



# TRUTH ON TOUGH TEXTS

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FROM SOLA SCRIPTURA PUBLICATIONS

ISSUE 127 (Nov./Dec. 2020)

## PERPLEXING PASSAGES (3)

### 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. Like the first, this installment addresses three such matters.

#### The Darkness at the Cross<sup>1</sup>

Matthew 27:45 declares: **Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour.** That is, at 12:00 noon, darkness fell all over the land. In dramatic contrast to the wondrous light of *glory* that shown at His birth (Lk. 2:9), a cheerless darkness of *gloom* enveloped the earth at His death. Some liberal writers dismiss this as a severe sandstorm. Some commentators even compromise a bit to say it was an eclipse, but that was totally impossible. The Passover was celebrated at the time of the full moon, when the moon is opposite to the sun, not in line with it as in an eclipse. This was a divinely sent darkness that lasted for three hours. It would seem that creation itself was lamenting the Creator. How significant it is that just as there were three days of darkness in Egypt before Passover (Ex. 10:21–23), there were now three hours of darkness before the Perfect Passover Lamb of God died for the sins of the world.

But why the **darkness**? What was the purpose? Darkness is repeatedly a symbol of judgment throughout Scripture. For example, in the context of God using the Assyrians to judge Israel, Isaiah 5:20 declares, “Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!” How true those words are in our own day! Later in 13:10–11, Isaiah describes the coming Day of the Lord:

For the stars of heaven and the constellations thereof shall not give their light: the sun shall be darkened in his going forth, and the moon shall not cause her light to shine. And I will punish the world for their evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; and I will cause the arrogancy of the proud to cease, and will lay low the haughtiness of the terrible.

God likewise spoke through Joel of that coming day: “I will shew wonders in the heavens and in the earth, blood, and fire,

and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and the terrible day of the LORD come” (2:30–31). Similar prophecies appear in Amos 5:18–20 and Zephaniah 1:14–18.

We find the same imagery in the New Testament. Jesus Himself spoke often that “outer darkness” and the “weeping and gnashing of teeth” are characteristics of God’s judgment (Matt. 8:12; 22:13; 25:30). Speaking of the coming Tribulation Period, He also declared that in “those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken” (Matt. 24:29–30; cf. Acts 2:20). Concerning fallen angels, Peter wrote, “God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast [them] down to hell, and delivered [them] into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment” (2 Pet. 2:4; cf. Jude 6). Peter then added that false teachers “are wells without water, clouds that are carried with a tempest; to whom the mist of darkness is reserved for ever” (v. 17).

So, as reflected in the *Talmud* (the ancient commentaries on the Law) and the teaching of many rabbis, **darkness** has been part of God’s judgment on the world for particularly heinous sin. Here, in fact, was the greatest example of that in the annals of history. What more monstrous sin could there be than the killing of God’s Son? Sadly, however, the Jews did not recognize that. Amazingly, while aware of darkness being a sign of judgment, there is no indication that the crowd was the least bit alarmed by it. They continued their mockery and have been under God’s chastisement ever since. Their mockery went so low, in fact, that it included a sick joke using a play on words when Jesus said “I thirst” (Jn. 19:28–30). Knowing full well that Jesus’ cry **Eli, Eli** meant **My God, My God**, this was so close to *Eliya*, that when someone tried to give Him some **sour wine**, they mockingly said, in effect, “Oh, wait, listen! He’s calling for **Elijah**. Let’s wait and see if Elijah comes to save Him and take Him down.” The Jews had long believed that Elijah would precede Messiah, introduce Him, and assist Him. Oh, how that reflects the depth of man’s depravity! A similar situation will also occur during the Tribulation period. Even though people will openly acknowledge that what they are suffering is God’s judgment, they will still refuse to repent (Rev. 9:20–21; 16:9–11).

A major question that has arisen about this darkness is:

What was its extent? Was it local or universal? Did it cover just Jerusalem, all of Palestine, perhaps even Egypt, or possibly the entire world? While some commentators view this as a local phenomenon only, there is some compelling evidence that it was far more widespread.

