



# TRUTH ON TOUGH TEXTS

EXPOSITIONS OF CHALLENGING SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

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## PERPLEXING PASSAGES (2)

### SELECTED TEXTS

**B**ACK IN ISSUE 113 (JULY/AUG. 2018), WE BEGAN A new category of TOTT articles that combines the other two categories: a “tough text” (or important topic) and reader questions. This installment addresses three topics.

#### Was David an Illegitimate Son?

Does that section title shock you? Back in August of 2016, I stumbled across an article on the Internet titled, “King David’s Big, Dark Secret,” in which the author (who gave only his name and theological bent) postulated that David was actually the illegitimate son of his “unknown” mother who had committed adultery. This theory, however, has actually long been based on Jewish tradition and faulty exegesis of two biblical texts, all of which we will get to in a moment.

I was so struck by this article that I did something I had never done before and have not done since—I posted a comment. (I know, why do that? Please forgive me.) My only excuse is the grief that I felt over such completely unsubstantiated conjecture and pointlessness. Here is my comment:

If I may encourage you, and I do not mean to offend, but such conjecture is fruitless discussion (1 Tim. 1:6). For one thing, you are giving Jewish commentaries far too much credibility. Plus, if this totally groundless theory were true, then David would have been a bastard and would not have been allowed to enter into the congregation of the Lord (Deut. 23:2), which he did do, of course, many times with great delight (Ps. 42:4). This entire conjectural theory has been discredited long before now, and I would encourage you to pursue more edifying exposition of what the text of Scripture, and that alone, declares.

The author was quite gracious in his reply, even writing: “It is a very valid point and got me thinking some more about this issue.” In the end, however, it only prompted another article, not to mention a whole plethora of other comments on the original post praising the author for this “fascinating and little known knowledge.” So, where does this idea come from?

Well, *first*, Scripture nowhere states the name of David’s mother, but a Jewish legend names her as Nitzevet. Some scholars believe David’s sisters, Abigail and Zeruah, might

have actually been his *half*-sisters, their father not being Jesse but Nahash, an Ammonite king (1 Sam. 11:1). Second Samuel 17:25 does, in fact, state that Abigail was the daughter of Nahash, although some “rabbis maintain that Nahash is another name for Jesse, David’s father.”<sup>1</sup> It is then speculated that David’s mother had been married to king Nahash when she bore the half-sisters and then later became Jesse’s second wife, which in-turn implies that David’s mother was not yet married to Jesse when she became pregnant, that she was, in fact, still married to Nahash when David was conceived.

Concerning Nitzevet specifically, we find her not in Scripture but only in the Talmud (the Jewish commentaries on the Torah). Again, based on pure speculation, it seems her husband, Jesse, doubted the purity of his ancestry because he was the grandson of Ruth the Moabitess (Ruth 4:17). He therefore stopped having marital relations with Nitzevet after she had given birth to their seventh son and planned instead to marry his Canaanite maidservant. Taking pity on Nitzevet, however, the servant hatched a plan much like the one Nathan hatched against Jacob by substituting Leah for Rachael (Gen. 29:17). The servant’s plan was to secretly on her wedding night switch places with Nitzevet so the latter could sleep with Jesse one more time. The plan worked and Nitzevet became pregnant with David, her eighth son. Nitzevet, of course, never revealed to Jesse what she had done, even when her pregnancy was apparent, so she was looked upon and despised as an immoral woman. Her son, David, likewise grew up as an outcast in his own family.

What should immediately grieve those who hold dear the authority and sufficiency of Scripture is that this legend is in the final analysis elevated over Scripture, which says nothing about Nitzevet or any other aspect of this extrabiblical yarn. Further, no, we know little about David’s mother, but we do know that she was a godly woman, as David prayed, “Save me, because I serve you just as my mother did” (Ps. 86:16). Why would anyone wish to besmirch that?

