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What Does The Bible Say About Nitzvet, Mother of David?

History between the Moabites, Ammonites, and Israelites:

According to the biblical account, [Genesis 19:37-38](#),

³⁷*And the first born bare a son, and called his name Moab: the same is the father of the Moabites unto this day.*

³⁸*And the younger, she also bare a son, and called his name Benammi: the same is the father of the children of Ammon unto this day.*

both Ammon and [Moab](#) were born of an [incestuous](#) relationship between [Lot](#) and his two daughters in the aftermath of the destruction of [Sodom and Gomorrah](#), and the Bible refers to both the Ammonites and Moabites as the "children of Lot". Throughout the Bible, the Ammonites and Israelites are portrayed as mutual antagonists. During the [Exodus](#), the Israelites were prohibited by the Ammonites from passing through their lands.^[5] In the [Book of Judges](#), ([Judges 3:14](#) - *So the children of Israel served Eglon the king of Moab eighteen years.*) the Ammonites work with [Eglon](#), king of the Moabites against Israel. Attacks by the Ammonites on Israelite communities east of the Jordan were the impetus behind the unification of the tribes under [Saul](#).^[6]

According to both [1 Kings 14:21-31](#) and [2 Chronicles 12:13](#), [Naamah](#) was an Ammonite. She was the only wife of King [Solomon](#) to be mentioned by name in the [Tanakh](#) as having borne a child. She was the mother of Solomon's successor, [Rehoboam](#).^[7]

The Ammonites presented a serious problem to the [Pharisees](#) because many marriages with Ammonite (and Moabite) wives had taken place in the days of [Nehemiah](#).^[8] The men had married women of the various nations without conversion, which made the children not Jewish.^[9] The legitimacy of [David's](#) claim to royalty was disputed on account of his descent from [Ruth](#), the Moabite.^[10]

[Psalms 51:5](#) - Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.

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The Bold Voice of Silence

Save me, O G-d, for the waters threaten to engulf me...

I am wearied by my calling out and my throat is dry. I've lost hope in waiting...

More numerous than the hairs on my head are those who hate me without reason...

Must I then repay what I have not stolen?

Mighty are those who would cut me down, who are my enemies without cause...

O G-d, You know my folly, and my unintended wrongs are not hidden from You...

It is for Your sake that I have borne disgrace, that humiliation covers my face.

I have become a stranger to my brothers, an alien to my mother's sons.

Out of envy for Your House, they ravaged me; the disgraces of those who revile You have fallen upon me...

Those who sit by the gate talk about me. I am the taunt of drunkards...

Disgrace breaks my heart and I am left deathly sick.

I hope for solace but there is none, and for someone to comfort me but I find no one.

(Written by: Nitzevet ([Nit-ze-vet](#)) daughter of Abdael the Ammonite)

Only one individual throughout David's youth felt pained over his plight and felt a deep bond of love for the child whom she alone knew was undoubtedly pure. This was King David's mother, Nitzevet bat Adel.

Nitzevet was not the Mother of David's brothers and David was thus hated by his family and brothers. and was not in line when God was to choose a King of Israel.



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Torn and anguished by David's unwarranted troubles, yet powerless to stop the degradation, Nitzevet stood by the sidelines waiting for the time when true justice would emerge. It would take 28 long years for that to happen.

David's Birth

David's father, Yishai (*Jesse*), was the grandson of Boaz and Ruth. After several years of marriage and after having raised virtuous children, Yishai began to entertain personal doubts about his ancestry.

His grandmother Ruth was a convert from the nation of Moav - *Moab*. The Torah specifically forbids a Moabite convert. Boaz and the *sages (a mentor in spiritual and philosophical topics who is renowned for profound wisdom)* understood this law as forbidding the conversion of male Moabites, while exempting the female converts. Ruth gave birth to Oved, the father of Yishai.

Later in his life, doubt gripped at Yishai on whether Boaz's decision was correct. If Yishai's status was questionable, he could not remain married to his wife, a *veritable (Being truly so called)* Israelite. Disregarding the personal sacrifice, Yishai separated from her.

After a number of years, Yishai longed for an offspring whose ancestry would be unquestionable. His plan involved his Canaanite maidservant.

He said to her, "Prepare for tonight. I will be freeing you, conditionally. If my status as a Jew is legitimate, you are freed as a Jewish convert to marry me. If my status is blemished, I am not giving you your freedom, but as a Canaanite maidservant, you may marry a Moabite convert."