*First*, there is the internal evidence. The Greek behind **land** (*gē*) refers not only to a region but also the whole of the earthly globe. It is extremely significant that when used of a region of **land**, the name of the region is specified, such as: “the land of Judah” (Matt. 2:6); “the land of Israel” (2:20–21); “the land of Egypt” (Acts 7:11, 36, 40; 13:17); “the land of Canaan” (13:19); etcetera. In contrast, many other instances clearly refer to the whole habitable earth, as when our Lord said “the meek will inherit the earth” (Matt. 5:5; see also Lk. 11:31; 21:35; Acts 10:12; 11:6; 17:26; Rom. 9:17; 10:18; Col. 3:2, 5; Heb. 11:13; Rev. 3:10; etc.).

What we see here then is simply the word **land**. There is no qualifier, no region name, or any other indication that this is local or even regional. I would therefore respectfully submit that to say this means “Palestine,” or any other region, is just an assumption and actually adds something to the text that is not there.

*Second*, there is also some fascinating external evidence. In fact, several reports from secular history about a unique and unprecedented darkness strongly indicate that this was worldwide. One such report occurs in the works of Phlegon, a second century Greek writer and freedman of the emperor Hadrian; he wrote, “There occurred the greatest darkening of the sun which had ever been known; it became night at midday, so that the stars shone in the heavens.” A similar report was recorded by the early Greek historian Thallus.

Another report comes from Dionysius the Areopagite, who was a judge in Athens and is actually mentioned in Acts 17:34 as one who was converted after Paul’s preaching on Mars Hill. He recounted that while still an unbeliever in Egypt he witnessed this darkness and exclaimed: “Either the God of nature is suffering, or the machine of the world is tumbling into ruin.” Early Church Father Tertullian (155–220) also stated that “the light of day was withdrawn, when the sun at the very time was in his meridian blaze. Those who were not aware that this had been predicted about Christ, no doubt thought it an eclipse. You yourselves [in Rome] have the account of the world-portent [sign] still in your archives” (*Apology*, Ch. 21).

*Third* and finally, this view is theologically consistent. Since Christ came to a sinful world, does it not follow that the whole world is here darkened? Or to put it another way, since He is the light of the world, does it not follow that the whole world at that moment was in the darkness of judgment?

So, what judgment did this signify! As the Apostle John wrote, “This is the condemnation, that the light [that is, Christ Himself] has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil” (Jn. 3:19). God, therefore gave them real darkness. When the sins of the world were heaped upon the Lord Jesus, it was more than fitting that the darkness of divine judgment shrouded the same world. And if I may also add, do we not see that same spiritual darkness shrouding our entire world today? Do we not see it creeping even into Christianity itself as it becomes more like the culture every day? Oh, how we need the light of God’s Word!

## Polygamy

While Martin Luther’s incalculable contributions to Reformation (and more importantly biblical) thought should never be discounted, he sadly made some disturbing compromises and errors that simply cannot be dismissed. One, of course, was his seriously flawed view of the Lord’s Supper, consubstantiation. His unchristian treatment of Zwingli on that very issue is also very troubling. Other disappointments include his involvement with The Peasants’ War (1523–25), his following of Augustine’s omission of the second commandment and division of the tenth into two, and his anti-Semitism in his later years.

A sometimes glossed over incident, however, further underscores Luther’s occasional lapse into compromise; it involved Philip of Hesse, a leading champion of the Reformation and one of the most important of the early Protestant rulers in Germany. While committed to Protestantism, a sexual scandal arose. Because of his wife Christina’s unattractiveness and her health and mental problems, he was revolted by her and turned instead to numerous adulteries to satisfy his strong sexual drive. After adopting Protestantism, he felt deep guilt in this but still could not stop. He finally thought he had found the answer when he met the beautiful, 17-year-old lady-in-waiting Margaret von der Saale (1522–66), who he was convinced could keep him satisfied. Having no grounds to divorce Christina, however, he proposed (with both Christina’s and Margaret’s mother’s consent) to make Margaret his second wife. Since bigamy was against the law of the land, however—a capitol offense, in fact, under the emperor Charles V—he sought backing from his theologians: Martin Bucer, Philip Melancthon, and Luther himself. While Luther believed in monogamy, he gave consent, foolishly citing Old Testament polygamy as a precedent,<sup>2</sup> and the marriage was performed in secret. When the news, of course, leaked, Luther added to his error by actually advising Philip to tell “a good strong lie” so it would not offend those who had a weaker conscience. At least Philip “came clean,” but to save himself he had to submit totally to Charles V, which resulted in a rift in the Protestant ranks, thereby weakening reform in Germany.

