

IDENTIFYING THE SIN OF SODOM IN EZEKIEL 16:49–50

BRIAN NEIL PETERSON*

Abstract: *The exact identification of the sin(s) of Sodom has long been central to the same-sex debate. In recent years, affirming scholars—some of whom are self-professed “evangelicals”—have attempted to downplay the sexually deviant aspects of Genesis 19 by invoking Ezekel 16:49 as conclusive evidence that Sodom’s sin was social injustice rooted in careless ease. Many affirming scholars triumphantly assert that based upon Ezekiel’s teaching, Sodom’s sin cannot be homosexuality especially as reflected in today’s “loving, caring, same-sex relationships.” In light of these assertions, this article argues that affirming scholars’ appeal to this Ezekielian passage is contextually, rhetorically, and exegetically flawed. Ezekiel not only employs the Sodom narrative in one of the most sexually graphic chapters of the Bible for rhetorical purposes, but he also highlights the sexually deviant sins of Sodom as a foil for the sexually deviant sins of YHWH’s bride, Jerusalem, both of whom had a Canaanite ancestry (16:3, 45). A close exegetical analysis of Ezekel 16:49 and 50 shows that the priestly prophet was drawing upon the Holiness Code of Leviticus, specifically the use of תועבה (tô‘evah; “abomination”) in 18:22 and 20:13, in order to highlight Sodom’s main sin of homosexuality.*

Key words: *Ezekiel 16:49–50, Sodom, homosexuality, Genesis 19, abomination, Holiness Code, Leviticus 18 and 20*

I. INTRODUCTION

It has become common fare in the same-sex discussion for affirming¹ scholars to enlist Ezekiel’s prophetic pronouncements in 16:49 as evidence that Sodom’s sin was nothing more than careless ease, which in turn led to social injustices such as the oppression of the poor.² Many times any mention of Sodom’s sexual impropriety dealing with same-sex acts, as found in Genesis 19, is quickly set aside in favor of Ezekiel’s putative non-sexual interpretation.³ When the sexual component

* Brian Neil Peterson is Associate Professor of OT at Lee University, 1120 N. Ocoee Street, Cleveland, TN 37311. He can be contacted at bpeterson@leeuniversity.edu.

¹ I use the term “affirming” to identify scholars who support the full acceptance of same-sex people within the church without the need for them to give up their homosexual lifestyles. While some are self-professed “conservatives” or “evangelicals,” most affirming scholars come from mainline churches (e.g. Episcopal, Methodist, Presbyterian [PCUSA], etc.) or more liberal academic settings.

² See, e.g., Martti Nissinen, *Homeropticism in the Biblical World: A Historical Perspective* (trans. Kirsi Stjerna; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 47; and J. Stiebert and Jerome T. Walsh, “Does the Hebrew Bible Have Anything to Say about Homosexuality?” *OTE* 14.1 (2001): 129–30. Although these scholars pick up on the pornographic nature of the chapter, they fail to note how the reference to Sodom actually ties in with this theme. On this point, see Brian Neil Peterson, “The Sin of Sodom Revisited: Reading Genesis 19 in Light of Torah,” *JETS* 59 (2016): 21.

³ See Daniel Boyarin, “Are There Any Jews in ‘The History of Sexuality?’” *JHisSex* 5 (1994): 350; and Nissinen, *Homeropticism in the Biblical World*, 47.

of Sodom's sin is acknowledged—sometimes it is not⁴—it is usually understood as the horrific practice of gang-rape for the purpose of domination and nothing more.⁵ In this case, these affirming authors are quick to point out that Genesis 19 in no way reflects today's "loving, caring, same-sex relationships" but instead is an example of oppressive actions;⁶ after all, they argue, Ezek 16:49–50 confirms it!⁷ Now, to be sure, any number of reasons could be proffered as to why affirming scholars would desire to downplay the sexual component of Sodom's sin. Of course, the most obvious one is the politically correct, or should I say *incorrect* position in today's Western worldview, which praises sexual deviancy while scoffing at sexual abstinence, purity, and God's design for marriage as instituted in the creation narratives.⁸

Despite affirming scholars' desperate attempts to whitewash Ezekiel's reference to Sodom's sins, it is impossible to divorce the sexual component from both the immediate and the surrounding contexts of 16:49.⁹ Because of this fact, in this article I will argue that affirming scholars have not only misunderstood the purpose of Ezekiel's reference to Sodom in chapter 16, but they have also failed to grasp the graphic sexual nature of the chapter within which the reference to Sodom appears. Due to this exegetical and hermeneutical misstep, in what follows I will examine in

⁴ On the non-sexual interpretation of Genesis 19, see D. Sherwin Bailey, *Homosexuality and the Western Tradition* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1955), 2–5; John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 93–94; Victor H. Matthews, "Hospitality and Hostility in Genesis 19 and Judges 19," *BTB* 22 (1992): 4; John McNeill, *The Church and the Homosexual* (4th ed.; Boston: Beacon, 1993), 68; Brian Doyle, "The Sin of Sodom: *yada', yada', yada'*? A Reading of the Mamre-Sodom Narrative in Genesis 18–19," *Theology & Sexuality* 9 (1998): 84–100; Lyn Bechtel, "A Feminist Reading of Genesis 19:1–11," in *Genesis* (ed. Athalya Brenner; Feminist Companion to the Bible (Second Series) 1; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998), 122; Brian Doyle, "Knock, Knock, Knockin' on Sodom's Door: The Function of פתח/לת in Genesis 18–19," *JSOT* 28 (2004): 438; Scott Morschauser, "'Hospitality,' Hostiles and Hostages: On the Legal Background to Genesis 19.1–9," *JSOT* 27 (2003): 461, 474–79; Nathan MacDonald, "Hospitality and Hostility: Reading Genesis 19 in Light of 2 Samuel 10 (and Vice Versa)," in *Universalism and Particularism at Sodom and Gomorrah* (ed. Diana Lipton; Ancient Israel and its Literature 11; Atlanta: SBL, 2012), 183–84; Ellen J. van Wolde, "Outcry, Knowledge, and Judgment in Genesis 18–19," in *Universalism and Particularism at Sodom and Gomorrah*, 92, 94; Ron Pirson, "Does Lot Know about Yada'?" in *Universalism and Particularism at Sodom and Gomorrah*, 203–13.