Aware of the anguish of her mistress in being separated from her husband, the maidservant informed Nitzevet of Yishai's plan and suggested a counter plan. "Switch places with me tonight."

Nitzevet conceived that night.

Incensed, her sons wished to kill her and her illegitimate fetus (*David*) . Nitzevet chose a vow of silence, refusing to embarrass her husband by revealing his plan.

Unaware of his wife's behavior, but having compassion on her, Yishai ordered his sons not to kill her. "Instead, let the child that will be born be treated as a hated servant. Everyone will realize that he is a *mamzer (a full-fledged Jew in all other matters)*."

From the moment of his birth Nitzevet's son was treated by his brothers, as an abominable outcast. The rest of the nation, too, assumed that this youth was a treacherous sinner.

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The prophet, **Shmuel** (*Samuel*) arrives in Beit **Lechem** (*lekh'-em - House Of God*) to anoint the new king of Israel. As he lays his eyes on Yishai's eldest son, tall and distinguished Eliav, he is sure that this is the future king, until G-d reprimands him not to look at outside qualities.

No longer did Shmuel make any assumptions. All the seven sons of Yishai passed before Shmuel. None had been chosen.

"Are these all the lads?" Shmuel asked.

Yishai answered, "A small one is left."

Shmuel ordered that David be summoned. Out of respect, David first went home to change his clothes.

Nitzevet inquired, "Why did you come home?"

David explained. Nitzevet answered, "If so, I, too, am accompanying you."

When David arrived, Shmuel doubted whether he was worthy of the kingship.

However, G-d commanded, "*My anointed one is standing and you remain seated? Anoint David!*"

Tearful weeping could be heard from outside - the voice of Nitzevet, David's lone supporter and solitary source of comfort. The 28 long years of silence in the face of humiliation were finally coming to a close. At last, all would see that the lineage of her youngest son was pure.

Within moments, the once reviled shepherd boy became anointed as the future king of Israel.

King David had many sterling qualities. Many of these were inherited from his illustrious father, Yishai. But it was undoubtedly from his mother's milk that the young David absorbed strong values and the courage to face his adversaries.

From the moment he was born, and during his most tender years, it was Nitzevet who taught him the essential lesson of valuing every individual's dignity and refraining from embarrassing another, regardless of the personal consequences. It was she who displayed a silent but stoic bravery and dignity in the face of the gravest hardship.

Undoubtedly, it is from Nitzevet that King David absorbed a strength born from an inner confidence to disregard the callous treatment of the world and find solace in the comfort of his Maker. It was this strength that would fortify King David to defeat his staunchest antagonists and well as his most treacherous enemies, as he valiantly fought against the mightiest warriors.

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And it was this strength that ultimately allowed him to become the forebear of *Moshiach* – Messiah.

They put gall into my meal and give me vinegar to quench my thirst... (Psalm 69)1

This Psalm describes the life of a poor, despised and lowly individual who lacks even a single friend to comfort him. It is the voice of a tormented soul who has experienced untold humiliation and disgrace. Through no apparent cause of his own, he is surrounded by enemies who wish to cut him down; even his own brothers are strangers to him, ravaging and reviling him.

Amazingly, this is the voice of the mighty King David, righteous and beloved servant of G-d, feared and awed by all.

King David had many challenges throughout his life. But at what point did this great individual feel so alone, so disgraced, and so undeserving of love and friendship?

What caused King David to face such an intense ignominy, to be shunned by his own brothers in his home ("I have become a stranger to my brothers"), by the Torah sages who sat in judgment at the gates ("those who sit by the gate talk about me"), and by the drunkards on the street corners ("I am the taunt of drunkards")? What had King David done to arouse such ire and contempt? And was there no one, at this time in his life, who would provide him with love, comfort and friendship?

This Psalm, in which King David passionately gives voice to the heaviest burdens of his soul, refers to a period of twenty-eight years, from his earliest childhood until his being coronated as king of the people of Israel by the prophet Samuel.

David was born into the illustrious family of Yishai (Jesse), who served as the head of the *Sanhedrin* (supreme court of Torah law) and was one of the most distinguished leaders of his generation. Yishai was a man of such greatness that the Talmud (Shabbat 55b) observes that, "Yishai was one of only four righteous individuals who died solely due to the instigation of the serpent"--i.e. only because death was decreed upon the human race when Adam and Eve ate from the Tree of Knowledge at the serpent's instigation, not due to any sin or flaw of his own. David was the youngest in his family, which included seven other illustrious and charismatic brothers.

