second century gnostic literature, which deemed passions and the body as something evil in itself or as material entrapment, the work of an errant heavenly being or a dirty aspect of creation to be discarded in the future if not de facto in the present, does not clearly arise in the first century CE. That would later lead some to practice celibacy.

The move towards celibacy in the writings of the Christian movement of the first century appears to have its inspiration elsewhere, in particular in the understandings of the nature of future hope. For we find evidence that some envisaged future hope as one where gender differentiation ceased and human life left sex behind and took angelic form (Loader 2014; Loader 2012, pp. 430–90). Such a view was attributed in Mark 12:25 to Jesus and appears to be assumed by Paul in 1 Corinthians 7 and by the Book of Revelation. It was not the more common Jewish view, which rather saw the future in terms of abundance and fertility (Loader 2014), but appears to have developed in circles who envisaged the age to come as a holy space where following the provisions relating to the earthly temple, sexual relations would be out of place (Loader 2012, pp. 66–73). Already, the understanding of the paradise of the garden of Eden as a sanctuary and thus a place where Adam and Eve had to abstain from copulation would lead in such direction, especially where hope entailed a return to paradise, such as we see in the Book of Revelation. Such a view, which need not have implied a negative view of sexual passion, because it was part of God’s creation, had the potential nevertheless to produce consequences that created controversy. One was the view of some they should live now as they would then. Some appear to have concluded that all believers should therefore abandon sexual relations and become celibate, apparently a view held by some in Corinth, occasioning Paul’s response, which insisted that this was not to be so and that marriage and sexual relations were not to be seen as sin. A similar rejection of this universal demand was attributed in Matthew’s gospel to Jesus himself (Matt 19:10–12). In both instances, we find the argument that to live now as one would then is a calling only for some. John the Baptist, Jesus, and Paul were among those who saw themselves called to celibacy, and Revelation depicted a symbolic number of 144,000 likewise called. Nevertheless, the notion of a sexless utopia had the potential in time to lead to a denigration of sexuality and to find common ground with those Greek moral philosophies, which deemed a passionless state as the ideal.

4. The Impacts of Engagement

Notwithstanding the condemnations of what these authors saw and sometimes projected of sexual depravity in the Gentile world, including by harnessing its own critics to their cause, there were also some significant commonalities and counterinfluences. We have already noted this phenomenon in the Book of Wisdom, the *Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs*, and Pseudo-Phocylides. Similarly, in their engagement with Hellenistic philosophy, Jews like Philo and Josephus were able to identify what they saw as affirming of their own religious tradition. The Stoic notion of order or the laws of nature seemed close to what they as Jews believed was God’s law. Hays, for instance, notes the widespread tendency of Hellenistic Jewish writers to connect nature with law, citing Josephus *Ap.* 2.199, 273, 275 and Philo *Spec.* 3.37–42; *Abr.* 133–141 (Hays 1996, p. 405). We noted the same above in *Sib. Or.* 3:248. The notion of living in harmony with God’s law made much sense. The rich ethical resources of Hellenistic philosophy, especially when seen as an ally rather than a threat, opened new possibilities for Jewish thinkers. Even when they claimed that Greek philosophy derived ultimately from Moses, as many did (e.g., Aristobulus; Philo *Leg.* 1.108; *QG* 4.167; *Prob.* 57; *Spec.* 4.60–61; Gruen 2011, pp. 413–22), there was much to be learned. Orderliness and rightness or righteousness

appeared to belong together. The focus not only on acts but attitudes and motivation, a strand of thought already embedded in the decalogue prohibition of coveting (Exod 20:17; Deut 5:21), meant that Jewish ethicists could now also address the underlying feelings, which needed control. This was a trait attributed also to the Jew Jesus, whose teachings, as depicted in the Sermon on the Mount, shifted the focus from murder to hate and adultery to adulterous attitudes (Matt 5:21–30). Their understanding of passion as part of God's creation meant that denying or denigrating passion was not an option, so they found their closest allies in those philosophies, which urged restraint and moderation, though to a degree, which went far beyond what was housed in the Jewish tradition.

