

Masterwork of the Messiah

Expositional Study Of Matthew's Gospel

Rockin' Relationships, Part 2

Written By

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Arriving home the summer of 1977 at the close of my freshman year at Azusa Pacific University, I took a job as the foreman on an icing crew at a cantaloupe plant in Holtville, California. I had a big, WWII vintage troop-looking, weathered gray truck with a massive gas-powered auger hooked up to it. The goal of our two-man team was simple: Ice the train cars full of cantaloupe bound for the east coast.

When longshoreman finished packing the cars, I'd call the ice house and they'd send a truck with about 20, three-hundred pound blocks of ice. The worker slid the blocks down a stainless steel, slippery chute into the teeth of our hungry auger, and I usually climbed into a car with the massive black six inch "hose," banking the crushed ice off the walls to cover the fruit.

It was a tough, dangerous job and I lived in that rail yard for 80 to 90 hours per week. It was also a boring job, at times, as well. Larry, a pastor's son who liked to drop acid before a shift, and I sat many hours in the 118 degree desert heat waiting for the muscle-bound, tattooed longshoremen to load the cars before we could get to work. They were an interesting and intimidating bunch of men. Some of their nicknames said it all: Jackhammer. You couldn't miss why he had this nickname. His forearms looked like redwood tree trunks. And boy did they party while they worked. When they weren't smoking pot, which wasn't legal and medicinal back then in California, they were popping goofballs and drinking cans of Coors to make it through a sweltering shift.

After a few weeks it became readily evident I was different. I had long blondish hair and tan back then, so I sort of had their "look," but that was about it. I didn't drop their acid (good

thing, especially when working around moving train cars), I didn't use their foul language, I didn't smoke their pot (they offered it to me, but quickly recanted when they found out my father was a federal agent), I didn't touch their drugs, and I drank sodas and water instead of beer. But I worked hard, just as hard as they did.

One day, on a break, as they swarmed the beer cooler on the wooden dock, one of their "leaders" came to me with a question, "Hey, man, you gonna have a beer with us?" "No thanks. I'll pass," I replied. "Why not, man? We've noticed you never drink with us. What gives?" he pushed. I replied matter-of-factly, "I am a Christian and my Lord wouldn't be too pleased if I participated in the things you guys do."

With a "That's cool," he walked over to the icy brews, popped the top and starting enjoying himself. From that day forward, they respected me, but you could tell they really didn't know what to do with me, because I just didn't fit into their party paradigm. That little encounter also put me in a position to be a verbal light to them.

Looking back on that episode from my college days, and comparing it to the Lord's teaching in Matthew 5 through 7 and 18 through 20, I still know it is true that our lives, as believers, need to be qualitatively different. Couched differently, we should live in light of our Lord's teaching so our lives, by definition, radically rock so they radiate the value of being His kingdom members.

This is the key premise Christ develops in Matthew 18 through 20, and from chapter 19:

God Wants Our Relationships To Rock (Matthew 19:1-12)

From our study of the opening nine verses of chapter 19, we learned that ...

- Our Marriages Should Rock (Matthew 19:1-9)

Yes, our marriages should be so healthy, so joyous, so exciting, so stable ... so full of Christ ... that the world around us can't help see we are different in an intriguing, inspiring fashion they know is right. If your marriage shines like a brilliant diamond for Jesus, then keep doing what you are doing. We need you and your example. If your marriage is in tatters because of mis-steps and sin you've made, realize there is grace and mercy at His throne, coupled with the Spirit's power to rebuild something beautiful out of the ashes. Trust God, walk with God and watch Him bring beauty out of the badness.

Verses 10 through 15 give us the second and third areas where our relationships should rock.

Our Singleness Should Rock (Matthew 10-12)

Before we delve into this verbal exchange between the disciples and Jesus, we need to remember the context. Jesus had just told the divorce-loving, low-view-of-marriage Pharisees that God's purpose for marriage since the beginning of time is for it to be known for oneness, not division. Additionally, He added the only way out of marriage is if your mate commits some type of sexual sin. However, even in this sordid situation, divorce isn't a Mosaic/Divine command but an option God would not like to see people exercise. He'd rather see confession and restoration.