To say all this was an enormous mistake would be the height of understatement. The Catholic enemies of the Reformation were positively gleeful. They could now wag their fingers and say, “See there! Reject the true Church and accept the ‘faith alone’ heresy and the result is moral debauchery.” Their mock “outrage” was hypocritical, of course, because such immorality had always existed in Romanism, but the damage was done and irreparable. In fact, as one writer put it in 1913, “The second marriage of Philip of Hesse has been a godsend to the enemies of Luther. They have exploited it with inexhaustible avidity.”<sup>3</sup> This was, indeed, “the darkest blot in the history of the German Reformation and worse than the successive polygamy of Henry VIII.”<sup>4</sup>

That brings us to the issue of bigamy. Why bring this up? Is it not obvious? Well, it would appear that it is not. It is troubling that some evangelical writers say something like this: “The Bible nowhere explicitly condemns polygamy.” That is bad enough coming from the twisted interpretation of Mormonism, but far worse coming from an evangelical. Why? Because monogamy was *always* God’s design and *not once* do we

we read God giving permission for polygamy. In fact, the instances where we read of it in Scripture are not nearly as common as some interpreters would have us believe.

*First*, then, as explicitly stated at Creation (when God created the first *couple*): “Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman [*Ish-sha*], because she was taken out of Man [*Ish*]. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh” (Gen. 2:23–24). Here is God’s unambiguous standard that was designed to always be not simply “a custom” that would depend upon one’s culture, but rather the godly absolute.

*Second*, that clear standard is evident throughout the Old Testament. Proverbs 5:15–23, for example, expresses the matter of sexual union in a delicate metaphor: “Drink waters out of thine own cistern, and running waters out of thine own well . . .” Likewise, the entire book of Song of Solomon is about such a committed union of one man and one woman. Some insist that Leviticus 18:18 states that a man may have a second wife as long as it is not his current wife’s sister, but that demonstrates ignorance of history. What the verse prohibits is marrying his wife’s sister while his wife is still living, which was a common practice among pagans, such as the ancient Egyptians, Chaldeans, and others. Appeal is also made to Deuteronomy 21:15–17, which legislates the rights of the first-born of two wives, “one beloved, and another hated.” But to argue that legislation on the rights within polygamy implies that polygamy is condoned “makes about as much sense as saying that Deuteronomy 23:18 approves of harlotry since it prohibits the bringing the wages earned by harlotry into the house of the Lord for any vow!”<sup>5</sup>

*Third*, the first deviation from God’s very specific standard was when Lamech took two wives (Adah and Zillah) in Genesis 4:19. But stop a moment and note who Lamech was. He was in the ungodly line of Cain, not the godly line of Seth. Along with his celebration of violence in his “Song of the Sword,” the short poem in verses 23–24, he also added the practice of polygamy. Since this appears in the context of the radical increase of man’s corruption, can there be any doubt as to the sinfulness of polygamy? In fact, the next clear instance is in Genesis 6:2, as the stage is set for the flood: “the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair; and they took them wives of all which they chose.” In other words, those rulers took as many wives as they wanted. In contrast, we read of not one other instance of polygamy from Seth to Terah (Abraham’s father).

*Fourth*, in addition to Lamech and “the sons of God,” from Creation to 931 BC there are only 17 other instances of polygamy: Nahor (Abraham’s brother); Abraham himself; Esau; Jacob; Gideon; Jair; Ibzan; Abdon; Sampson; Elkanah; Saul; David; Solomon; Rehoboam; Abijah; Ahab; and Jehoram. It is significant that no less than 13 of those were absolute rulers who answered to no one and could therefore do as they pleased. One can hardly make a case for the godliness of polygamy from that list.

*Fifth*, that brings us to two favorite justifying examples: Abraham and David. In Abraham’s case, there is no way whatsoever to justify or defend his actions with Hagar. Yes, what Sarah suggested was clearly in line with the custom of the day, according to the Code of Hammurabi and other near

eastern codes that existed around the time of the patriarchs. But where in God’s Word (either *then* or *now*) do we read that we are to act according to the culture? Abraham’s act with Hagar was sin, plain and simple, as today’s struggles with the Arab nations (Ishmael’s descendents) demonstrate. God does not need our help to accomplish His purposes.