*Second*, as one might expect, this theory, like many others, is propped up by some Bible verses. The foundational verse that is used appears in David’s psalm of repentance over his sin with Bathsheba: **Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me** (Ps. 51:5) As the article author insists, “Setting aside all fancy theological interpreta-

tions, we need to interpret verse 5 simply as it reads. David's mother conceived him in an act of sin. She committed adultery and David was the byproduct of this infidelity." What a shocking statement! If that is actually what David meant, why didn't he write, "Behold, I was shapen in infidelity; and in adultery did my mother conceive me."

Further, the phrase "all fancy theological interpretations" is the author's way of offhandedly dismissing the clear meaning that has been recognized for centuries by virtually all expositors and commentators. For example, in his massive commentary on the whole Bible, Matthew Poole (1624–79) is representative of those centuries: "This verse is both by Jewish and Christian, by ancient and later, interpreters, generally and most truly understood of original sin."<sup>2</sup> Who was Matthew Poole? Considered one of the great Puritans, few names stand as high in the biblical scholarship of Great Britain than this English Nonconformist theologian. Charles Spurgeon said of Poole's commentary, in fact: "If I must have only one commentary, and had read Matthew Henry as I have, I do not know but what I should choose Poole. He is a very prudent and judicious commentator. . . . [He] is not so pithy and witty by far as Matthew Henry, but he is perhaps more accurate, less a commentator, and more an expositor."<sup>3</sup>

Poole was incontrovertibly correct. What David refers to here is not some speculative adultery by his mother, but to the unambiguous doctrine of original sin that is repeatedly stressed in Scripture. As another highly respected commentator, Albert Barnes (1798–1870), put it:

Of course, the idea here is not to cast reflections on the character of his mother, or to refer to her feelings in regard to his conception and birth, but the design is to express his deep sense of his own depravity; a depravity so deep as to demonstrate that it must have had its origin in the very beginning of his existence.<sup>4</sup>

Spurgeon adds a rebuke to the article author that he would do well to heed: "It is a wicked wresting of Scripture to deny that original sin and natural depravity are here taught. Surely men who cavil at this doctrine have need to be taught of the Holy Spirit what be the first principles of the faith."<sup>5</sup> Again, we could cite a whole plethora of other commentators here, such as, to name only a few: Martin Luther; John Calvin; Peter Riedemann; Matthew Henry; John Gill; Adam Clarke; J. P. Lange; G. Rawlinson; Arthur G. Clarke; John Phillips; James Boice; Ray Stedman; George Zemek; and the list goes on.

Indeed, while the OT does not contain a systematic presentation of original sin, it is clearly implied in several passages (Gen. 8:21; Job 14:4; 15:14–16; Pss. 14:2–3; 58:3; Pro. 22:15; Is. 43:27; and Hosea 6:7). The doctrine of depravity is then, of course, fully developed in the NT (Rom. 1:18–32; 5:12–19; 1 Cor. 15:22; Eph. 2:1–3; 4:17–19; etc.).

Another verse that is used to bolster this tall tale is Psalm 69:8: **I am become a stranger unto my brethren, and an alien unto my mother's children.** The article author uses this to insist that it describes "David's miserable early life" and "it is generally believed Psalm 69 covers David's early life prior to his anointing by Samuel." I honestly have no idea where he gets that "genera belief" idea. The fact of the matter is, as Albert Barnes points out, "On what occasion in the life of David the psalm was written cannot now be determined." But

even more to the point, as John Phillips writes:

This psalm has long been considered Davidic even though there is nothing in David's life which resembles the things he says. . . . [Many] forget that David was not only a poet; he was also a prophet. That is the key to this psalm. From beginning to end it points forward to Christ.<sup>6</sup>

John Gill likewise observed that what is written in this psalm cannot be said of

any other person whatever but the Messiah. . . . The psalm belongs to Christ, and to the times of the Gospel, [as] is abundantly evident from the citations out of it in the New Testament: verse 4 in John 15:25; verse 9 in I John 2:17; verse 21 in Matthew 27:34; verse 22 in Romans 11:9; and verse 25 in Acts 1:16.<sup>7</sup>

James Montgomery Boice agreed: "Psalm 69 . . . is clearly about Jesus. In fact, it is one of the most obviously messianic psalms in the psalter."<sup>8</sup> So did William Kelly: "All scripture shows that [Christ's] sufferings are the ground of His exaltation. So it is here."<sup>9</sup> And we could again go on.