After hearing how difficult it is to get out of a “bad” marriage, the disciples made an interesting ... and telling ... statement to Jesus in private (Mark 10:10):

¹⁰ The disciples said to Him, “If the relationship of the man with his wife is like this, it is better not to marry.”

Have you ever struggled with a statement of Jesus? Have some of His teaching just rubbed you the wrong way, leaving you wondering, “How am I ever going to fulfill that?” or “Is Christ really being fair?” From the comment of the disciples here, it is readily apparent they had bought into the inferior view of marriage propagated by the Pharisees. A Marty paraphrase of these words might go something like this: “Lord, if the only way out of a rough marriage is if your mate commits a vile sexual sin, then we think it’s just more logical not to get married in the first place, right?” Stated another way, “Lord, your teaching is so restrictive concerning marriage it sounds like to us that celibacy and singleness are the preferred way to go.” Shocking, wouldn’t you agree? On the one hand the disciples opted for asceticism and celibacy (even though we know some, like Peter, were married), and on the other hand they didn’t want to quickly give up their Jewish teaching about how easy it was to move from one wife to the next. Maybe the Lord is speaking to you right now. You, like the disciples, are in dire need to changing your unbiblical view about divorce, remarriage, and marriage. He will guide you if you will follow Him.

Like so many of us, at times, the disciples needed a little more instruction so the lights would come on in their spiritual minds. Jesus gave them that much needed light with His next comment:

¹¹ But He said to them, “Not all men can accept this statement, but only those to whom it has been given.”

What in the world does this all mean? I’m glad you asked. Let’s dissect it ... and then look for life application where relationships are concerned. Basically, Jesus will teach the disciples ... and us by proxy ... that singleness should rock for some kingdom members ...

Because of Divine Working. The “statement” here points back to what the disciples just said: If it’s almost impossible to exit a sub-par, tenuous marriage, then the single life is, well, the life. Jesus countered this unfounded notion by saying, “Not all men can accept this statement, but only those to whom it has been given.” What does this cryptic saying mean? Jesus will open up its meaning in the next two verses. Up front, Jesus taught the disciples that some people can’t and won’t agree with their limited, restrictive position because, for them, singleness is not their calling. Some folks are built for marriage and can’t wait to be married. Paul speaks about them in 1 Corinthians 7:7-9. Some, on the other hand, are wired for singleness. Christ mentioned three types of singles alive in His day and time.

¹² “For there are eunuchs who were born that way from their mother’s womb; and there are eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men; and there are also eunuchs who made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. He who is able to accept this, let him accept it.”

What is a eunuch?¹ Eunuchs, in ancient times, were typically castrated men who served in royal courts. Since they could not function sexually, therefore, they served as no threat to the throne. This is the literal meaning of the term, and Christ speaks about them in his second statement. In His first statement, Jesus informs us that some eunuchs are born sexually deformed or impotent, making reproduction impossible. Hence, there were two types of singles, physically speaking, according to Jesus. The third type of eunuch was/is the spiritual kind, or the person who, like John the Baptist (or the Essenes of the Qumran community on the northwest shore of the Dead Sea), chose singleness for spiritual reasons.

What might those reasons be? Paul touches on some of them in 1 Corinthians 7:

³²But I want you to be free from concern. One who is unmarried is concerned about the things of the Lord, how he may please the Lord; ³³ but one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how he may please his wife, ³⁴ and his interests are divided. The woman who is unmarried, and the virgin, is concerned about the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and spirit; but one who is married is concerned about the things of the world, how she may please her husband. ³⁵This I say for your own benefit; not to put a restraint upon you, but to promote what is appropriate and to secure undistracted devotion to the Lord.

From Paul's perspective, a single person has more flexibility with their time in order to be, ostensibly, more devoted to Christ. A married person, conversely, has to be divided in their devotion. On the one hand, they have to give time and attention all the demands a mate and family put upon them. In order to create oneness, per God's design, they have to work hard on many and varied fronts (taxing the kids around, cooking big meals, attending soccer practice and games, and so on and forth). On the other hand, they have to give another slice of their time to Christ, but it is not always optimal time because they are pulled in so many directions. Paul isn't diminishing marriage. On the contrary, he is just stating an obvious fact: Married people have to spend time pleasing a spouse, which cuts into time with Christ.