⁵ E.g. Boyarin, "Are There Any Jews," 349; Leland J. White, "Does the Bible Speak about Gays or Same Sex Orientation? A Test Case in Biblical Ethics: Part 1," *BTB* 25 (1995): 20; Nissinen, *Homocriticism in the Biblical World*, 48–49; Bechtel, "Feminist Reading," 118, 120; Michael Carden, *Sodomy: A History of a Christian Biblical Myth* (London: Equinox, 2004), 28; J. Harold Ellens, *Sex in the Bible: A New Consideration* (Westport, CN: Praeger, 2006), 108; James V. Brownson, *Bible, Gender, Sexuality: Reframing the Church's Debate on Same-Sex Relationships* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 268; and Matthew Vines, *God and the Gay Christian: The Biblical Case in Support of Same-Sex Relationships* (New York: Convergent, 2014), 59–75 esp. 65–68.

⁶ E.g. Vines, *God and the Gay Christian*, 64.

⁷ Andrew Marin, *Love Is an Orientation: Elevating the Conversation with the Gay Community* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009), 118.

⁸ See Brian Neil Peterson, "Does Genesis 2 Support Same-Sex Marriage? An Evangelical Response," *JETS* 60 (2017): 681–96.

⁹ For a discussion on this, see Brian Neil Peterson, *What Was the Sin of Sodom: Homosexuality, Inhospitality, or Something Else?: Reading Genesis 19 as Torah* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2016), 83–98.

detail the sexually charged message of Ezekiel 16 followed by a close exegetical analysis of 16:49–50. I will conclude that not only does the immediate context of chapter 16 point to the obvious sexual nature of Sodom's sin, but it also aids in understanding the prophet's rhetorical use of the Sodom reference. Finally, I will show that it is exegetically impossible to separate the sexual component of Sodom's sin from Ezekiel's argument especially when the meaning of the Hebrew term תועבה (*tō'ēvāl*), found in verse 50, is placed within the priestly purview of the exilic prophet-priest Ezekiel, a prophet who consistently relied on the Holiness Code of Leviticus to indict his wayward nation.

II. THE SEXUALLY EXPLICIT CONTENT OF CHAPTER 16

Long before the same-sex debate gained steam in recent years and affirming scholars hijacked Ezek 16:49 as the irrefutable evidence that Sodom's sin was non-sexual, Jewish rabbis struggled with how to handle the graphic sexual content of Ezekiel 16.¹⁰ Similarly, feminist scholars have also grappled with the “pornographic” nature of chapters 16 and 23.¹¹ It is easy to appreciate the concerns of these two groups of interpreters because almost from the beginning of the chapter, Ezekiel disparages Jerusalem—a synecdoche for all Judah/Israel—using some of the most lurid and sexually graphic language found within the Hebrew Bible.¹² In the following summary, I will highlight the specific terms and content that proves this very point.

1. *Jerusalem's origins/parentage.* By verse 2, YHWH tells Ezekiel to make known to Jerusalem all of her abominations (תועבת *tō'ēvōth*). The prophet also uses sexual

¹⁰ Mishnah *Megillah* 4:10; see Herbert Danby, *The Mishnah* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 207; and comments by Martin McNamara, “Interpretation of Scripture in the Targumim,” in *A History of Biblical Interpretation*, vol. 1: *The Ancient Period* (ed. Alan J. Hauser and Duane F. Watson; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 176; Margaret S. Odell, *Ezekiel* (Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary; Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2005), 184, 198; and Paul M. Joyce, *Ezekiel* (LHBOTS 482; London: T&T Clark, 2009), 131. See also Stiebert and Walsh, “Does the Hebrew Bible Have Anything to Say,” 129.

¹¹ See for example the work of J. Cheryl Exum, “Prophetic Pornography,” in *Plotted, Shot, and Painted: Cultural Representations of Biblical Women* (ed. J. Cheryl Exum; JSOTSup 215; Gender, Culture, Theory 3; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1996), 101–28; Mary Shields, “Multiple Exposures: Body Rhetoric and Gender Characterization in Ezekiel 16,” *JFSR* 14 (1998): 5–18; Carol J. Dempsey, “The ‘Whore’ of Ezekiel 16: The Impact and Ramifications of Gender-Specific Metaphors in Light of Biblical Law and Divine Judgment,” in *Gender and Law in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East* (ed. Victor H. Matthews et al.; JSOTSup 262; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998), 57–78; Linda Day, “Rhetoric and Domestic Violence in Ezekiel 16,” *BibInt* 8 (2000): 205–30; Peggy L. Day, “Adulterous Jerusalem's Imagined Demise: Death of a Metaphor in Ezekiel xvi,” *VT* 50 (2000): 285–309. See also Robert P. Carroll, “Whorusalem: A Tale of Three Cities as Three Sisters,” in *On Reading the Prophetic Texts: Gender Specific and Related Studies in Memory of Fokkelien van Dijk-Hemmes* (ed. Bob Becking and Meindert Dijkstra; BIS 18; Leiden: Brill, 1996), 67–82. On Ezekiel 23, see Fokkelien van Dijk-Hemmes, “The Metaphorization of Women in Prophetic Speech: An Analysis of Ezekiel xxiii,” *VT* 43 (1993): 162–70. See also the work of Julie Galambush, *Jerusalem in the Book of Ezekiel: The City as Yahweh's Wife* (SBLDS 130; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992); and J. A. Durlleser, *The Metaphorical Narratives in the Book of Ezekiel* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 2006), 103–43.

¹² While the focus in chapter 16 is Jerusalem, multiple times Ezekiel blends the metaphor by including all of Judah and Israel (during their early days) in his indictment. A common designation for God's covenanted people in Ezekiel is the “house of Israel,” which is used 83 times.

innuendo in verse 3 to disparage Jerusalem's origins, which were rooted in Canaanite culture.¹³ On top of this, in the same verse Ezekiel notes that Jerusalem's parentage is also tainted: she had an Amorite father and a Hittite mother (cf. 16:45).¹⁴ While one could argue that there is nothing *overtly* sexual in these opening lines, by the time the reader reaches verse 15 it becomes clear why the prophet chose to draw such connections early in the chapter. Canaanite culture was marred by sexual promiscuity and deviance (cf. Gen 9:22–27; Lev 18:3, 24–27; 20:22–24).¹⁵ Of course the Amorites and the Hittites, who dwelled in the land, were no better. In fact, these people were not only frequently lumped together with the Canaanites (Exod 3:8, 17, 13:5; 23:23; 33:2; 34:11; Num 13:29; etc.), they were sometimes synonymous with them (Deut 1:20; Amos 2:9–10).