As for David, his multiplicity of wives and concubines was also sin. The consequences of that are not only evident in the aftermath of the Bathsheba affair, but also the incident of the ten concubines spoken of in 2 Samuel (15:16; 16:22; 20:3). We read there that his rebel son Absalom (one of the consequences of his sin with Bathsheba) raped the concubines David left behind to keep his house when he was forced to flee (how striking it is that that occurred on the same rooftop where David had gazed upon Bathsheba). When David returned, he sequestered those ten women under guard. Why? Because if he would have had relations with any of them and they had conceived, it would have been difficult to ascertain whether he or Absalom was the father, and such a child could lay claim to the throne. Oh, how David reflects the truth that they who sow the wind shall reap the whirlwind (Amos 8:7)!

*Sixth* and finally, why then did God allow polygamy to go on? The typical answer to that question is that in strict patriarchal societies women were often uneducated and untrained, and so it was practically impossible for an unmarried woman to provide for herself. Women, therefore, had to rely on their fathers, brothers, and husbands for provision and protection. The alternatives were often prostitution or slavery. Polygamy, therefore, was permitted for such women. That explanation falls short, however, on one point. If the motive was true benevolence, why was there a sexual relationship? Yes, God allowed it for the same reason Moses allowed divorce, “because of the hardness of [the people’s] hearts” (Matt. 19:8), but both practices were sin nonetheless.

Therefore, if I may lovingly conclude, to say, “The Bible nowhere explicitly condemns polygamy,” is shallow, shortsighted, and a serious misrepresentation of Scripture.

### **Tithing or Giving?**

One of the most common, yet serious, misconceptions in Christianity is that of so-called “tithing.” I cringe a little whenever I hear the word. Many have the mistaken idea that “ten percent” of their income belongs to God and must be given back to Him. While they no doubt have the purest motive, it is nonetheless a totally false concept. *Everything* we have belongs to God. There are other Christians who do not give God anything, or at the very least give Him a pittance. Space does not allow an in-depth study, but this subject is of such importance that a brief study is in order.

“Tithing” was based on the OT Mosaic Law. It prescribed that ten percent of a man’s income was to be given to God (e.g. Lev. 27:30). This tithe was actually for the Levites, those of the priestly tribe (Num. 18:21). We then read in Numbers 14 that a second tithe of animals and food was set aside for the national feasts and holidays. In the same passage we read that a third tithe was collected every third year, which was used to support the Levites, orphans, and widows. Therefore, all that totals up to be nearly 23 percent. So, I would submit that if someone today wants to live according to “tithing,” then he is going to have to accept the fact that God demands

about 23 percent of his income, not just ten. So, while voluntary giving was practiced (see Ex. 25:1–2; 35:5, 21; Prov. 3:9–10; 11:24), tithing was *demand*ed because it paid for the operation of Israel’s government. In fact, Malachi condemned the people for their failure to pay those “taxes” that supported the Levites who ran the nation. Tithing, then, had nothing to do with “giving,” which implies freewill offering, but rather it was required payment.

Coming to the NT, tithing is nowhere to be found. Just as the Israelites gave “tithes” to support the Divinely ordained government under which they lived, we today are required to pay taxes (Rom. 13:6). While we are sometimes appalled at what our tax money pays for, we must pay it anyway. As corrupt and perverted as the Roman Empire was, our Lord still commanded, “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s” (Mk. 12:17). I would also interject how much better off our country might be if our tax code was based not on the present hopelessly convoluted system, rather on a flat rate everyone paid because that is the biblical way.

In contrast, as 1 Corinthians 16:2 declares, no percentage or amount is required in this age: “Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, *as God hath prospered him*, that there be no gatherings when I come” (emphasis added). We find here a far more blessed truth about stewardship. No longer is stewardship based upon *demand*; it is based upon *grace*. The most foundational principle about our giving should be, *do not give ten percent*; just stay away from that number to avoid the trap of “tithing,” the trap of giving what is supposedly “required.”