While it is true a Christian single can be so busy with their secular life they put hold back in their service to Christ, it is not a necessary outcome. They, at least, have the opportunity to be less distracted in their service to Jesus; therefore, they should be highly focused. Believe me, we have many singles in our church that fit this description. No, they are not looking primarily to find a mate (which is a cultural myth we need to put to rest), but feel it is their gift to Christ to be single so they can do much work for Him. And work they do around here. They serve in our singles ministry, but that is not all. You'll find them pouring their lives into many facets of our church because they can be more focused than many married folks. As your pastor, let me say, "Thank you. Thank you for rocking for Christ." You are an example to all of us of what it means to follow hard after Jesus. For you, the disciple's words are, well, from another planet. You are single by choice and for you it is a spiritual fulcrum to be used to advance the kingdom. Continue to do what you are doing for you are right where God wants you to be. Live your single life for Christ and watch that life have a huge, positive impact on countless lives around you, especially among other singles.

Additionally, kingdom living should rock for some single kingdom members ...

Because Of Divine Wiring. We get this insight from Paul in 1 Corinthians 7:7. Speaking about the single and the married life, the apostle concludes:

⁷ Yet I wish that all men were even as I myself am. However, each man has his own gift from God, one in this manner, and another in that.

Paul wished more people were single like he was because it enables a person to have the opportunity to do more for God with minimal life distractions. However, note he says that each person has their own “gift from God,” meaning some have the gift of marriage, and others have the gift of being single. Let this sink into your heart and mind, you who think that getting married will solve all of your problems. Marriage is a wonderful institution created by God. It also takes a whole lot of work to make it fulfill God’s desire for oneness. Blending two lives together, especially of a man and a woman who are created so differently, is no simple calling, but it is a worthy one, but, as Paul says, it is not for everyone. Some are gifted, by God, to be single. It’s in their divine wiring.

If you are single and wondering why, perhaps the answer is this is how God lovingly made you. If this is so, then stop buying into the cultural notion you’ll be fulfilled if you are married. Don’t get all caught up thinking happiness is tied to marriage either. Marriage can be happy (and they should be), but I know a whole lot of unhappy married people, too. And don’t embrace the untenable argument that singles are not as healthy as married people. Consider the following evidence to help you embrace your singleness:

Myth: Married people are happier and healthier than unmarried people. Hollywood does a great job of painting singlehood as lonely, unstable, and downright dismal (think Bridget Jones crying into her ice cream, alone on New Year’s Eve). But one recent study published in the *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships* found that people over 40 who never settle down are just as emotionally healthy as their wedded peers. When researchers compared more than 1,500 40- to 74-year-olds — both married and never married — they found that the latter group’s “psychological resources” (factors that promote well-being and [prevent depression](#), such as self-sufficiency and optimism) were just as strong.

And while marriage has been shown to have a protective effect against depression, heart conditions, and other health problems, other findings prove that not *all* marriages are good for you. One study published in the *Archives of General Psychiatry* found that unhappy matrimones can be extremely harmful to both [emotional](#) and physical health (while those content, never-been-married folks are doing just fine).²

So, if God wired you for singleness, then embrace it and use it to His glory, use it serve Him and shine the light of His kingdom principles and gospel in the lives you come in contact with in

² Katie Kerns, “6 Myths About Living Single,” Everyday Health, accessed January 24, 2014, <http://www.everydayhealth.com/emotional-health/6-myths-about-living-single.aspx>.

your single world. And, please, don't think for a moment that being single makes you more spiritual either. All saints, whether they are single or married, are to strive for spirituality through self-sacrifice and obedience to the Lord's commands. You are no different and no better than the next kingdom member, but you are an important member, for sure, with unique opportunities you need to realize for Christ.

One of my friends named Thom is one of those life-long singles. He is a strapping six foot six former Marine, who is, probably at this time in his life, a sixth or seventh degree black belt in Tai Kwon Do. He's intellectually gifted, too, and just recently retired as a pharmacist in northern California. He's also a great, godly man. When I was in high school, Thom, who was a Navigator (a Christian organization which specializes in Scripture memory), mentored me in the Word, challenging me to memorize Bible verses, and answering many of my thorny theological questions. Over the years, he has served the Lord in a variety of capacities, and somewhere along the line, he developed his own ministry to Muslims. During the first Iraq war he even flew there on his own dime to spread the gospel. What a devoted saint he is, and he has utilized his singleness God called him to years ago to impact not just my life, but the lives of countless men and women all over the place. Thank you Lord for single people like Thom who know how to rock for you. Bless all those Thom-types among us.

