

Psalm 51:5 Is Not A Support for Being Born with Sin

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Editor's note: This article is quoted from a Facebook post originally published by Dean Harvey.

King David said “In sin did my MOTHER conceive me”, but it's no support for a sinful nature Ps. 51:5

Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me (Ps. 51:5)

This verse concerns two people – King David and his mother. No one else is spoken about so we can't assume that all the people in the world are referred to here. The event spoken of is the conception of David and not the birth of David and he is not saying that he was born a sinner but possibly that his mother was in sin when she got pregnant. It could very well be that she was sinning when she conceived him, and a strong case can be made that this verse is talking about the defilement of David's mother, because she was previously the wife of, or the concubine of, a heathen king. Psalms is a poetic book and this means that it can be taken literally or figuratively depending on the context, so we must therefore be careful so we don't end up starting a new doctrine based on pure poetry. Taking a verse from Psalms,

Proverbs or other poetic texts, to make a doctrine out of it contrary to other more clear verses in the Bible, is never a good idea. We can reach all kinds of crazy conclusions with such methods. This psalm has often been used as an attempt to prove that David and ALL people under the sun are born in sin, but it fails miserably.

Some facts concerning David and his mother

David had two half-sisters named Zeruiah and Abigail (1 Chron. 2:13-16). The father of David's half sisters was not Jesse but Nahash (2 Sam. 17:25).c. Nahash was an Ammonite king (1 Sam. 11:1; 1 Sam. 12:12). David's father was Jesse, not Nahash, but David's half sisters were daughters of Nahash. This could explain why Nahash showed kindness toward David (2 Sam. 10:2).David's mother was most likely the second wife of Jesse. The first wife of Jesse would have been considered superior to his second wife, which had been either the concubine or wife of a heathen king. This would explain why David's half brothers viewed themselves as superior to David, and why David was considered prideful for thinking he was as good as them (1 Sam. 17:28-30). This may also explain why David was not called before Samuel the prophet amongst the other sons, as he was viewed as the embarrassment of the family and possibly was an illegitimate child (1 Sam. 16:11). David's mother apparently had a good relationship with the Lord (Ps.86:16; 116:16), but she would have been, in the eyes of Jewish law, considered defiled by her previous relationship with an Ammonite (Num. 25:1,2; Deut. 7:3,4; 1 Kings 11:2-4, Ezra 9:2; Neh. 13:23,25; 2 Cor. 6:14-17). David's mother was apparently a Jewish woman, because "no Ammonite shall enter the congregation of the Lord to the 10th generation" (Deu 23:3), and yet in Ps 86:16 and Ps 116:16, David refers to himself as "the son of thy handmaid", which would seem to testify to his mother's relationship with the Lord.

It may simply be that David's mother was not married to Jesse when she became pregnant, or that she was still the concubine of, or married to Nahash the heathen king, when she conceived. David was not blaming his sin on his birth, but he was simply stating that even the circumstances of his birth were surrounded by sin, and he says he was "wonderfully" and "marvelously" made by God in the womb (Ps. 139:13-14). David is in Psalm 51 speaking to the Lord and he is not trying to ask God for forgiveness for that he (David) has had the nerve to be born with a sinful nature, because that would hardly be David's fault. On the contrary, it would be something that he could blame GOD for IF it were true – which it isn't.

Psalms 51 goes on to say

Psalm 51:7 Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Make me to hear joy and gladness; that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice...

which few would understand as literal truths. Can hyssop really make our sins go away, and can broken bones rejoice? Poetry might speak the whole truth or it might mirror the truth poetically. David was in jeopardy of losing the Spirit, because God had broken the covenant with him:.

Ps 51:11 "Cast me not away from thy presence; AND TAKE NOT THY HOLY SPIRIT FROM ME."

Also compare with these verses

Psalm 22:9 But thou art he that took me out of the womb: thou didst make me hope when I was upon my mother's breasts.10 I was cast upon thee from the womb: thou art my God from my mother's belly.

Psalm 139:14 I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well.

None of the early church fathers the first 250+ years AD (with no exception) taught that man is born with a sinful nature, and the popularity of this gnostic idea in Church can actually be traced back to Augustine and blamed on him. He was a former gnostic.