2. *Jerusalem as the abandoned child.* In verses 4–9, Ezekiel continues the shocking language of the beginnings of Jerusalem by describing her as an unwanted and abandoned female child whom YHWH found in the wilderness and took care of.¹⁶ Adding to the explicit sexual acts of the Canaanites is also this unnatural act of parents abandoning their child. The fact that YHWH's bride had been the product of this troubled parentage makes it easier to understand her unnatural acts of abandoning her husband, YHWH: "like mother like daughter" (16:44). What is more, her behavior, along with that of her metaphorical parents, exemplified the breaking of God's natural order of Genesis 1 and 2. As we will see, Ezekiel picks up on this theme again in his comparative analysis of Jerusalem, Samaria, and Sodom later in the chapter.

When the foundling came of marriageable age, YHWH entered into a marriage covenant with her. Even the language used for her coming of age in verse 7 is sexually charged. Here Ezekiel describes her developed "breasts" (שָׁדַיִם *shādayim*; cf. Song 4:5; 7:4, 8, 9; 8:8, 10), the presence of her "pubic hair" (שַׁעַר *se'ar*; cf. Isa 7:20),¹⁷ and her state of "nakedness" (עָרֹם *'erōm*; cf. 16:8). This description in turn gives way to Ezekiel's depiction of Jerusalem as a beautiful bride whom YHWH had adorned with the finest of clothing and jewelry as they prepared for their wedding day and metaphorical consummation (vv. 10–13).¹⁸ In the midst of God's blessings heaped upon his bride, Jerusalem's beauty and fame had spread throughout the nations (v. 14). At this juncture one would think that all would end well for

¹³ At the time of David, Jerusalem was inhabited by Jebusites (2 Sam 5:6–9; 1 Chr 11:4–8).

¹⁴ On the possible interpretation of "Hittite" as "Hethite," see Bryant Wood, "Hittites and Hethites: A Proposed Solution to an Etymological Conundrum," *JETS* 54 (2011): 243–44, 250. See also comments by G. A. Cooke, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Ezekiel* (ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1960), 160–61; and Walther Eichrodt, *Ezekiel* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970), 204.

¹⁵ So, too, Walther Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 338.

¹⁶ The fact that the child is described as wallowing in her birth blood may reflect Ezekiel's priestly concerns about the contaminating aspects of blood (cf. Lev 12:1–8; 17:10–14).

¹⁷ See Moshe Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1–20* (AB 22; New York: Doubleday, 1983), 276; and Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, 339.

¹⁸ Galambush (*Jerusalem in the Book of Ezekiel*, 95) notes the similarities between the clothing and gifts YHWH lavished upon his bride and the tabernacle and temple materials. This is yet another connection between Ezekiel and the priestly tradition (see more below).

this foundling. However, it is here that the tone of the chapter pivots and Ezekiel employs some of the most sexually graphic language thus far.

3. *Jerusalem as the unfaithful wife/cultic unfaithfulness* (vv. 15–22). At verse 15, Ezekiel begins to describe how YHWH's bride had repaid the loving actions of her Husband: in her pride, she had trusted in her beauty and played the whore (זנה *zōnāh*) with all of her foreign lovers. (Here Ezekiel introduces the theme of pride, which will be highlighted as a key sin of Sodom in 16:49–50.) No less than twenty-one times in chapter 16 alone, Ezekiel uses some form of the root זנה to describe Jerusalem's actions.¹⁹ In this vein, Daniel Block notes that the use of זנה is an apt "description of Jerusalem's unrestrained nymphomaniacal adventures with her lovers."²⁰ This troubling picture of the bride's sexual wantonness included allowing any "passerby" (על-בלי-עובר; *al-kol-ōvēr*) to take sexual advantage of her. She also took some of her wedding gifts and made shrines where she played the whore (v. 16) and used other portions of her gifts to make for herself "male images"/"phallic symbols"²¹ (עלמי זכר *tsalmey zākār*, v. 17). S. Tamar Kamionkowski has seen in this latter notation a possible reference to male dildos, which YHWH's bride used for penetrating other men *and* women,²² thus further heightening her sexual perversion. In light of the sexually charged language in chapter 16, there can be little doubt that this is a double entendre used to demonstrate Jerusalem's perversion while also highlighting her literal fashioning of images for the purpose of idol worship (vv. 18–19; cf. Exod 32:2–4). Of course, in Canaan, idol worship, gross immorality, fertility rites, and child sacrifice went hand in hand (Gen 38:21; Numbers 25; Deut 23:17; 2 Kgs 23:7).²³

The theme of idol worship continues in verses 20–21 where YHWH upbraids his bride for cultic transgressions. During these rites she had sacrificed her children to pagan deities, thus depriving YHWH of his children. Even though Ezekiel is speaking metaphorically, there is also a literal aspect to this indictment in that the Israelites did in fact offer their literal children to foreign gods thus depriving YHWH of the next generation, which would never have an opportunity to serve him (cf. Ezek 20:26; Jer 7:31; 19:4–9). As I will demonstrate below, Ezekiel often appeals to the Holiness Code of Leviticus 17–26. The prohibitions against child sacrifice can be found specifically in the priestly teaching of chapters 18 and 20 (Lev 18:21; 20:2–5).

Ezekiel next heaps scorn upon the unfaithful wife by labelling her sins as abominations (תועבות *tō'evōt*) and whorings (תזנות *taẓnūt*), while reminding her that she had failed to remember how YHWH had rescued her during her early days of being naked (ערם *'erōm*), bare (עריה *'eryāh*), and destitute in the wilderness (v. 22).

¹⁹ Cf. 16:15 (2x), 16–17, 20, 22, 25, 26 (2x), 28 (2x), 29, 30, 31, 33 (2x), 34 (2x), 35–36, 41.

²⁰ Daniel Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 1–24* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 465.