Hellenistic influence had already helped shape the Greek translation of their scripture, the Septuagint (LXX), which was the translation used by Greek-speaking Jews and Christians in the diaspora and thus was especially formative. This was especially so in the way it portrayed creation in Genesis (Loader 2004, 2008a, 2008b, pp. 27–58), an account which laid the foundation for much thought about sexuality. There are parallels with Plato's *Timaeus*. Thus, the LXX allowed readings in which we find assumed in Philo and Paul, for instance, that women are God's creation, but created in the image of man, as man is created in the image of God—a hierarchy of being. The Greek also allowed an interpretation of the snake's leading Eve to sin as sexual seduction (εἶπεν ἡ γυνὴ Ὁ ὄφις ἡπάτησέν με “the woman said, ‘The snake seduced/deceived me’”) (Gen 3:13; read as “seduced in 2 Cor 11:2–3), implying that human sexuality is a sin or at least potentially very dangerous, whereas in the original Hebrew, the word deceive did not have a range of meanings, which included the idea of seduction. The reordering preserved in two accounts of the so-called ten commandments in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5 in the Septuagint translation, which in most manuscripts set the prohibition of adultery as the first prohibition of the second of the two tables on which it was believed the commandments were inscribed, whereas this was not the case in the original Hebrew. Its prominence inspired writers like Philo to hail it as of greatest importance and broaden it to include all sexual wrongdoing as worthy of strong condemnation (Loader 2004, pp. 5–26).

Even those who most vehemently opposed Hellenistic influence could at times nevertheless adopt or at least reflect very Hellenistic practices, which had also become common in Jewish society, such as what appears to reflect symposia norms in the Community Rule of the Qumran sect, when it had its members sit at meals in a sequence reflecting their status in the hierarchy (1QS 6.4–10) (Shimoff 1996, p. 450), a pattern also echoed in Jesus' parable in which he poked fun at the practice in his context (Luke 14:7–10).

Writings from within the emerging Christian movement shared much in common with their Jewish counterparts in what they rejected (same-sex relations, prostitution, incest, bestiality), in what they shared as values with the Hellenistic world in relation to marriage and adultery, and in what they were willing to adopt and adapt from their environment. Thus, they, too, embraced what they saw as the best in the surrounding cultures. Love, loyalty, and mutuality in marriage were norms they could embrace, as reflected both in the discussion of marriage in Mark (Berger 1972, p. 575) and in Paul's emphasis on mutuality in 1 Cor 7:3–4 (Deming 2004, pp. 114–150), though he could also express himself in ways that paralleled Cynic and Stoic reservations about marriage as an impediment to philosophy, as in 1 Cor 7:32–35 (Deming 2004, p. 195; Balch 1983). At other times it appears that Paul was deliberately countering Stoic positions as in his rejection of the freedom slogan, “All things are lawful”, in 1 Cor 6:12, at the beginning of his warnings about illicit sexual relations, probably targeting prostitution (Loader 2012, pp. 166–82; Murphy-O'Connor 1978, p. 393; Smith 2008, pp. 65, 76).

Households became important as the Christian movement became sedentary, so that we find in writings like Colossians and Ephesians, written in Paul's name but probably a generation later, and 1 Peter, teachings about proper relations between husbands and wives, children and parents, and slaves and masters, consistent with Hellenistic norms for the household of the time (Loader 2012, pp. 401–18). The norm for marriages, which were arranged between families in most cultures of the time, was that these should be restricted to the members of the movement (as 1 Cor 7:39 assumes), a continuation of Jewish rejection of intermarriage, though that had less to do with Jubilees' warnings about outsider women as sexually immoral and more to do with preserving group identity. With the

cultures of the time, they shared the abhorrence of adultery, a threat to household stability and so to the welfare of the family, and the assumption, implied in Jewish law and reasserted by Augustus in the *Lex Iulia* 18 BCE, updated in the *Lex Papia Poppaea* 9 CE, that adultery mandated divorce (implied also in Deut 24:1–4) (Treggiari 2003, pp. 167–68; Loader 2015, p. 69). That law even required the prosecution of men who failed to divorce their adulterous wives.