Christ's teaching should have a major, radical, and positive impact on our marriages and our singles, but there is one more key area it should touch ...

Our Parenting Should Rock (Matthew 13-15)

After Christ finish correcting the misconceptions of the disciples about marriage and singleness, the place was flooded with children:

¹³ Then some children were brought to Him so that He might lay His hands on them and pray; and the disciples rebuked them.

According to teaching of Judaism, children should be brought before spiritual leaders/ rabbis to receive a blessing. Typically, this occurred in relation to the Day of Atonement (*Sopherim* 18:5); however, it could really occur at any time, as we see here in a day in the life of Jesus. All the parents wanted was for the self-proclaimed Messiah to place his powerful, loving hands on their children and utter words of divine blessing. I'm sure you would have been in line as well with your children, right? I would have.

Enter the disciples. Once again, they misread and bungled a situation. Aren't you glad Word is written to reflect real life? God used these men greatly and they grew spiritually; however, their maturation, like ours, was a process of many triumphs spotted with times of almost shocking spiritual dullness.

Parallel accounts in Mark and Luke (Mark 10:13; Luke 18:15) use the imperfect tense to describe the activity of the parents, thereby, underscoring this was no event but a lengthy, continual process. Translated, this wasn't just four or five parents crowding Jesus with their children, but a perpetual line of them. And the Greek word for "children" is different in these contexts. Matthew employs the word *paidia* (παιδίων), which can mean a baby or a young child, while Luke calls them "babies" from *brepheos* (βρέφος). Based on these lexical meanings, we are probably safe in concluding babies were in the arms of those who came to Jesus.

The disciples eventually grew weary of this endless procession of babies, so they started rebuking the parents. Amazing. They should have been the first ones to welcome the parents and the babies, but they weren't. Instead, they were the only ones telling the parents to go home so they could get on with the spiritual business of the Messiah. Jaw dropping, isn't it?

Christ, as many times before, corrected/rebuked His disciples,

¹⁴ But Jesus said, "Let the children alone, and do not hinder them from coming to Me; for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these."¹⁵ After laying His hands on them, He departed from there.

Ouch. According to Jesus, the parents were doing what they should be doing: Bringing their children to Him. Stop right there and ask yourself some pointed, probing questions, especially if you are a Christ-follower:

- What, excuse me, lame things are you saying which are keeping people from Jesus?
- How are you responding to the teaching of Jesus in the wrong fashion?
- Are you keeping your children from being exposed to Jesus, the Savior?
- Are you making sure your children are learning how to worship Him?
- Are you making sure that Sunday School and/or youth group is a priority?
- Do you guide them to Jesus at home with how you model Him before them?

The homes of Christians should rock in relation to how passionate we are about bringing our children, as it were, to Jesus. Believe me, there is nothing better than doing this for you introduce them to the Lord of Lord and King of Kings, and His teachings will challenge them and transform them in spectacular ways, ways which will positively impact them for time and eternity, as well as countless lives they will encounter in a lifetime. I thank God for parents who brought me to Jesus. All those times in Sunday School as a child, all those sermons I heard growing up, all those relationships I developed with godly people changed my life forever, and they served to guide me to a saving relationship with the Master Carpenter, Jesus.

Children, therefore, have to be our priority, especially as kingdom members. Their lives will be drawn in many directions from piano lessons to swim practice; however, the most important place you can ever take them is to the feet of the Savior. And, trust me, His arms are always ready to receive a child because they are important to Him. In fact, as Jesus says here"

"... for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these."

In light of the fact Jesus has already in this context stated that "*... unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven*" (Matthew 18:3-4), we must conclude He is speaking here, first and foremost, about how one gets into heaven in the first place. They must come to Him like a child: innocent, dependent, helpless, and trusting. Heaven, then, is composed of all people who have come to Jesus, in faith, just like a child would run toward the arms of his grandpa. In light of this, I must ask you, "Have you laid all your arguments against Jesus at the foot of His cross and come like a child to Him?" He's waiting for you to take that big, innocent, trusting step of faith.