²¹ Joyce, *Ezekiel*, 132. So, too, Robert W. Jenson, *Ezekiel* (Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible; Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2009), 130; Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, 207; and Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1–20*, 280.

²² S. Tamar Kamionkowski, "Gender Reversal in Ezekiel 16," in *Prophets and Daniel* (ed. Athalya Brenner; Feminist Companion to the Bible [Second Series] 8; New York: Sheffield Academic, 2001), 178 n. 27.

²³ Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, 210.

The use of the generic term for evil (רע *ra'*) sums up Jerusalem's wickedness and encapsulates the sexually charged language up to this point (v. 23; cf. 16:57). It also serves as a transition to the next section of the chapter.

4. *The bride's sexual wantonness/political unfaithfulness through foreign alliances* (vv. 24–34). One could argue that up until this point Ezekiel has been “tame” with his use of sexual innuendo and double entendre; however, from verse 24 onward, Ezekiel begins to use language that is both sexually explicit, and extremely graphic in content.²⁴ This is evidenced by the vocabulary used in verses 25 and 26. Not only does the verbal form of תועבה appear (i.e. תעב *tā'uv*; “to commit abominations”) when describing how YHWH's unfaithful wife had made her beauty an abomination, but the prophet also notes that she had built platforms/pavilions in the market place (v. 24) and at the head of every street (v. 25). On these platforms she had positioned herself with her legs (רגלים *raglayim*) spread apart (פשא *pāša*) for every passerby to take a look and/or have illicit sexual relations with her.²⁵ In particular, she multiplied her harlotries before God (v. 26) by whoring after her Egyptian neighbors who, the prophet says, have “large flesh” (גדלי בשר *gidley bāšār*; i.e. penises).²⁶ The actions of YHWH's wife were so vile that even her Philistine neighbors were offended at her “lewdness” (זמה *zimmāh*; v. 27; cf. 16:43, 58; Lev 18:17; 19:29; 20:14), another sexually charged term.²⁷

Typical of her nymphomaniacal behavior, YHWH's wife's sexual liaisons with Egypt were not enough to satisfy (שבע *sāva'*) her so she added to her whoring by going after the Assyrians (v. 28) and the Babylonians (v. 29). In her arrogance, pride, and utter depravity she lacked even a basic level of shame as she behaved as a “brazen whore” (זונה שלטת *zōnāh šallāteth*; v. 30). What is more, when she bared herself in the streets and open square on her raised platforms she was worse than a whore, because at least whores get paid for their services (v. 31). In her perversity (הפך *hēphek*), she refused payment and instead paid her lovers to have sex with her (v. 33–34)! Indeed, this adulterous wife was a woman who preferred strangers (זרים *zārīm*) over her own husband (v. 32). One could argue that even at this juncture there is some affinity with the Sodom narrative in Genesis 19 because, like YHWH's wife, the men of Sodom went after strangers for the purpose of sex as opposed to remaining faithful to their wives (Gen 19:5).²⁸

5. *Judgment pronounced on the bride.* Having indicted his wife using the most graphic and lurid terms, YHWH now pronounces judgment on her by again addressing her as a whore (v. 35). Because of her “poured out”²⁹ lewdness (נחשת *n'chōsheth*),³⁰ child sacrifice, and because she uncovered her nakedness (עורה *'erwāh*)

²⁴ See a similar assessment by Block, *Ezekiel 1–24*, 467.

²⁵ Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1–20*, 271.

²⁶ Odell, *Ezekiel*, 192; and Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1–20*, 283.

²⁷ Donald J. Wold, *Out of Order* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 88; and Cooke, *Ezekiel*, 171.

²⁸ Peterson, *What was the Sin of Sodom?*, 61–63.

²⁹ Joyce (*Ezekiel*, 132) suggests that in the context the verb שפך (*shāphak*) may refer to “female ejaculation.” So, too, Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1–20*, 285.

³⁰ For the meaning of נחשת, Greenberg (*Ezekiel 1–20*, 285–86) points to the Akkadian cognate *naḥšāti* from the root *nḥš*, which means “be abundant, overflowing.”

in the presence of all of her lovers and abominable (תועבות *tō'evōth*) idols (v. 36), God will gather her lovers, even the ones she was not so fond of, and he will strip her in their presence—a sign of divorce in the OT and the ANE³¹ (cf. 23:10, 18, 29; Deut 28:48; Jer 13:22; Hos 2:3, 9–10; Lam 1:8–9; Isa 47:2–3; Nah 3:5–6)—revealing her nakedness (ערוה *'erwah*) for all to see (v. 37). Interestingly, the use of ערוה appears most frequently in Leviticus 18 and 20 to describe sexually deviant behavior such as incest and sex with a menstruating woman. As we will see below, Sodom's sexually deviant behavior fits perfectly within the context of Ezekiel's indictment of YHWH's unfaithful wife.

Next, YHWH will judge his wife according to the judgments of those who commit adultery (נאף *na'aph*) and shed innocent blood (v. 38). In verse 39 the reader finds out *how* YHWH will “strip” his wife; he will allow her foreign lovers to do it. They will tear down her pavilions and platforms, strip her and leave her bare (עירם *'eyrom*) and naked (עריה *'eryah*).³² Then they will stone her, cut her with swords (v. 40),³³ and burn her houses causing other women³⁴ to fear, thus bringing an end of the payments to her lovers (v. 41). By these actions YHWH's anger will be assuaged (v. 42). It is only through judgment that YHWH's bride will learn not to commit her lewdness (זמה *zimmah*) and many other abominations (תועבות *tō'evōth*; v. 43).

6. *Jerusalem compared to her “sisters.”* At this juncture, Ezekiel returns to the motif of origins found in verse 3. Jerusalem was just like her metaphorical “sisters” who also had been unfaithful (i.e. Samaria to the north and Sodom to the south, v. 46). Like her sisters, she was indeed the daughter of a Hittite mother and Amorite father, thus having Canaanite origins (v. 45; cf. 16:3). They all had learned ungodly traits from their metaphorical parents. Beyond the trait of sexual promiscuity typi-

³¹ See the discussion by Brian Neil Peterson, *Ezekiel in Context* (PTMS 182; Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2012), 210–18 and the numerous sources cited there. For a discussion against the belief that stripping was a sign of divorce in the ANE, see Ryan C. Hanley, “The Background and Practice of Stripping the Adulteress in Hosea 2,” *JETS* 60 (2017): 90–96. Hanley argues that the stripping metaphor (specifically as found in Hosea 2) is rooted in the covenant curses of Deut 28:48 where YHWH removes all of his provision from the people as they go into exile. See also Steven Tuell, *Ezekiel* (NIBC 15; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2009), 90–92.