Yet, when David was born, this prominent family greeted his birth with utter derision and contempt. As David describes quite literally in the Psalm, "I was a stranger to my brothers, a foreigner to my mother's sons...they put gall in my meal and gave me vinegar to quench my thirst."

David was not permitted to eat with the rest of his family, but was assigned to a separate table in the corner. He was given the task of shepherd because "they hoped that a wild beast

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would come and kill him while he was performing his duties"[2](#) and for this reason was sent to pasture in dangerous areas full of lions and bears.[3](#)

Only one individual throughout David's youth was pained by his unjustified plight and felt a deep, unconditional bond of love for the child whom she alone knew was undoubtedly pure.

This was King David's mother, Nitzevet bat Adel, who felt the intensity of her youngest child's pain and rejection as her own.

Torn and anguished by David's unwarranted degradation, yet powerless to stop it, Nitzevet stood by the sidelines, in solidarity with him, shunned herself, as she, too, cried rivers of tears, awaiting the time when justice would be served.

It would take twenty-eight long years of assault and rejection, suffering and degradation until that justice would finally begin to materialize.

David's Birth

Why was the young David so reviled by his brothers and people?

To understand the hatred directed toward David, we need to investigate the inner workings behind the events, the secret episodes that aren't recorded in the Book of Prophets but alluded to in Midrashim.[4](#)

David's father, Yishai, was the grandson of Boaz and Ruth. After several years of marriage to his wife, Nitzevet, and after having raised several virtuous children, Yishai began to entertain personal doubts about his ancestry. True, Boaz was the leading Torah authority in his day, but his grandmother, Ruth, was a convert from the nation of Moab, as related in the Book of Ruth.

During Ruth's lifetime, many individuals were doubtful about the legitimacy of her marriage to Boaz. The Torah specifically forbids an Israelite to marry a Moabite convert, since this is the nation that cruelly refused the Jewish people passage through their land, or food and drink to purchase when they wandered in the desert after being freed from Egypt.

Boaz and the sages understood this law--as per the classic interpretation transmitted in the "Oral Torah"--as forbidding the conversion of *male* Moabites (who were the ones responsible for the cruel conduct) while exempting female Moabite converts. With his marriage to Ruth, Boaz hoped to clarify and publicize this Torah law, which was still unknown to the masses.

Boaz died the night after his marriage with Ruth. Ruth had conceived and subsequently gave birth to their son, Oved, the father of Yishai. Some rabble-rousers at the time claimed that Boaz's death verified that his marriage to Ruth the Moabite had indeed been forbidden.

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Time would prove differently. Once Oved (called so because he was a true *oved*, servant of G-d), and later Yishai and his offspring were born, their righteous conduct and prestigious positions proved the legitimacy of their ancestry. It was unquestionable that men of such caliber could have descended from a forbidden union.

However, later in his life, doubt gripped at Yishai's heart, gnawing away at the very foundation of his existence. Being the sincere individual that he was, his integrity compelled him to action.

If Yishai's status was questionable, he was not permitted to remain married to his wife, a veritable Israelite. Disregarding the personal sacrifice, Yishai decided the only solution would be to separate from her, by no longer engaging in marital relations. Yishai's children were aware of this separation.

After a number of years had passed, Yishai longed for an offspring whose ancestry would be unquestionable. His plan was to engage in relations with his Canaanite maidservant.

He said to her: "I will be freeing you, conditionally. If my status as a Jew is legitimate, then you are freed as a proper Jewish convert to marry me. If my status, however, is blemished and I have the legal status of a Moabite convert forbidden to marry an Israelite, I am not giving you your freedom, but as a *Shifchah Canaanit*, a Canaanite maidservant, you may marry a Moabite convert."

The maidservant was aware of the anguish of her mistress, Nitzevet. She understood her pain in being separated from her husband for so many years. She knew, as well, of Nitzevet's longing for more children.

The empathetic maidservant secretly approached Nitzevet and informed her of Yishai's plan, suggesting a bold counter plan.

"Let us learn from your ancestress and replicate their actions. Switch places with me tonight, just as Leah did with Rachel," she advised.

With a prayer on her lips that her plan succeed, Nitzevet took the place of her maidservant. That night Nitzevet conceived. Yishai remained unaware of the switch.