I remember the day my grandpa Dorsey taught me how to ride a bike. At first, we started with the training wheels. I rode that way for a while, and then he said, "Marty, it's time to take these training wheels off. It's time for you to ride on your own." Within a few minutes, this skilled mechanic for Southern Pacific Railroad had those little wheels off, and then, with his strong hands on the back of my seat, he gave me a big push and said, "Marty, you can do it." I trusted him and the rest is history.

Jesus is waiting for you to innocently trust him now so you can ride your bike, as it were, into His eternal kingdom. Go ahead. You can do it.

Another thing Jesus is saying in this statement about the kingdom of heaven can't be missed. Heaven is composed of children, children who died before they knew they were sinners in need of a Savior. In relation to this, I agree with Pastor John MacArthur when he concludes:

"The implication of such as these is that for those who, because of young age or mental deficiency, are incapable of exercising saving faith, God grants them, in the event of death, entrance into the kingdom by the sovereign operation of His grace. When children die before they reach the age of decision, they go into the presence of Jesus Christ because they are under the special protection of the sovereign King."³

My mother lost a baby boy pre-maturely between me and my older sister, Marla. I fully intend on meeting him on my first day in heaven because Jesus has promised me he is there. What a day that will be.

In light of the fact we just had *Sanctity of Life* last Sunday and countless life-loving people marched last week in D.C. to put an end to the scourge of abortion on our land, we must stop and take note that all those babies who have been aborted: 1,282,580,277 worldwide since 1980 as of 1:10 p.m. this last Friday, and 57,049,410 in the United States since 1973⁴ are now in the kingdom of God, enjoying His presence. And they are babies, humans, people, just as the Scriptures attest. Interestingly enough, the same Greek word for babies Luke uses in 18:15 who were brought to Christ, is the same Greek word used to describe John the Baptist in the womb of Elisabeth (Luke 1:41). Obviously, God fashions the baby in the womb. As the inspired Psalm states:

¹³ For Thou didst form my inward parts; Thou didst weave me in my mother's womb. ¹⁴ I will give thanks to Thee, for ¹I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Wonderful are Thy works, and my soul knows it very well. ¹⁵ My frame was not hidden from Thee, when I was made in secret, and skillfully wrought in the depths of the earth. ¹⁶ Thine eyes have seen my unformed substance; and in Thy book they were all written, the days that were ordained for me, when as yet there was not one of them" (Psalm 139).

The logical conclusion shouldn't be missed: woe to anyone who'd dare tamper with God's handiwork.

³ John MacArthur, *Matthew* (Moody Press: Chicago, 1988): 181.

⁴ www.numberofabortions.com

For those dear babies, therefore, who never had the opportunity to enjoy the fullness of life because they never made it out of the womb, or because they died prematurely, or because they died at an innocent age, thanks be to God who invites them into His glorious kingdom.

Heaven is about children.

Heaven is full of children.

Christians who rock with God understand this truth and make sure they do their part in brining those little ones to His feet.

Additional info on eunuchs from The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia ... (for the truly studious)

EUNUCH [Heb *sārîs*]; AV also CHAMBERLAIN; [Gk *eunouchos*] (Mt. 19:12; Acts 8:27, etc.); NEB also INCAPABLE OF MARRIAGE; [part of *eunouchizō*] (“made eunuchs,” Mt. 19:12); NEB also RENOUNCE MARRIAGE. An emasculated human male.

I. In the Ancient World

Exactly where and why human castration began is still uncertain. The tradition reported by the Byzantine historian Ammianus Marcellinus (*Rerum gestarum libri xiv.6.17*) — that it was instituted by the legendary Assyrian Queen Semiramis (Sammu-ramat, ca 810–805 B.C.) — at least suggests Mesopotamia as its place of origin, though it is now known that the Assyrian practice of making men eunuchs actually antedates this queen by many centuries. Castration as a means of punishment was known in Assyria already in the 2nd millennium B.C. An example may be noted in the “Middle Assyrian Laws” (tablets from the time of Tiglath-pileser I, 12th cent B.C., but laws and regulations which may actually derive from the 15th cent B.C.): “if a seignior has caught a (nother) seignior with his wife ... if the woman’s husband puts his wife to death, he shall also put the seignior to death, but if he cuts off his wife’s nose, he shall turn the seignior into a eunuch [*aīla(LÚ) ana ša rēšēn útâr*] and they shall mutilate his whole face” (Tablet A.15; tr T. J. Meek, ANET, p. 181; text, R. Borger, *Lesestücke*, II, 51; III, plate 34).