And so it is that this theory is just that, a theory based on speculation, supposition, and surmising. In fact, words that repeatedly appeared in every writer I read on this theory included: "perhaps," "speculate," "possibly," and "maybe." How does that glorify God or edify His people? Again, here is a vivid example of "fruitless discussion" (1 Tim. 1:6) to no good end. The Greek *mataiologos* appears only here in the NT and is a compound: *mataios* ("that which is devoid of force, truth, success, result, that which is useless, to no purpose") and *logos* ("a word or discourse"). So, the idea is simply "useless talk." It has been variously translated as "vain discussion" (ESV), "vain discourse" (YLT), "meaningless talk" (NIV), and "vain jangling" (KJV). The latter is especially significant. "*Jangling* is an early English word from the old French *jangler* [or] *jongleur*, a teller of tales."<sup>10</sup> How appropriate!

### The Perpetual Virginity of Mary

We focus here on Ezekiel 44:1–3. The prophet writes of the **closed gate** through which passed the **prince** and that, **This gate shall be shut, it shall not be opened, and no man shall enter in by it; because the LORD, the God of Israel, hath entered in by it, therefore it shall be shut.** Among several troubling holdovers from Catholicism held by the Reformers was their retaining the teaching of Mary's perpetual virginity. Tainted by the allegorical method of interpretation common in his day, Augustine interpreted the **closed gate** through which passed the **prince** as a type of Mary's perpetual virginity. This is shockingly bad hermeneutics. *This is not allegorical*; it clearly refers to the *literal* shutting up of the Eastern Gate in Jerusalem that only Messiah the **Prince**, who has the keys of David (and no other man), shall open. Rome superimposes its own teaching on Scripture. Why? Simply because it tries to justify the celibate state of the priests and nuns. Rome teaches that the single state is holier than the married state and that marriage is inherently unclean and defiling. As George Bull (1634–1710), English theologian and Bishop of St. David's (in Wales), plainly stated:

Now the necessary consequence of this dignity of the blessed Virgin is, that she remained for ever a Virgin, as the Catholic Church hath always held and maintained. For it cannot with decency be imagined, that the most holy vessel, which was thus once consecrated to be a receptacle of the Deity, should afterwards be desecrated and profaned by human use.<sup>11</sup>

Such a twisted attitude toward marriage (which God declares is “honorable in all and the bed undefiled,” Heb. 13:4) would have us believe that a woman’s body is “desecrated and profaned” when she becomes a mother and that a nun is somehow holier than the mother of beautiful children, whom God has given her as a “heritage” and a “reward” (Ps. 127:3).

Catholic teachers also insist that denying the perpetual virginity of Mary “is a fairly recent innovation—a peculiar historical aberration, particularly since certain Protestants, such as evangelicals, consider themselves to be conservative Christians—that can’t even find historical precedent among the primary magisterial Reformers; for that, one can only look to a handful of fourth-century teachers who were otherwise universally rejected as heretics.”<sup>12</sup> But wait just a moment. Why were such teachers “rejected as heretics”? Well, Jovinian (fourth century), for example, was branded such because he dared challenge asceticism, monasticism, and celibacy. Likewise, the Paulicians (seventh century) were so branded not only for rejecting this doctrine but others, such as Purgatory, images, and infant baptism, as well as proclaiming true biblical baptism. Rome has always been expert in branding anyone with the red hot iron “heretic” who dares disagree with even the smallest pronouncement of its dogmas and traditions.