³² Jerusalem will be returned to her former state before YHWH found her in the wilderness (16:4–6). See Tuell, *Ezekiel*, 90.

³³ Defacing/mutilation was a common punishment for an unfaithful spouse in Neo-Babylonian marriage contracts. See Walter Kornfeld, “L'adultère dans l'orient antique,” *RB* 57 (1950): 93–96; Samuel Greengus, “A Textbook Case of Adultery in Ancient Mesopotamia,” *HUCA* 40 (1969): 41–42, esp. 41 n. 25; Martha T. Roth, “She Will Die by the Iron Dagger: Adultery and Neo-Babylonian Marriage,” *JESHO* 31 (1988): 187–92; idem, *Babylonian Marriage Agreements 7th–3rd Centuries B.C.* (AOAT 222; Kevelaer: Butzon & Bercker, 1989), 38, 40, 45, 46, 48, 49, 70, 93, 99; Raymond Westbrook, “Adultery in Ancient Near Eastern Law,” *RB* 97 (1990): 562; Sophie Lafont, *Femmes, droit et justice dans l'antiquité orientale: contribution à l'étude du droit pénal au Proche-Orient ancien* (OBO 165; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999), 80–85; Elisabeth M. Tetlow, *Women, Crime, and Punishment in Ancient Law and Society*, vol. 1: *The Ancient Near East* (New York: Continuum, 2004), 110, 135, 137, 166–67; 205–19; Peterson, *Ezekiel in Context*, 214–16; and *ANET* 181–82. See also J. J. Finkelstein, “Sex Offences in Sumerian Laws,” *JAOs* 86 (1966): 372.

³⁴ The use of “women” in the context is referring to cities, not actual women.

cal of the Canaanites as noted above, the metaphorical child (i.e. Jerusalem) had been abandoned by her parents as an infant. The God-given natural order of parents protecting their children had been spurned (16:3–5).³⁵ Similarly, Sodom had rejected the God-given natural order of heterosexual coupling opting for that which was against nature (cf. Rom 1:26–27). Therefore, because of these ungodly influences, a proverb will be recited in the land: “like mother, like daughter” (v. 44).

In the immediate context, it is clear that Ezekiel is paralleling the sexually graphic metaphor used throughout chapter 16 with the depravity of both Samaria and Sodom and their “sisters” (i.e. the other cities surrounding Sodom and Samaria³⁶). Indeed, Jerusalem had learned her abominations (תועבות *tō’evōth*) from her “sisters,” and had even become more depraved than they had been (vv. 47–48, 51).³⁷ Both Samaria and Sodom had broken the “covenants” of God. Like Samaria, Jerusalem was guilty of breaking the Sinai/spiritual covenant. And like Sodom, she had broken the natural order of Genesis (i.e. sexually, socially, and maritally; cf. vv. 49–50) both metaphorically and by the actual sexual sins of the people (cf. Ezek 18:10–13; 22:9–11; 33:26). By using the plural term for abomination (תועבות *tō’evōth*) twice in verse 51 and its verbal form (תעב *tā’uv*) once in verse 52, Ezekiel points out that the abominations of YHWH’s bride excelled those of Sodom and Samaria making them appear righteous by comparison.

7. *Final words and a message of hope.* Despite the coming judgment on YHWH’s bride, YHWH promises that he will restore the captivity of Samaria, Sodom, and Jerusalem (vv. 53, 55). In doing so, Jerusalem will recognize her evil and bear the reproach of her sin and be a lesson to those around her (v. 54). Even though Jerusalem, in her pride, had mocked the plight of Sodom in the past (v. 56; cf. Gen 19:1–29), now Syria and Philistia would deride her because Jerusalem’s evil (רעה *rā’āb*) had been uncovered (v. 57), and she had borne the outcome of her lewdness (זמה *zimmāb*) and abominations (תועבות *tō’evōth*; v. 58).³⁸ As a result of that lewdness, YHWH will judge her because she had despised the oath of the covenant (v. 59); yet in the end he will restore the everlasting covenant with her (vv. 60, 62) and give her Samaria and Sodom as “daughters” so that she will remember her shameful past and rebel no more (vv. 61, 63).³⁹

III. THE SINS OF SODOM VIS-À-VIS JERUSALEM: EZEKIEL’S RHETORIC IN 16:49–50

As noted above, Ezekiel uses Sodom and Samaria as literary foils in order to draw a comparison between them and the vileness of YHWH’s bride, Jerusalem.

³⁵ Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1–20*, 288.

³⁶ See also Cooke, *Ezekiel*, 177.

³⁷ A detailed analysis of vv. 49 and 50 will be provided in the next section.

³⁸ Note also Lev 19:29; Job 31:11; Jer 13:27; Ezek 22:11; 23:21, 49. Interestingly, Prov 21:27 and 24:29 actually use *tō’evāb* and *zimmāb* in parallelistic lines, further confirming the sexual nature of these words.

³⁹ The use of the verb כפר (*kaphar*) in verse 63 recalls the priestly language in Lev 16:1–34 used on the Day of Atonement.

On the one hand, Samaria served as the perfect comparative city when it came to the spiritual/covenantal context found in the Sinai tradition. On the other hand, Sodom functioned as the ideal parallel for Jerusalem's social and sexual depravity—both metaphorical and real—in relation to the creation covenant rooted in Genesis 1 and 2.⁴⁰ With these ideas in mind, it is vital to our discussion to understand exactly which sins of Sodom Ezekiel is addressing in verses 49–50. After all, as noted in the introduction, it is verse 49 (and in the odd case, v. 50), to which affirming scholars turn in support of their interpretations of the non-sexual nature of Sodom's sin. In light of this position, the discussion that follows will focus on the rhetorical use of Sodom in the immediate context. While Ezekiel had already introduced Sodom in verses 46 and 48, it is in verse 49 that the prophet begins to list Sodom's sin.

