

Theology, Gender and Transgender Ministry: Overview of Biblical References

Compiled for the Anglican Diocese of Toronto
Transgender Ministry

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INTRODUCTION

The following overview of selected biblical references has been compiled for several purposes. While the author hopes that trans individuals using it will find sources of scriptural support, comfort and encouragement, the document is also intended to support the ministry to transgender individuals and parishes in the Anglican Diocese of Toronto that was started more actively in about 2014. This transgender ministry has included workshops, displays, clergy and parish development, information materials, and pastoral interactions and referrals for individuals, their families and allies.

Over the last ten years, an increasingly large and world-wide range of books has been published offering theological and scriptural perspectives on the lives of transgender people, their families and their allies. Each of the biblical references listed here will also lead the reader to related sources offering varying theological interpretations relevant to LGBTQ+ issues, as well as perspectives that may be helpful to transgender experience. The document in its entirety attempts to avoid the perils of proof-texting in biblical interpretation.

The textual overview column quotes the version of the Bible as used by the main author cited. In some cases, the actual words of the author are quoted in the interpretation column, and in other situations there is a brief summary, especially for longer documents. No summary of this kind can ever do justice to the excellent scholarship and depth of theological insights of the many authors cited.

The content of this selected biblical overview is entirely the responsibility of the Rev. Margaret Rodrigues, who would welcome questions and suggestions.

Thank you very much for your interest.

OVERVIEW OF BIBLICAL REFERENCES: TRANSGENDER-RELATED ISSUES

Reference	Biblical Text	Interpretations	Sources
Genesis 1:26-27	<p><i>Then God said, “ Let us make man in our own image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.</i></p>	<p>This passage continues to be the subject of intense debate and disagreement about the implications of “male and female he created them.” Does this imply a binary world in relation to human gender?</p> <p>Both Jewish and Christian scholarship has recognized that the original created being is either hermaphroditic or sexually undifferentiated... closer to a transgender identity than half of a binary gender construct. According to this very ancient interpretation, binary gender would be a later development, not the first intention of the Creator but provided subsequently for the sake of human companionship. From this angle, hermaphrodites or intersexuals could be viewed as reminders of Original Perfection.”</p> <p>Genesis 1 is such a poetic articulation of creation that the author of Genesis was not trying to write a scientific explanation for the creation of all things. (Besides the poetic factor, there is also the fact that the scientific method had not yet been developed.)</p>	<p>Rodrigues, 2016.</p> <p>Mollenkott, 2001, p. 91.</p> <p>Also: Evans, 2017, pp. 39-50.</p> <p>Also: Guest, 2016, pp.21-44.</p> <p>Also: Hertzner, 2016, pp.50-71.</p> <p>Also: Hartke, 2018, pp.50-57.</p> <p>Also: Paige, 2019, pp. 27-30.</p>

<p>Genesis 32: 28</p> <p>Isaiah 62: 2</p> <p>John 1:42</p>	<p><i>The following three bible passages are about name changes:</i></p> <p><i>Then the man said, “You shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with humans, and have prevailed.”</i></p> <p><i>The nations shall see your vindication, and all the kings your glory, and you shall be called by a new name that the mouth of the Lord shall give.</i></p> <p><i>He brought Simon to Jesus, who looked at him and said, “You are Simon son of John. You are to be called Cephas (which is translated Peter).</i></p>	<p><i>Alex Clare-Young’s personal name change responses:</i></p> <p>You shall no longer be called your old name. You have wrestled with me and discerned a new name: Alex.</p> <p>I could be called by ‘a new name that the mouth of the Lord will give.’ i.e. Alex.</p> <p>I recognize you. And you are to be called ‘Alex’.</p>	<p>Clare-Young, 2019, pp. 58-60.</p> <p>Also: Hartke, 2018 pp.75-86.</p>
<p>Genesis 37:2-4</p>	<p><i>Now Israel loved Joseph more than any other of his children, because he was the son of his old age; and he had made him a long robe with sleeves.</i></p>	<p>In the KJV the Hebrew phrase <i>ketonet passim</i> was translated as “ a coat of many colours.” This apparently beautiful and luxurious garment served as a mark of distinction for the virgin daughters of the king, therefore Joseph was failing to measure up to expected gender expressions. The only other person wearing one in scripture was Tamar, King David’s daughter.</p>	<p>Hartke, 2018, pp. 67-69.</p> <p>Also: Beardsley and Dowd: 2020, pp. 56-7.</p> <p>Also: Hertzler, 2016, 86-91.</p> <p>Also: Paige, 2019, pp. 99-103.</p>
<p>Leviticus 21: 1-23</p>	<p><i>The Lord said to Moses: Say to Aaron: For the generations to come none of your descendants who</i></p>	<p>This reflects the ancient Israelites’ experience of what it took for God’s priests to be holy. When Jesus</p>	<p>Hertzler, 2016, pp. 28-32.</p>