So, not only was this error *declared* by several early teachers (Gregory of Nyssa, Thomas Aquinas, etc.), it was sadly *defended* even by the Reformers. Martin Luther, for example, wrote in, *That Jesus was Born a Jew*: “When Matthew says that Joseph did not know Mary carnally until she had brought forth her son, it does not follow that he knew her subsequently; on the contrary, it means that he never did know her.” But where did he get that? It is demonstrably false. While Matthew 1:25 is categorically denied, it unambiguously states: “Then Joseph being raised from sleep did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife: And knew her not *till* she had brought forth her firstborn son: and he called his name Jesus.” (emphasis added). It is utterly baffling that the word “till” is treated as if it were meaningless. But “till” is *heōs*, which means “unto, as long as, marking the continuance of an action up to the time of another action.”<sup>13</sup>

Notice another verse in Matthew with exactly the same idea: “The angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there *until* I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him” (2:13). Does that mean they were to stay in Egypt permanently. No, only *until* word was sent that they could safely return. Notice also 17:19: “And as they came down from the mountain, Jesus charged [the disciples], saying, Tell the vision to no man, *until* the Son of man be risen again from the dead” (17:19). Did that mean that they should forever keep silent? No, they were only to keep silent *until* He was risen from the dead.

So, does “knew her not till she had brought forth her first-

born son” mean that Joseph never had marital relations with Mary? Of course not. It cannot possibly mean that if words mean what they say. This clearly means that Joseph never knew Mary in this way *until* after Jesus’ birth. It is further objected (shockingly, even by John Calvin) that “what took place afterwards, [Matthew] does not inform us.”<sup>14</sup> But why would he need to say any more than “till”? The implication of normal husband/wife relations is so obvious that to say more would be redundant (and a little ridiculous).

Another clear statement of Scripture that is denied is that Jesus had siblings. Luther again writes in his *Sermons on John* (chaps. 1–4): “I am inclined to agree with those who declare that ‘brothers’ really mean ‘cousins’ here, for Holy Writ and the Jews always call cousins brothers.” The reference here is to Matthew 13:55–56, where people in Jesus’ home country asked: “Is not this the carpenter’s son? is not his mother called Mary? and his brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas? And his sisters, are they not all with us? Whence then hath this man all these things?” Now, while it is *grammatically* true that *adelphos* (brothers) and *adelphē* (sisters) can refer to cousins, the *context* of the verse itself makes the meaning unambiguously clear. They thought this was the *son* of Mary and Joseph and obviously the *brother* of the other children listed. Added to that are the following: Matthew 12:46; Mark 3:31–34; Luke 8:19–21; John 2:12; and Acts 1:14. All these couple Mary with *adelphos*, so why are they mentioned so many times with Mary if they were just cousins?

It is also troubling that Calvin and others say such things as: “Certainly, no man will ever raise a question on this subject, except from curiosity; and no man will obstinately keep up the argument, except from an extreme fondness for disputation.”<sup>15</sup> Another adds, “[Mary’s] perpetual virginity is of no consequence; and the learned labor spent to prove it has produced a mere castle in the air. The thing is possible; but it never has been, and never can be proved.”<sup>16</sup> In other words, this issue is really “no big deal” and we are being divisive to even bring it up. I respectively submit, however, that it is a “big deal.” The express purpose and underlying motive of insisting on Mary’s perpetual virginity was again to justify the celibate state of the priests and nuns with Mary as the greatest model. And let us also not forget the veneration of Mary that has flowed out of this in torrents ever since. I would, therefore, humbly submit that the true, biblical evangelical recognizes the doctrine of the perpetual virginity of Mary as unbiblical, ungodly, and a direct attack on Christ alone and even on marriage itself.

### A Succinct Theology of the Jews

One of the great tragedies of our day is a growing apathy, antagonism, and outright attack on all things Jewish. In fact, many Christian young people actually side with Arabs over the Jews in middle eastern matters. Why? I am convinced of two reasons. First, they simply have not been taught the place the Jews have in God’s overall plan for the ages. Second, they are bombarded, brainwashed, and bludgeoned with the political leftist-liberal lies of inclusivism, diversity, racial purity, and a plethora of other anti-God and anti-biblical notions. But God *promised* His people that He would *perpetuate* them and *protect* them until His plan and purpose was completed.