In verse 49, Ezekiel notes that Sodom was prideful (נָאֵץ *gā'ôn*) and had plenty of food but in her state of careless ease did not help the poor and needy. Based upon this one verse, affirming scholars' assertions of the non-sexual nature of Sodom's sins seem to have a solid basis. Here one can see that Sodom's sins were obviously against society (i.e. social injustice). However, when verse 49 is taken out of context like this, scholars not only miss the sexually graphic nature of chapter 16, as demonstrated above, but frequently also fail to note that the list of Sodom's sins continues into the next verse. Despite this oversight—whether it is intentional or not cannot be determined—one could argue that Sodom's sin of pride (נָאֵץ *gā'ôn*),⁴¹ the first sin mentioned by the prophet in verse 49, may in fact reflect, or at least include, acts against God's natural order of sexuality (cf. Isa 3:9–16⁴²) and marriage (Gen 1:27–28; 2:24).⁴³

Even if one refuses to accept such a reading, verse 50 continues the list of Sodom's sins, which actually includes sexual deviance.⁴⁴ Moreover, much like the sin of pride noted at the beginning of verse 49, verse 50 also begins by mentioning that Sodom was prideful/arrogant (גְּבַהַּ *gā'aval*), which once again led to sin. In this case, God declares through the prophet that the sin Sodom had committed was an “abomination” (תּוֹעֵבָה *tō'ēvāh*) “before my face” (לְפָנַי *l'phānāy*).⁴⁵ The connections with the Holiness Code of Leviticus 17–26 must not be overlooked. Ezekiel uses

⁴⁰ Jenson (*Ezekiel*, 133) posits that Ezekiel may be drawing a “causal relation of sexual chaos to general civil disintegration.” This is indeed a part of the picture that Ezekiel is painting.

⁴¹ It is ironic that modern same-sex marches and celebrations are done under the banner of “Pride Week” or “Pride Parades,” etc.

⁴² Cf. Otto Kaiser, *Isaiah 1–12* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972), 42; Joseph A. Alexander, *Commentary on the Prophecies of Isaiah* (10th ed., Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980), 114; and Brevard Childs, *Isaiah* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 2001), 33.

⁴³ See Peterson, “Sin of Sodom Revisited,” 25.

⁴⁴ Contra Joyce, *Ezekiel*, 133; and Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, 215. Eichrodt posits two separate traditions behind Genesis 19 and Ezekiel 16: one rife with sexual deviance, and the other focused on social injustices. Because of his commitment to source critical theory, Eichrodt has failed to make the proper connections to Leviticus 18 and 20 and the general graphic sexual content of Ezekiel 16. Zimmerli (*Ezekiel 1, 350*) is no doubt correct when he notes that Ezekiel is just adapting the Genesis tradition for his needs.

⁴⁵ Elsewhere I note that in Genesis 13:13 (cf. 20:6; 39:9), Sodom's “sin against God” has sexual connotations as well (*What Was the Sin of Sodom?*, 34–35).

תועבה (*tô'evāh*) in the singular even though he has used the plural form throughout chapter 16 when speaking of Jerusalem's sins (vv. 2, 22, 36, 43, 50, 51 [2x], 58). By using the singular form, he appears to be making an intentional link to the sexual code of Leviticus 18 and 20 as found within the Holiness Code. In Leviticus 18 and 20 (see 18:22; 20:13), it is only homosexuality that is described as an "abomination" (תועבה *tô'evāh*)—in the singular—before God.⁴⁶ Any of the other sexual sins in Leviticus 18 and 20 that are labeled an abomination use תועבות (*tô'evōth*) in the plural (cf. Lev 18:26, 27, 29, 30).⁴⁷

Despite these distinctions in Leviticus and Ezekiel 16, many of the modern translations of Ezek 16:50 have not aided in bringing clarity to Ezekiel's rhetorical intent in the context. In this vein, I have noted elsewhere the difficulties of modern translations of verse 50:

In Ezekiel 16:50, the NASB translators, perhaps following the Greek translators of the LXX (who render *tô'evāh* by the plural term *anomemata*) confuse the translation by making *tô'evāh* a plural. Their translation reads: "Thus they were haughty and committed *abominations* before Me. Therefore I removed them when I saw *it*." Similarly, the NIV translates this verse as: "They were haughty and did *detestable things* before me. Therefore I did away with them as you have seen." The New Living Translation and the New Revised Standard Version render the key word as "loathsome things" and "abominable things" respectively. Interestingly, the closest translations to the actual Hebrew are the King James Version, the English Standard Version, and the Tanakh. Each of these translations render *tô'evāh* in the singular as "abomination"; however, the ESV is even more precise by translating it as "an abomination."⁴⁸

Because of the translational confusion of this verse, affirming scholars have missed the focus of Ezekiel which centers on both the social and the sexual nature of Sodom's sins, sins that Jerusalem was guilty of as well, as we will see below. When God saw these sins, especially the sexual depravity of Sodom, he "removed them," that is, he destroyed their city (Ezek 16:50). Not surprisingly, Jerusalem suffered the same fate!

Finally, even though some may suggest that תועבה (*tô'evāh*) serves as an all-encompassing designation for Sodom's sins as listed in verse 49, this does not seem likely for at least three reasons. First, both verses 49 and 50 begin by noting the pride/arrogance of Sodom. As such, it appears that Ezekiel was trying to highlight the two main groupings of Sodom's sin; those social (v. 49) and those sexual (v. 50). Second, if Ezekiel wanted to use תועבה (*tô'evāh*) in an all-encompassing manner for Sodom's many sins, then why did he not use the plural form as he had done throughout chapter 16 when speaking of Jerusalem's collective sins? After all, this is exactly what Ezekiel does in 18:10–13. After listing a variety of Jerusalem's sins in verses 10–11, Ezekiel uses the singular תועבה (*tô'evāh*) in verse 12 to address a

⁴⁶ See also Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1–20*, 289.

⁴⁷ So, too, the conclusion of Robert Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2001), 83–84.

