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Sacred Worth Study
Eunuch Texts
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So who are the eunuchs? In basic terms, eunuchs are people who are not really considered male or female, but are transgressors of the gender binary. People who cannot really be slotted into a box. This is because of a procedure they went through, usually as children, to remove their testicles so that they could not reproduce. They were trusted in positions of administration and care of the concubines because there was no risk of them having children and starting a dynasty of their own. Eunuchs were found all the way from the middle-east and China.

I am drawing these people out because in these past few weeks we have asked the question of if the clobber texts can apply to people in loving, mutual, and committed same-sex relationships. The problem is that the idea of a sexual relationship that was not based on exploitation or domination would have been an alien idea in ancient times. So, I would like to present the eunuchs are an alternative anaronstic stand-in for what God thinks about LGBTQ people. Plus, we have the added benefit of getting Jesus's opinion.

Deuteronomy 23:1,

No one whose testicles are crushed or whose penis is cut off shall be admitted to the assembly of the Lord.

This text speaks for itself. I think that it is important to know that the baseline of this study on what Jewish law had to say about Eunuchs. They are the servants of the surrounding empires around us and they do not fit within their conception of what male and female was, so they are not allowed admittance into the tabernacle/temple. But let's dive deeper.

Isaiah 56:1-12,

Isaiah was written at the return of the Isrealite leaders back to their ancestral homeland. In that time, there was a big hullabaloo about who was Jewish and who was not. So some, like Neiamiah and Ezra, wanted to cast out the foreigners, even to the point of telling people to divorce their forieng wives and cast out their children. So here comes Isaiah with another picture. He looks at the two groups that are being rejected by the Jewish community, Eunuchs and foreigners. And says, why do we let things like gender

transgression and place of birth get in the way of being Jewish. Instead, look at how during the exile, people learned what it meant to be Jewish. They follow the laws and the Sabbath. And isn't that enough?

Matthew 19:12,

Jesus is talking about divorce and marriage in this section. Jesus says that divorce for any reason is cruel, but instead that adultery should be the only reason for separation. Then Jesus says something mysterious. There are eunuchs from birth, and eunuchs created by themselves or others, aka, castrated eunuchs. The natural eunuchs could either be people with missing body parts, men who were not aroused by women, or just men who did not get married. Maybe Jesus is getting at this quote from Clement of Alexandria "some men by birth have a nature to turn away from women, and those who are subjected to this natural constitution do well not to marry" I'll add the word women. Pliny the Elder, a Roman philosopher of Jesus's time, said, Eunuchs are a "third gender, called half-male." A fourth century Christian, Gregory of Nazianzus, said natural eunuchs should not be proud of their self-restraint toward women. A natural eunuch not desiring a woman is, well, natural, Gregory explains, "fire naturally burns, snow is naturally cold, and the son by nature sines. Yet neither fire, snow, nor sun boast."

So even Jesus says that it is best if eunuchs do not marry women. Or really anyone who does not want to marry a woman, it's fine. It would be too much to say that Jesus here is saying that men should marry men, because that would be like us today talking about something that does not exist. Remember Marriages in ancient times were for the purpose of economics and procreation. And Jesus was thinking about the economics when he wrote this, worried about women not being able to support themselves or get another husband after they are divorced. He is trying to avoid the economic harm done to women. And we know this well, because of how difficult it is in our day, when men and women pretend they are not gay in order to win their parents and society's approval. So they get married, have children, and later when the burden of living a lie is too much, they must go through the difficult task of dismantling their family. Nobody wants this. So here we have Jesus flat out telling us, no, don't live a lie just so that you can fit in. If you are a natural eunich or gay, don't get married to a woman. It is up to the modern Chrisitin to then ask, does this limit gay men and women to celebacy? Or does this say nothing and it is up to us to decide whether or not to affirm same-sex marraige as the logical solution that Jesus is pointing to us today.

Acts 8:27-39

Here we get an echo of the Isaiah text. I think that we are supposed to imagine that the Eunuch has Isaiah 56 in mind. (Though technically, The Eunuch reads from Isaiah 53, to reference Jesus). So clearly, this text is not about if Eunuchs are to be welcomed into the Jewish Christian worship. Instead, it looks at how even the outsider, a foreigner and a Eunuch that Jewish Law teaches us are to be rejected. Even the most rejected member is getting baptized. And not only that, This is an Ethiopian, who is going to start one of the oldest Christian Churches in the world and is partially responsible for why Ethiopia is a majority Christian country. With 500,000 believers making up 63% of their population. The Eunuch joins the table of believers with zero words of condemnation or even questioning his eunuch status.