Commonplace from early times in Mesopotamia was the employment of eunuchs as servants or supervisory officials in the women’s quarters of royal households (see E. Weidner, pp. 264ff). But eunuchs in ancient Mesopotamia were known not only as bodyguards or domestics, but also as palace officials, statesmen, and military generals (see, e.g., Borger, *Lesestücke*, I, lxxvi, sv *šūt rēši*).

Concerning the origin of eunuchs, it is generally assumed that human castration was first suggested by analogy with that of animals. Xenophon (*Cyropaedia* vii.5.60–65) reports that it was the belief of the Persian king Cyrus the Great that emasculation yielded more docile and easily managed slaves who, undistracted by family ties, were characterized by single-hearted loyalty (and in the harem by unquestioned fidelity). Thus Xenophon says of Cyrus, “Recognizing these

facts, he selected eunuchs for every post of personal service to him, from the doorkeepers up” (*Cyropaedia* vii. 5.65 [LCL]).

The use of eunuchs, both domestically and politically, became commonplace throughout the Persian empire under the Achaemenean kings (559–330 B.C.), during the Roman and (especially) Byzantine empires, and in the various Islamic caliphates after ca A.D. 750. Nevertheless, the phenomenon was not unique to the Fertile Crescent or Mediterranean cultures, for eunuchs are known to have served royalty in China as political advisers already in the Chou period (ca 1122–221 B.C.) (cf. *Enc.Brit.* [1974], III, 994). There is no clear evidence, however, of eunuchs in ancient Egypt (see G. Kadish, p. 61).

Through Near Eastern influence the custom of making men eunuchs was introduced to the ancient Greek world, although the concept of human castration was fundamentally alien to Greek thought (TDNT, II, 765). This influence was most prominently felt in hellenized Asia Minor, the land-bridge between the Near East and the Aegean sphere. There, particularly in the cults of Cybele, Attis, and Artemis, the institution of ritual castration and a corresponding eunuch priesthood flourished, probably motivated by a desire to be one physically with the deity (i.e., in transmundaneity) as well as spiritually (ERE, V, 580–82; TDNT, II, 765).

II. In Israel

A. OT Teaching

Castration was prohibited in ancient Israel. In Dt. 23:1 eunuchs are excluded from the cultus. The rationale for this exclusion was multifaceted and in varying proportions included the following arguments: (1) emasculation is contrary to the divine order in creation; (2) it represents syncretistic accommodation to foreign influence; (3) the maimed or mutilated are considered unfit for priesthood, since by definition they constitute an affront to the God who made the world without blemish (cf. Lev. 21:20); and (4) the practice tends to undermine the natural patriarchal cultic order.

This prohibition notwithstanding, the eunuch is later considered admissible to the worship assembly (Isa. 56:3f). This does not constitute the establishment of some new cultic norm, but rather the concrete application, to an especially problematic case, of the universalistic principles delineated by Isaiah in passages such as 44:5; 45:14, 23; 55:5, so that the unlimited nature of Yahweh’s love may be manifested. With a skilful piece of prophetic *tôrâ*, the prophet counters the traditional objection to membership of eunuchs (“a dry tree,” i.e., unproductive of offspring) with the instruction that the single most important thing is devoted loyalty to the covenant. The kind of perpetual memory gained by the eunuch’s loyal deeds represents, in the prophet’s eye, a more significant hope than the traditional one of a name perpetuated through numerous progeny. This teaching is reemphasized in Wisd. 3:14: “Blessed is the eunuch, if he has never done anything against the law” (cf. the first two categories of Mt. 19:12, those born eunuchs and those castrated involuntarily); sterility is no disgrace or impediment for the pure in heart, for he will find “a place in the Lord’s temple” (NEB).

