

# **RAW MATERIAL**

## **STUDIES IN BIBLICAL SEXUALITY**

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### **Chapter 13**

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## Size Matters

### A Mercifully Short Chapter

The subject of this chapter is male genital size. This may seem a crass and inappropriate topic for the sacred text or an exposition of the sacred text, even in a book like this. Therefore we will keep this short and to the point.

In these modern times men are often advised that, “size does not matter.” The reason for the repeated assurance is because there is a widespread feeling that size matters very much anyway. Did this obsession exist in the Biblical world? Yes, though it received little notice in the Bible. It was used to illustrate the shallowness and crassness of a character.

Solomon was succeeded by his son Rehoboam, who was approached by a delegation demanding reforms from the new king. The king’s older advisors who served his father advised the king to make some concessions to the petitioners. The young advisors to the king, however, advised force instead of negotiations. They told the king to say, “My little finger is larger than my father’s ‘thigh’.” Rehoboam did not go so far as to repeat this tidbit to the petitioners, though he did follow the younger advice, with disastrous consequences.

“Thigh” is a euphemism for the penis, and Rehoboam’s friends claimed that the new king was more of a man than his father by belittling his father’s genital endowment compared to Rehoboam’s. Masculinity and power are tied directly to genital size, among shallow, vain people such as Rehoboam and his young advisors. Remember Rehoboam’s losses when he followed the advice of these callow youths. In its way, this story confirms the modern wisdom that genital size is not what matters.

The Book of Ezekiel has some of the crassest passages in the Bible — intentionally crass passages. The nearest competitor to Ezekiel for crassness is the book of Judges. Two of Ezekiel’s messages touch the size issue. In chapters 16 and 23 Ezekiel describes the history of Israel and Judah in graphic sexual terms. Adulteries and fornications abound as metaphors for idolatry and political alliances with outside powers. In chapter 23 the paramours are described as stately, “riding horses” (23:6,12,23). In the midst of these equine references is another one used to describe the lust of Judah for foreign powers. “And she doted on her lovers there, who have the flesh (*basar*; בָּשָׂר) of donkeys and the ejaculate (*zirmah*; זִרְמָה) of horses” (23:20).

“Flesh” in this verse is a euphemism for the penis, probably as phallus. In 16:26 the Egyptian lovers of the adulterous Israel are described as being of “great flesh.” Based on 23:20, the earlier verse is also often understood as describing the genital size of the Egyptians. *Zirmah* comes from the root meaning “pour” or “flow.” Most scholars understand it to mean ejaculate/semen here, though some understand it to mean rod/phallus.

Ezekiel uses a variety of images to describe the lusts of Israel and Judah. Only one of the images was a hankering for men with large phalluses. All of Ezekiel’s images in chapters 16 and 23 are crass, this being one of the more extreme ones. In spite of these extremes, it is well to note that Ezekiel stuck to euphemisms to make his point. Even when discussing genital size with an eye to crassness, propriety insisted on euphemism.

When Ezekiel belittles Judah and Israel, he uses a metaphorical fascination with genital size. How foolish and shallow they were. We are so much more advanced today.