⁴⁸ Peterson, *What Was the Sin of Sodom?*, 88–89; idem, "Sin of Sodom Revisited," 21.

specific sexual sin; however he then uses the plural of תועבה in verse 13 to encompass *all* of Jerusalem's sins. It is obvious that something more was in play when Ezekiel penned 16:49–50: he wanted to point out *both* aspects of Sodom's sin: it is not either-or, but both-and.⁴⁹ Third, it is wrongheaded to assume that Sodom's sins were only related to social injustice. Sodom's sins were many but it was the sexually deviant component that brought about judgment upon the city. Ezekiel notes this in the last clause of verse 50; the Sodom account itself testifies to the fact that deviant sexuality brought down God's judgment on Sodom (Gen 19:12–13; cf. Judges 19); and the author of Leviticus notes that it was sexual sins that caused the Canaanites to be spewed from the land (18:3, 24–30; 20:22–24).

To summarize, when the prophet sought a parallel to Jerusalem's breaking of the Sinai covenant, Samaria was most suitable. Ezekiel makes this clear in chapter 23 where Jerusalem and Samaria appear as sisters who broke covenant with God. When Ezekiel was searching for a foil for the sexual depravity of YHWH's metaphorical wife, Sodom was the obvious choice. Yet, YHWH's wife, Jerusalem, had excelled beyond the sins of both Samaria and Sodom. Indeed, she should have known better because YHWH's house was in her very midst! Therefore, rhetorically Ezekiel appears to be using Sodom in order to draw a comparison with Jerusalem's sexual depravity both metaphorically and literally. Indeed, the Canaanite roots of both Jerusalem and Sodom help to highlight the propensity of both to sin sexually (cf. Gen 9:20–27; 19:5).⁵⁰ Also, in the same way that careless ease had fostered sexual depravity in Sodom, so, too, the careless ease (spiritually and socially) with which the house of Israel had lived after YHWH had blessed her in the wilderness and during the monarchy (e.g. Solomon's reign), had led to spiritual and literal sexual deviance.

IV. EZEKIEL'S USE OF THE HOLINESS CODE

Before concluding this study it is important to point out the evidence that Ezekiel did in fact use the Holiness Code, and specifically Leviticus 18 and 20, when addressing the sins of Jerusalem and Sodom. Scholars have long noted the reality that Ezekiel relied on some form of the Holiness Code when indicting the house of Israel.⁵¹ Many times this discussion revolves around the similarity in language and themes between the books. This is evident in the discussion immediately above where I noted that the singular use of תועבה (*tô'evah*) in 16:50 has linguistic

⁴⁹ See a similar conclusion in Richard Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh: Sexuality in the Old Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007), 162.

⁵⁰ So, too, the conclusion of Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1*, 349.

⁵¹ See Menahem Haran, "The Law Code of Ezekiel XL–XLVIII and Its Relation to the Priestly School," *HUCA* 50 (1979): 45–71 esp. 47, 53, 61; Avi Hurvitz, *A Linguistic Study of the Relationship between the Priestly Source and the Book of Ezekiel* (Paris: Gabalda, 1982); John F. Kutsko, *Between Heaven and Earth: Divine Presence and Absence in the Book of Ezekiel* (BJSUCSD 7; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2000), 11–12; Ka Leung Wong, *The Idea of Retribution in the Book of Ezekiel* (VTSup 87; Leiden: Brill, 2001), 78–195; Risa Levitt Kohn, *A New Heart and a New Soul: Ezekiel, the Exile, and the Torah* (JSOTSup 358; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2002), 35–37, 42–47; and Peterson, *Ezekiel in Context*, 63–68. Note also the comments of Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh*, 297–375; and Gagnon, *Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 90.

affinities with its use in Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13.⁵² In the book of Ezekiel, תועבה is used a total of 43 times.⁵³ Although the prophet uses both the singular and the plural forms of תועבה for sexual and non-sexual sins, he only uses the singular form when sexual sins are in view (cf. 16:50; 18:12; 22:11; 33:26).⁵⁴ Again, elsewhere I have pointed out this fact:

Ezekiel uses the word *to'evab* elsewhere in his book in very specific ways related to sexual ethics. For example, Ezekiel uses the singular form of *to'evab* in 22:11 and 33:26 specifically where sexual sins are the focus. The text of 22:11 reads: "And one has committed abomination [*to'evab*] with his neighbor's wife, and another has lewdly [*zimmab*] defiled his daughter-in-law. And another in you has humbled his sister, his father's daughter" (NASB). In this verse, three sexual sins are highlighted: adultery (cf. Lev 18:20; 20:10), sex with a daughter-in-law (cf. Lev 18:15; 20:12), and incest with one's sister (cf. Lev 18:9, 11; 20:17). All three are handled in Leviticus 18 and 20. As a matter of fact, only these two chapters in the OT handle all three topics in the same chapter! Similarly, Ezekiel 33:26 again highlights abomination in the singular (*to'evab*) and committing adultery with a neighbor's wife. These examples point to the reality that Ezekiel used the Levitical sexual laws as the basis for his indictment not only of Israel but also of Sodom.⁵⁵

It is therefore evident that Ezekiel was indicting both Jerusalem and Sodom for sexual depravity when he employed the singular form of תועבה. What is more, it is clear based upon his use of תועבה in verse 50 that homosexuality was a central problem/sin that caused God to "remove" Sodom.⁵⁶ Because some may still argue that one word is not enough to draw a connection between the Holiness Code and Ezek 16:50, I will conclude this section by examining three other linguistic links related to sexual impropriety found in Leviticus 18, 20, and Ezekiel 16 (and 23).

1. *Erwab*. The motif of YHWH's wife's "nakedness" (ערוה; cf. עירם and עריה)⁵⁷ appears multiple times in Ezekiel 16. The dominant term for nakedness, ערוה (*erwah*), appears 32 times in Leviticus 18 and 20 (6, 7 [3x], 8 [2x], 9 [2x], 10 [3x], 11 [2x], 12, 13, 14, 15 [2x], 16 [2x], 17 [2x], 18, 19; 20:11, 17 [3x], 18, 19, 20, 21) and seven times in Ezekiel 16 and 23 (16:8, 36, 37 [2x]; 23:10, 18, 29). Interestingly,

⁵² So, too, S. Donald Fortson III and Rollin G. Grams, *Unchanging Witness: The Consistent Christian Teaching on Homosexuality in Scripture and Tradition* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2016), 200–201.