I once read a book in which the author (unfortunately an obscure one) told of a tract that came into his hands. On the cover was an illustration similar to a pie. A thin slice of the pie, which represented ten percent, was labeled, “10% for God,” and the remainder was labeled, “90% for yourself.” In the author’s own words:

I simply cannot express the loathing in my heart to this legalistic and loveless lie. Nowhere are Christians taught that they can discharge their stewardship on such a basis. If I am God’s, then all that is put in my hands is God’s! Does it startle some of you to learn that God is going to make His stewards give an account of 100% of all that He gives them? I urge ministers and teachers to forsake OT ground and start teaching NT doctrine relative to stewardship.<sup>6</sup>

Dear Reader, God wants us to give as He has prospered us, to give according to the grace He has shown toward us. The story is told of a man who knelt with his pastor in prayer one day and committed himself to give a certain percentage of his income for the rest of his life. From his first week’s pay, he gave \$1, and then as his wages increased, he gave \$10, then \$100, then \$200, and finally got up to \$500. At this point he called his pastor and said, “Please come and see me. It’s urgent!” When the pastor arrived, the man said, “You remember that promise I made to God years ago. How can I get released? When I made that promise, all I had to give was a dollar, but now it’s \$500. I can’t afford to give away money like that.” The wise old pastor replied, “I’m afraid you can’t get released from the promise, but there is something we can do. We can

knelt down and ask God to shrink your income so that you can afford to give a dollar again.”<sup>7</sup>

Briefly, such “grace giving” involves four principles. *First*, realize that 100% belongs to God. He has entrusted us with all we possess and will hold us accountable for how we use it. *Second*, weigh how much you give against how much you keep for yourself. There is nothing wrong with buying things, but often we confuse needs, wants, and indulgences. *Third*, do not “give to get.” Many today teach a philosophy of prosperity that says if you give to God, He will bless you materially. OT Jews were promised material blessing, but no such promise is ever made to NT believers. *Fourth*, give as the Spirit urges you. This does not mean giving out of impulse or emotion, rather through prayer and Holy Spirit guided discernment of genuine needs we give as God has prospered.

I would dare add one other thought before closing. As we have noted in a past issue of TOTT,<sup>8</sup> First Corinthians 16:2 makes it clear that the Christian’s money belongs in the Local Church. I have been burdened for most of my 46 years of ministry about this problem. Many local churches are in financial difficulty because Christians are giving their money to Christian organizations that are outside the local church. As mentioned in that earlier study, God wants to do His work through the Local Church, not through “parachurch organizations,” and God’s people need to *fully* support the Local Church.

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#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> This section taken from Pastor’s Watson’s new book, *Solemn Sentences: The Seven Statements of Christ on the Cross*, to be released in the first quarter of 2021.

<sup>2</sup> See John Alfred Faulkner, “Luther and the Bigamous Marriage of Philip of Hesse,” in *The American Journal of Theology* (The University of Chicago Press), Vol. 17, No. 2 (April 1913), 206–231, for his English translation from the German of Luther’s letter to Philip (213–16). In short, Faulkner summarizes Luther: “(1) Monogamy is the divine law, laid down at the creation and reaffirmed by Christ. No other law can be admitted. (2) Exceptions were allowed in Old Testament, so that bigamy is not itself a sin. (3) In case of necessity, exceptions might be allowed, by way of dispensation. (4) But such a case must be secret to prevent injury to the law and to prevent public scandal. (5) There are very grave reasons why you, Philip, should not consider that you are one of these exceptional cases. (6) Adultery is a fearful sin, and you should remain faithful to your wife. (7) All things must be ordered according to the word of God. (8) But if you are determined to take another wife, then let it be done in secret. (9) For both moral and patriotic reasons do not have recourse to the emperor for a dispensation.”

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, 206.

<sup>4</sup> Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, Vol. VIII, 387.

<sup>5</sup> Walter C. Kaiser, Jr. (et. al), *Hard Sayings of the Bible*, One Volume Edition (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 1996), 224.

<sup>6</sup> Edward Tracy, *Babylon The Great Is Fallen, Is Fallen* (published by the author in San Francisco, California, 1960), 81.

<sup>7</sup> Dennis J. DeHaan, *Windows on The Word* (Grand Rapids: Radio Bible Class, 1984), 52.

<sup>8</sup> “I Will Build My Parachurch”? Issue 103 (Nov./Dec. 2016),

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