After three months, Nitzevet's pregnancy became obvious. Incensed, her sons wished to kill their apparently adulterous mother and the "illegitimate" fetus that she carried. Nitzevet, for her part, would not embarrass her husband by revealing the truth of what had occurred. Like her ancestress Tamar, who was prepared to be burned alive rather than embarrass Judah,⁵ Nitzevet chose a vow of silence. And like Tamar, Nitzevet would be rewarded for her silence with a child of greatness who would be the forebear of [Moshiach](#).

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Unaware of the truth behind his wife's pregnancy, but having compassion on her, Yishai ordered his sons not to touch her. "Do not kill her! Instead, let the child that will be born be treated as a lowly and despised servant. In this way, everyone will realize that his status is questionable and, as an illegitimate child, he will not marry an Israelite."

From the time of his birth onwards, Nitzevet's son was treated by his brothers as an abominable outcast.⁶ Noting the conduct of his brothers, the rest of the community assumed that this youth was a treacherous sinner full of unspeakable guilt.

On the infrequent occasions that Nitzevet's son would return from the pastures to his home in Beit Lechem (Bethlehem), he was shunned by the townspeople. If something was lost or stolen, he was accused as the natural culprit and ordered in the words of the Psalm, to "repay what I have not stolen."

Eventually, the entire lineage of Yishai was questioned, as well as the basis of the original law of the Moabite convert. People claimed that all the positive qualities from Boaz became manifest in Yishai and his illustrious seven sons, while all the negative character traits from Ruth the Moabite clung to this despicable youngest son.

Anointing King David

We are first introduced to David when the prophet Samuel is commanded to go to Beit Lechem to anoint a new king to replace the rejected King Saul.

Samuel arrives in Beit Lechem and the elders of the city come out to greet him, nervous at this unusual and unexpected visit, since the elderly prophet had stopped circulating throughout the land. The elders feared that Samuel had heard about a grievous sin that was taking place in their city.⁷ Perhaps he had come to rebuke them over the behavior of Yishai's despised shepherd boy, living in their midst.

Samuel declared, however, that he had come in peace and asked the elders, and Yishai and his sons, to join him for a sacrificial feast. As an elder, Yishai was invited to the feast, but when his sons were inexplicably also invited, they worried that perhaps the prophet had come to publicly reveal the embarrassing and illegitimate origins of their brother. Unbeknownst to them, Samuel would anoint the new king of Israel at this feast. All that had been revealed to the prophet at this point was that the new king would be a son of Yishai.

"When they came, Samuel saw Eliav (Yishai's oldest son) and he thought, "Surely G-d's anointed stands before Him!"

But G-d said to Samuel, "Don't look at his appearance or his great height, for I have rejected him-G-d does not see with mere eyes, like a man does. G-d sees the heart!"

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Then Yishai called Avinadav (his second son) and made him pass before Samuel. He said: "G-d did not choose this one either."

Yishai made Shammah pass, and Samuel said, "G-d has not chosen this one either."

Yishai had his seven sons pass before Samuel. Samuel said to Yishai, "G-d has not chosen any of them." At last Samuel said to Yishai, "Are there no lads remaining?"

He answered, "A small one is left; he is taking care of the sheep."

So Samuel said to him, "Send for him and have him brought; we will not stir until he comes here."

So he sent for him and had him brought-he was of ruddy complexion with red hair, beautiful eyes, and handsome to look at.

G-d said: "Rise up, anoint him, for this is the one!" (1 Samuel 16:6-12)

The Small One, Left Behind

As Samuel laid his eyes on Yishai's eldest son, Eliab, he was certain that this was the future king of Israel. Tall, handsome and distinguished, Samuel was ready to anoint him, until G-d reprimanded him not to look at the outside but to the inside.[8](#)

No longer did Samuel make any assumptions of his own, but he waited to be told who was to become the next king. All the seven sons of Yishai had passed before Samuel, and none of them had been chosen.

"Are these all the lads?" Samuel asked. Samuel prophetically chose his words carefully. Had he asked if these were all Yishai's *sons*, Yishai would have answered affirmatively, that there were no more of *his sons*, since David was not given the status of a son.

Instead, Yishai answered, "A small one is left; he is taking care of the sheep." David's status was small in Yishai's eyes. He was hoping that Samuel would proceed and allow David to remain where he was, outside of trouble, tending to the sheep, in the faraway pastures.