B. OT Terms

1. *Heb sārîs* The Hebrew term *sārîs* appears forty-seven times in the OT (including four times in the title *rab-sārîs* and six in the title *šar-hassārîsîm*, both “chief eunuch”). In twenty-eight of these occurrences the RSV translates literally, “eunuch,” but in the others it renders “(military) officer,” “(political) official,” or “chamberlain.” (The NEB consistently translates “eunuch” for every occurrence of the term.) While in some instances *sārîs* clearly has the literal sense “emasculated male” (BDB, p. 710), especially in some of the later OT writings (cf. Dnl. 1; Est. 1–2 *et passim*; Isa. 56:3f; Sir. 30:20), elsewhere it appears to denote in a more general sense “courtier,” “political official,” or “military officer” in service to royalty. *See also* CHAMBERLAIN; OFFICER.

This usage in a more general sense occurs in 1 K. 22:9 par 2 Ch. 18:8, where a *sārîs* functions as an emissary for Ahab, and in 2 K. 8:6, where another is appointed by the king to restore lost property to the woman of Shunem. Several *sārîsîm* throw Jezebel to her death from a palace window (2 K. 9:32f). Describing the despotic character of Near Eastern kingships, Samuel warns that the royal servants and *sārîsîm* will be beneficiaries of the king’s harvest and vintage tax (1 S. 8:15). *Sārîsîm* are listed among ranking dignitaries in Jer. 34:19: princes, priests, and *sārîsîm* (cf. LXX *dynástas*, “men in power”). The *sārîs* Nathan-melech is said to have had a room in the temple during the time of Josiah (2 K. 23:11). In Jer. 29:2 (cf. 2 K. 24:12, 15) *sārîsîm*, together with the queen mother, harem wives, princes, courtiers, nobles, craftsmen, and smiths, are taken into exile along with King Jehoiachin. At the fall of Jerusalem the Babylonians captured, among others, a *sārîs* who was “in command of the men of war” (Jer. 52:25; 2 K. 25:19).

The term is similarly applied in the OT to foreign dignitaries; e.g., Potiphar, the captain of Pharaoh’s guard (Gen. 37:36; 39:1), is called a *sārîs*, as are Pharaoh’s chief butler and chief baker (40:2). In military contexts, the Assyrian officials sent by Sennacherib to negotiate tribute from the besieged Hezekiah (2 K. 18:17) are the *tartān* (commander-in-chief), the *rab-sārîs*, and the *rab-šāqēh* (chief officer); and the Babylonian *rab-sārîs* of Nebuchadrezzar, Nebushazban, is named in Jer. 39:13 (cf. v 3) along with a host of other military officers of the Babylonian king. It is not certain whether *sārîs* has the general or specific sense in Isa. 39:7 par 2 K. 20:18 — Isaiah’s warning to Hezekiah that “some of your own sons ... shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon” (but cf. LXX *spādōn*, “eunuch”).

The literal sense of the term is exemplified particularly in Esther (twelve times), where the *sārîsîm* are regularly identified by their personal names and by such titles as “keeper of the women” (*šōmēr hannāšîm*, 2:3, 15), “keeper of the concubines” (*šōmēr happīlagšîm*, 2:14), “keepers of the door” (2:21; 6:2), all generally reflective of Persian custom. The *sārîsîm* in 2 K. 9:32 and Jer. 41:16 may also have functioned in connection with the harem.

The Heb *sārîs* is now generally considered a loan-word from Akk *ša rēši* (*šarri*), “the one who is at the head [of the king],” i.e., “courtier” (first proposed by P. Jensen, 174 n.1; see also R. Borger, *Akkadische Zeichenliste* [1971], p. 31; *Lesestücke*, I, lxxvi; Bauer and Leander, p. 538; R. de Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, I, 121; K. A. Kitchen, p. 160; J. Fitzmyer, p. 108; BDB, p. 710). The term may have passed into Hebrew via Aramaic (cf. Sfire stele III.5; I.B.45; S. Kaufman, *Akkadian Influences on Aramaic* [1974], pp. 100, 147f, 152), and thence into Syriac and Arabic as well (cf. BDB, p. 710).