## The Promises to Israel

The story of Israel begins in Genesis 12 with God making His unilateral, unconditional, and unchangeable covenant with Abram (known later as Abraham). This covenant stated that God would use the “great nation” that would come from Abram and would through it bless “all families [nations] of the earth” listed in chapters 10–11.

He would bless the nations first by sending the Savior of the world (Messiah) through Israel. This was fulfilled, of course, in the Lord Jesus Christ: “Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ” (Gal. 3:16). In the crucial *proto-evangelium* (first gospel) of Genesis 3:15, in fact, we read the first mention of the Redeemer who is to come. While Satan would bruise Jesus’ *heel* (cause Him to suffer), Jesus would deliver the death blow to Satan’s *head* at the Cross. From that moment forward, everything pointed to when Jesus would “save his people from their sins” (Matt. 1:21). Israel, then, is crucial in this.

Second, Israel would bless the nations by leading and serving them (Is. 2:2–4). Because of her persistent rebellion, however, resulting in God’s judgment via a divided kingdom, enslavement by foreign nations, worldwide dispersion in AD 70, and subsequent persecution by many nations, that role is yet to be fulfilled. And it *will* be fulfilled. Jesus Himself spoke of His coming kingdom when he declared, “The Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Matt. 19:28). Stronger still is Acts 1:6. The disciples asked the legitimate question: **Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?** As Jews, they were concerned whether Messiah would now, since He had risen from the grave, establish His literal, physical kingdom on earth as the prophets had repeatedly foretold. Jesus did not correct them by saying, “No, there will no longer be a literal kingdom but only a spiritual one.” He simply told them there was something to do in the meantime; they were to be “witnesses unto [Him] both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (v. 8).

It should also be carefully noted that God **will bless them that bless [Israel], and curse him that curseth [Israel]** (Gen. 12:3). As history has repeatedly demonstrated, those who persecute and mistreat Israel will be destroyed. This is why Christians who side against Israel are in grave error.

## The Perpetuation of Israel

The story has been told that Frederick the Great (King of Prussia, 1740–86) was strongly influenced by the atheistic French philosopher Voltaire and became skeptical of Christianity and the reliability of the Bible. Reportedly, he turned to his chaplain and asked, “If your Bible is really true, it ought to be capable of very easy proof. So often, when I’ve asked for proof of the inspiration of the Bible, I’ve been given some tome, that I have neither the time, nor desire, to read. If your Bible is really from God, then you should be able to demonstrate the fact simply. Give me proof for the inspiration of the Bible, in one word.” The chaplain replied, “Your Majesty, it is possible for me to answer your request literally.” Frederick was amazed and asked, “What is this magic word that carries

such a weight of proof?” The chaplain replied: “Israel.” Frederick was silent.

Israel is indeed powerful proof of the veracity not only of Scripture but also the very character of God. From the moment He made His covenant promise with Abram until now, Israel has been a reality. No matter what Israel did, no matter how rebellious she became, even in murdering of her Messiah, this did not alter God’s elective decree, redemptive plan, or literal kingdom fulfillment. Further, through the ages men have tried to destroy Israel. Hitler, for example, murdered six million Jews, but Israel is still here. It is truly puzzling to hear some Bible teachers actually say that the existence of Israel today, her returning to the land (as prophesied in Ezek. 36–37 and Amos 9:11–15), and the establishment of the Jewish state in Israel means absolutely nothing. Such statements leave me totally flabbergasted and blinking my eyes in disbelief. As Romans 11:1 declares, **Hath God cast away his people? God forbid.** He went on to link Israel’s (i.e., a future generation of Jews’) salvation with God’s electing purposes: “As concerning the gospel, they are enemies for your sakes: but as touching the election, they are beloved for the father’s sakes. For the gifts and calling of God are [irrevocable]” (vv. 28–29). Mark it down: *God will fulfill every promise He made to Israel.*

It is sad indeed that eschatology is such a problem these days, and the reason for that is also sad. It is simply because if one does not get Israel right, he will never get eschatology right. There are more than 2,000 references to Israel in Scripture, and every single one of them, without exception, means Israel, not the Church or anything else.