But Samuel ordered that David immediately be summoned to the feast. A messenger was dispatched to David who, out of respect for the prophet, first went home to wash himself and change his clothes. Unaccustomed to seeing David home at such a time, Nitzevet inquired, "Why did you come home in the middle of the day?"

David explained the reason and Nitzevet answered, "If so, I, too, am accompanying you."

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As David arrived, Samuel saw a man "of ruddy complexion, with red hair, beautiful eyes and handsome to look at." David's physical appearance alludes to the differing aspects of his personality. His ruddiness suggests a warlike nature, while his eyes and general appearance indicate kindness and gentility.[9](#)

At first, Samuel doubted whether David could be the one worthy of the kingship, a forerunner of the dynasty that would lead the Jewish people to the end of time. He thought to himself, "This one will shed blood as did the red-headed Eisav."[10](#)

G-d saw, however, that David's greatness was that he would direct his aggressiveness toward positive aims. G-d commanded Samuel, "My anointed one is standing before you, and you remain seated? Arise and anoint David without delay! For he is the one I have chosen!"[11](#)

As Samuel held the horn of oil, it bubbled, as if it could not wait to drop on David's forehead. When Samuel anointed him, the oil hardened and glistened like pearls and precious stones and the horn remained full.

As Samuel anointed David, the sound of weeping could be heard from outside the great hall. It was the voice of Nitzevet, David's lone supporter and solitary source of comfort.

Her twenty-eight long years of silence in the face of humiliation were finally coming to a close. At last, all would see that the lineage of her youngest son was pure, undefiled by any blemish. Finally, the anguish and humiliation that she and her son had borne would come to an end.

Facing her other sons, Nitzevet exclaimed, "The stone that was reviled by the builders[12](#) has now become the cornerstone!" (Psalms 118:22)

Humbled, they responded, "This has come from G-d; it was hidden from our eyes" (ibid., verse 23).

Those in the hall cried out in unison, "Long live the king! Long live the king!" Within moments, the once reviled shepherd boy became the anointed future king of Israel.

Nitzevet's Legacy

King David would have many more trials to face until he was acknowledged by the entire nation as the new monarch to replace King Saul. During his kingship, and throughout his life, up until his old age, King David faced many ordeals.

King David possessed many great talents and qualities, which would assist him in attaining the tremendous achievements of his lifetime. Many of these positive qualities were inherited

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from his illustrious father, Yishai, after whom he is fondly and respectfully called *ben Yishai*, the son of Yishai.

But it was undoubtedly from his mother that the young David absorbed the fortitude and courage to face his adversaries. From the moment he was born, and during his most tender years, it was Nitzevet who, by example, taught him the essential lesson of valuing every individual's dignity and refraining from embarrassing another, regardless of the personal consequences. It was she who displayed a silent but stoic bravery and dignity in the face of the gravest hardship.

It is from Nitzevet that King David absorbed a strength born from an inner confidence to disregard the callous treatment of the world and find solace in the comfort of one's Maker. It was this strength that would fortify King David to defeat his staunchest antagonists and his most treacherous enemies, as he valiantly fought against the mightiest warriors on behalf of his people.

Nitzevet taught her young child to find the strength in following the path of one's inner convictions, irrespective of the cruelty that might be hurled on him. Her display of patient confidence in the Creator that justice would be served gave David the inner peace and solace that he would need, over and over again, in confronting the formidable challenges in his life. Rather than succumb to his afflictions, rather than become the individual who was shunned by his tormentors, David learned from his mother to stand proud and dignified, feeling consolation in the open pastures in communicating with his Maker.

She demonstrated to him, as well, the necessity of boldness while pursuing the right path. When the situation would call for it, personal risks must be taken. Without her bold action in taking the place of her maidservant that fateful night, the great soul of her youngest child, David, the forebear of Moshiach, would never have descended to this world.

The soul-stirring Psalms composed by King David in his greatest hours of need eloquently describes his suffering and heartache, as well as his faith and conviction. The book of Psalms gives a voice to each of us, and has become the balm to sooth all of our wounds, as we, too, encounter the many personal and communal hardships of life in *galut* (exile).

As we say these verses, our voices mesh with Nitzevet's, with King David's and with all the voices of those past and present who have experienced unjustified pain, in beseeching our Maker for that time when the "son (descendant) of David" will usher in the era of redemption and true justice will suffuse creation.