The Akkadian idiom *ša rēši* exhibits in the cuneiform literature the same double meaning as Heb *sārīs*. Originally a generalized term for “courtier,” “official,” *ša rēši* underwent a specialization of meaning already before (cf. ANET, p. 181, where the term is used in the expression “turn into a eunuch”), but especially after the turn of the 1st millennium B.C. This semantic narrowing likely occurred as eunuchs increasingly were found to be the most reliable supervisory personnel in the harem. The same evolution of meaning may well explain the OT uses of the Hebrew counterpart, *sārīs*, since the specialized sense is clearly evident only in the later strata of the OT. Although scholarly consensus generally rests with the above explanation, two other opinions have been suggested: (1) two originally distinct Semitic homophones meaning “official” and “eunuch” have inextricably coalesced in Heb *sārīs* (*Enc. Brit.* [1914], II, 247 [Cheyne]; cf. J. Gray, *I & II Kings* [OTL, 2nd rev ed 1970], pp. 449f); (2) the meaning evolved from the specific to the general sense as eunuchs in domestic service for royalty merited ever more responsible positions for their reliability (*Enc. Brit.* [1911], IX, 890; this opinion, dependent on a suspect etymology of Gk *eunoúchos* as “bed wardens,” is rejected by L. Gray in ERE, V, 579).

2. *LXX Usage* In the LXX *eunoúchos* is used almost exclusively to represent Heb *sārīs* (thirty-one times, and seven times in Daniel in the compound *archieunoúchos*; cf. also *spádōn*. “eunuch,” in Isa. 39:7). The peculiar LXX translation of *sārīsīm* as *dynástas*, “men in power,” in Jer. 34:19 (LXX 41:19) suggests conscious accommodation to the Deuteronomic regulation excluding the castrated from the cultus. *Eunoúchos* is used in the LXX much as *sārīs* in the Hebrew OT, i.e., in the sense of a military or political official as well as in the more restricted sense of eunuch. In the Apocrypha the latter sense prevails (cf. *Wisd.* 3:14; *Sir.* 20:4; 30:20).

C. *Judaism* That Herod the Great employed eunuchs in his court is reported by Josephus (*Ant.* xv.8.4.; xvi.8.1). Rabbinic Judaism approached the question of eunuchs from the viewpoint of creation, teaching that not to beget offspring was to disobey the divine command of Gen. 1:28 (“be fruitful and multiply”). A distinction was also made between the *ṣṛīs .ādām*, “man-made eunuch,” and the *ṣṛīs hammā*, “eunuch by nature” (*Mish Yebamoth* viii.4–6; cf. Jesus’ distinctions in Mt. 19:12; see TDNT, II, 767).

III. In the NT

The Gk *eunoúchos* appears infrequently in the NT: five times in Acts 8:27–39 and twice in Mt. 19:12; in addition, the cognate verb *eunouchízō*, “make a eunuch,” appears twice (Mt. 19:12). In Acts 8 the eunuch of the Ethiopian queen Candace comes to faith in Jesus and is baptized. That this person is a eunuch is of greater significance than that he is an Ethiopian, for this event is a fulfillment of the prophetic saying in Isa. 56:3–5. The eunuch (an outcast like the Samaritans in the preceding verses of Acts 8) is no longer excluded from the kingdom of God. See ETHIOPIAN EUNUCH.

Jesus’ teaching goes beyond the rabbinic teaching in that He distinguishes three types of “eunuchs”: those who are so by birth, those who have been involuntarily castrated, and those who have “made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven” (Mt. 19:12). The last category is often interpreted figuratively rather than literally, in the sense that those who for the sake of the kingdom forego the sexual life and marriage do so in order to focus their energies

totally on a goal that reaches beyond the demands of existence — the goal of establishing the kingdom of God on earth (TDNT, II, 768). A contemporary example of this last group, familiar to Jesus, would have been the Qumrân Essenes for whom celibacy was a part of the community discipline.

IV. In the Early Church

The attitude of the early Church to self-mutilation appears to have been ambivalent. The Mt. 19:12 saying wielded a strong influence and in early exegesis was frequently interpreted literally (TDNT, II, 768). Nevertheless, only a few early Christians (the great theologian and linguist Origen, A.D. 185–254, being the most celebrated example) took the drastic step of self-castration in hope of avoiding temptation or sexual sin. Canons were eventually adopted in the 4th cent admitting into the Christian ministry those belonging to the first two categories of Mt. 19:12, but permanently barring from the ministry those who had emasculated themselves (Apos. Const. viii.21–24, 47; see ERE, V, 583; TDNT, II, 768; Quesnell, pp. 335–358; Blinzler, pp. 254–270).

See also CELIBACY.

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