⁵³ תועבה used in the plural form: 5:9, 11; 6:9, 11; 7:3, 4, 8, 9, 20; 8:6 [2x], 9, 13, 15, 17; 9:4; 11:18, 21; 12:16; 14:6; 16:2, 22, 36, 43, 47, 51 [2x], 58; 18:13, 24; 20:4; 22:2; 23:36; 33:29; 36:31; 43:8; 44:6, 7, 13. תועבה used in the singular form: 16:50; 18:12; 22:11; 33:26.

⁵⁴ The use of תועבה in Ezek 18:12 falls within a list of social, idolatrous, and sexual sins as noted in verses 11–13.

⁵⁵ Peterson, *What Was the Sin of Sodom?*, 92. See also Fortson and Grams, *Unchanging Witness*, 199–201.

⁵⁶ Contra Odell, *Ezekiel*, 203n.26.

⁵⁷ The derivative terms עירם and עריה appear four times each in Ezekiel 16 and 23 (16:7, 22, 39; 23:29) but not in Leviticus.

the four chapters in the Hebrew Bible where ערוה appears the most frequently are Leviticus 18, 20 and Ezekiel 16 and 23.⁵⁸

2. *Zimmāh*. Ezekiel uses the word זמה (*zimmāh*; “lewdness”) to denote the sexual depravity of YHWH’s bride. The prophet uses it three times in chapter 16 (16:27, 43, 58; cf. Jer 13:27) and eight times in the parallel chapter of 23 (cf. Ezek 23:21, 27, 29, 35, 44, 48 [2x], 49). In Ezek 22:9, 11, and 24:13 Ezekiel also uses זמה to denote sexual lewdness. Not surprisingly, this term appears in Leviticus 18–20 five times (18:17; 19:29; 20:6, 14 [2x]). Once again, it is Leviticus and Ezekiel which use this term the most in the entire Hebrew Bible.

3. *Nā’aph*. Ezekiel uses the verbal form of נאף (*nā’aph*) to note the adulterous acts of YHWH’s wife. The verb appears six times in Ezekiel 16 and 23 (16:32, 38; 23:37 [2x]; 23:45 [2x]).⁵⁹ Prohibitions for this act (using the same verb) appear not only in the Ten Commandments (Exod 20:14) but also four times in Lev 20:10. While Jeremiah (3:8, 9; 5:7; 7:9; 9:2; 23:10, 14; 29:23) and Hosea (3:1; 4:2, 13, 14; 7:4) employ the verb נאף in their unfaithful wife metaphor and throughout their books, it is in the specific chapters of Ezekiel 16, 23, and Leviticus 20 where the verb נאף appears with the most frequency.

It is evident that the linguistic links between Ezekiel 16 (and 23) and the Holiness Code, and specifically the sexual laws of Leviticus 18 and 20, point to literary dependence. There can be little doubt that when Ezekiel wrote chapter 16 that he had Leviticus 18 and 20 in mind. Similarly, when it came to noting Sodom’s sins, the prophet took special care to point out that they had also committed an abomination against God, namely, same-sex acts. It was these acts that caused God to remove them from his sight (16:50; cf. Gen 19:1–29). Of course, YHWH’s wife, Jerusalem, met a similar fate as God removed her inhabitants from his sight to the land of Babylon. Finally, and as noted above, it should be no surprise that Ezekiel begins chapter 16 by focusing on Jerusalem’s origins in Canaanite culture, a culture rife with sexually deviant acts. Interestingly, the author of Leviticus 18 also begins his list of sexual prohibitions by noting that these sexual sins were practiced by the Canaanites, sins that had caused them to be spewed from the land (Lev 18:3, 24–30; 20:22–24; cf. 16:50). This is yet another link to the Holiness Code of Leviticus.

V. CONCLUSION

At this point, it is possible to draw together some conclusions based upon the analysis carried out above. First, affirming scholars who propound that Ezekiel stressed only Sodom’s social crimes against God—while excluding the homosexual

⁵⁸ The term appears three times in Genesis 9 in the account of Ham’s sin against his father Noah. Not surprisingly, this chapter has also been interpreted with homosexual connotations. See, e.g., Devoran Steinmetz, “Vineyard, Farm, and Garden: The Drunkenness of Noah in the Context of Primeval History,” *JBL* 113 (1994): 198; Nissinen, *Homeropticism*, 53; Wold, *Out of Order*, 65–76; O. Palmer Robertson, “Current Critical Questions Concerning the ‘Curse of Ham’ (Gen 9:20–27),” *JETS* 41 (1998): 179–80; Gagnon, *Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 63–71; and Peterson, *What Was the Sin of Sodom?*, 45–48.

⁵⁹ In Jeremiah, the contemporary of Ezekiel, the priestly prophet also indicts the nation for similar acts of adultery using the same verb (3:8, 9; 5:7; 7:9; 9:2; 23:10, 14; 29:23).

component—are not only wrong, they are misleading their readers. To be sure, many of their readers either may not be familiar with the text of Ezekiel 16 and/or they may not be able to work with the Hebrew text. Of course, this may also be true of some of the affirming scholars who actually cite the passage to begin with! Second, the graphic sexual language of Ezekiel 16 pushes one to conclude that Ezekiel used the city of Sodom as a rhetorical foil in order to draw a parallel between the sexual deviance of YHWH's wife and the sexual deviance of Sodom. Third, the linguistic parallels between the Holiness Code and Ezekiel—specifically in relation to the sexual laws of Leviticus 18 and 20—make it almost certain that the priestly prophet drew upon this priestly source when he wrote chapter 16 (and 23).

In light of these findings, it is time for affirming scholars to cease touting Ezekiel 16 as irrefutable evidence for the non-sexual sins of the men of Sodom. If anything is true, it is that both Sodom and Jerusalem met a similar fate *because of* sexually deviant behavior and the rejection of God's commands. While Ezekiel may have stressed the metaphorical nature of Jerusalem's adulterous deviance—*notwithstanding* the actual sexually deviant acts perpetrated by her inhabitants—Sodom's careless ease fostered sexual deviancy, which had brought a form of destruction upon the city that would be used throughout the Bible as a warning of what complete destruction looked like when people violate and flout the creation ordinances established by God in Genesis 1 and 2.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ Peterson, *What Was the Sin of Sodom?*, 97, 111.