The issue of divorce has a history that was shaped by Hellenistic influence on Jewish tradition. Under that influence, the norm of polygyny came to be questioned. The Damascus Document, probably written in the second century BCE, and found both in the library of documents hidden in caves by the Dead Sea by the sect that had buildings there and in the ancient Cairo *genizah*, demanded monogyny, not only of kings, a requirement enunciated in the Temple Scroll (47.15–19) (Loader 2009, pp. 40–44), but also of all Jews (CD 4.20–5.2) (Loader 2009, pp. 107–25). The move away from polygyny to, in this case, the more enlightened ways of the Hellenistic world inevitably created a new problem. For where marital disharmony occurred, the option of taking another wife was ruled out. Divorce became the main option (Loader 2015, pp. 68–71).

This, in turn, would lead to controversy over what might justify such a divorce, usually a man's decision. We have rabbinic traditions, which preserve some of the ancient arguments between the schools of Shammai and Hillel, a narrow and a broad interpretation of what might be a satisfactory justification (*m. Git* 9.10; *b. Git* 90a; *Sifre* Deut 269) (Meier 2009, p. 95), though caution is to be exercised in using such traditions and their attributions to recover history (Jackson 2008, pp. 194, 205–207; Meier 2009, pp. 4, 121, 126; Sigal 2007, pp. 111–12). It is not so surprising that we also have a report of a discussion on the matter by Jesus of Nazareth, in which he took the idealistic stance of declaring it contrary to God's intention (Mark 10:2–12), though probably not calling into question the mandating of divorce for adultery (Loader 2015, pp. 71–41). It is likely also that Roman norms of divorce shaped early Christian approaches, such as we see in Mark (10:11–12), which assumed that women could divorce as much as men, not normally the case in Jewish tradition, though increasingly women could initiate divorce. Many of the principles and practices relating to households and marriage were widely shared between Jews and the surrounding culture, reflecting the fact that survival and well-being depended so heavily on the stability of the household (Loader 2012, pp. 74–82). As Satlow observes, “socially, Hellenistic Jews, for the most part, did not choose marriage as a ‘boundary marker’: when Philo and Josephus try to delineate what is distinctive about Jews, they rarely raise the issue of marriage” (Satlow 2001, p. 201).

5. Conclusions

We have been looking at sexuality in the Greco-Roman world through the windows of Jewish and early Christian writings. Much of what is written was designed to differentiate the authors' community and faith from the world around them, to assert superiority, and to warn of dangers. Despite the probable distortions and exaggerations that arise from such an endeavor, the contrast sensed would have matched the reality in many respects. Jewish norms were generally stricter and much less tolerant of deviation than were many of the cultures of the Hellenistic world, where prostitution was generally accepted and same-sex relations more likely to be tolerated though not without dissenting voices. Otherwise, many norms were held in common, including some which to 21st century ears sound strange if not appalling, including those that suggested that male heads of household would have sexual access to all within the household except where it would entail incest, that adultery would mandate divorce, that women were to be subordinate to men with only rare outstanding exceptions that nevertheless proved the rule, and that men arranged marriages of their sons and daughters. On another level, the cross-fertilization that cultural engagement made possible moved Jewish ethics away from affirming polygyny and deepened it through the very significant achievements of Hellenistic philosophy in broadening sensitivity and understanding in relation to motivation and the management of the passions, desires, and appetites, which uncontrolled and wrongly directed wreak havoc and produce the actions that the commandments sought to forbid but, on their own, addressed only the symptoms and not the cause.

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