I am convinced that we need to get this right simply because biblical authority actually depends upon it. If I may be even more blunt for a moment, I would humbly submit that so-called Replacement Theology (the Church is now Israel and inherits all the promises made to Israel) is in reality extremely damaging in at least three ways. First, *hermeneutics* are *diluted* because they are not longer consistent, being literal in some places but spiritual or allegorical in others. Second, as a result of that, *Scripture* itself is *denied* because it no longer means what it says, but rather what we make it say. Third, and as a result of both of those, *God* is *dishonored* because He no longer is going to do exactly what He said He would do when He unconditionally elected Israel.

## The Protection of Israel

God irrevocably promised He would protect Israel:

**Whosoever shall gather together against thee shall fall for thy sake. . . . No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn** (Is. 54:15, 17).

**For I, saith the Lord, will be unto her a wall of fire round about, and will be the glory in the midst of her. . . . he that toucheth you toucheth the apple of [the Lord’s] eye** (Zech 2:5, 8).

Yes, God has allowed His people to be persecuted because of their rebellion, and especially their rejection of Messiah, but He has still protected them from annihilation, though many have tried to do just that. Despite being scattered to the four winds and horrific persecution, in fact, they have survived

some 2,500 years. From the 70 year exile in Babylon, to the expulsion of Jews from Spain under Ferdinand and Isabella unless they converted to Catholicism (which many did), to Hitler's Holocaust, to today's Islamic onslaught, every attempt has failed.

If that's not enough to display God's protection, recent events should prove it even to the skeptic. No sooner had Israel established her Jewish State (1948), five Arab armies (Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, and Iraq) invaded. Even though the Arabs had all the weapons they needed, far out-gunning Israel, her fledgling forces prevailed. Likewise, the same armies attacked again on June 5-10, 1967, the goal being "to wipe Israel off the map." By all indications, they should have succeeded, being vastly superior in armor, aircraft, and troops. But in what became known as the Six-Day War, Israel again prevailed. Still again Egypt and Syria attacked in October 1973 while Israel was "resting" during Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement), but Israel prevailed yet again despite the surprise and resulting losses. Do we chalk all that up to "luck" or just "good fortune"? Of course not. God sovereignly protected His *people* for His own future *purpose*.

This all serves not only as a testimony but also a warning. Any nation, or even individual (including Christians), who persecutes or mistreats God's people will suffer His wrath.

*Dr. J. D. Watson — Pastor-Teacher, Grace Bible Church  
Director, Sola Scriptura Publications, a ministry of GBC*

**NOTES**

- <sup>1</sup> *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (public domain), "Nahash" entry.
- <sup>2</sup> Matthew Poole, *English Annotations Upon the Holy Bible* (1683, public domain).
- <sup>3</sup> Charles Spurgeon, *Commenting and Commentaries*, "Lecture 1 A Chat about Commentaries" (public domain).
- <sup>4</sup> *Barnes' Notes on the Bible* (public domain).
- <sup>5</sup> Charles Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David* (public domain).
- <sup>6</sup> John Phillips, *Exploring the Psalms: Psalms 1-88* (Loizeaux Brothers, 1988), 553.
- <sup>7</sup> *John Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible* (public domain).
- <sup>8</sup> James Montgomery Boice, *Psalms, Volume 1: Psalms 1-41* (Baker, 2005).
- <sup>9</sup> William Kelly's *Commentaries* (public domain).
- <sup>10</sup> M. R. Vincent, *Vincent's Word Studies* (public domain).
- <sup>11</sup> George Bull, *The English Theological Works of George Bull* (Oxford: John Henry Parker, 1844), 72-73.
- <sup>12</sup> Brantly Millegan, "A Protestant Defense of Mary's Perpetual Virginity" via an Internet post on October 10, 2013 (<https://aleteia.org/>).
- <sup>13</sup> Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary*, entry #G2193.
- <sup>14</sup> *Calvin's Commentaries*, comment on Matt. 1:25.
- <sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>16</sup> *Adam Clarke's Commentary*, comment on Matt. 1:25.

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