	<i>has a defect may come near to offer the food of his God. No man who has any defect may come near.</i>	came, he taught and modelled a deeper, more profound way of understanding holiness. It is not the things that people come in contact with on the outside that defile them and make them unclean or unholy, but the thoughts and actions that arise from inside them.	
Deuteronomy 22:5	<i>A woman must not wear men's clothing, nor a man wear women's clothing, for the Lord your God detests anyone who does this.</i>	<p>The ancient Israelite ethical code in Deuteronomy appears to condemn what today would be called cross-dressing. Many biblical scholars consider this prohibition as a warning against various Canaanite cult practices in the historical period and geographic location in which the injunction was written. The harmless practice of cross-dressing was not inherently abominable in and of itself; rather, it was to be avoided by the Israelites because of its idolatrous association with the worship of other regional gods.</p> <p>The religious particularity of the Levitical rules is matched by the strong cultural and historical conditioning that gave rise to them. Equal and loving relationships between same-gender people, for example, did not exist in the same way in the cultures of Mediterranean antiquity. Sexuality was male-oriented and based</p>	<p>Sheridan, 2001, p. 75.</p> <p>Tolbert, 2004, p.3.</p> <p>Also: Paige, 2019, pp.41-44.</p>

		<p>upon the combination of dominance and submission.</p> <p>Since gender-variant people today are cross-dressing in order to express their true selves, in order <i>not</i> to deceive others and so harm relationships, ...this verse is actually an affirmation to gender variant people to dress in clothing that best expresses their true gender identity.</p>	<p>Also: Hertzler, 2016, pp. 33-43.</p>
Deuteronomy 23:1	<i>He whose testicles are crushed and or whose male member is cut off shall not enter into the assembly of the Lord.</i>	<p>Gender reassignment is as much about <i>conversion</i> as it is about <i>castratio</i>.</p> <p>This verse prohibits eunuchs from the assembly but it is not binding for all time. Within scripture the prohibition regarding eunuchs and foreigners changes over time.</p>	<p>Taylder, 2009, in Althaus-Reid & Isherwood, 2009, p. 76.</p> <p>Hertzler, 2016, p. 20-21</p> <p>Also: Paige, 2019, pp. 43-48.</p>
Judges 4: 4-8	<i>At that time Deborah, a prophetess, wife of Lappidoth, was judging Israel...and the Israelites came up to her for judgement.</i>	<p>Barak insisted that Deborah go into battle with him against the Canaanites, leading to Jael killing Sisera, the Canaanite general, with a tent peg. Both women were gender rebels (no evidence of being transgender, however).</p>	<p>Hartke, 2018, pp. 69-70.</p>
2 Kings 9:32 2 Kings 20:18	References to eunuchs		<p>Also: Hartke, 2018, p. 87-127.</p>

Job: 1-42	Continuing, Elihu said,....."Look, God is mighty and doesn't reject anyone; he is mighty in strength and mind. He doesn't let the mighty live, but grants justice to the poor. Job 36:5-7.	The analogy between Job (a transcestor) and trans people works on another, deeper level.....It arises from the narrative of a person persecuted, blamed and excluded, in order to allow people to remain in their theological comfort zones.	Dowd and Beardsley, 2018, pp. 117-133.
Psalm 139: 13-16	<i>For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.</i>	<p>The creation of the human was purposeful. It was planned, it was wonderful, and it was hidden and created in the mother's womb. Each human is uniquely wonderful in their design...even those born with mental or physical challenges have been specifically planned and designed that way. God knew what he was creating.....</p> <p>These words are a retrospective blanket wrapped around my childhood isolation. They are like a tight hug, a warming fire, or a comforting drink of cocoa.</p>	<p>Evans, 2017, pp. 53-54.</p> <p>Clare-Young, pp. 25-29.</p> <p>Also: Hartke, 2018, p. 140-142.</p>
Isaiah 39:7	Reference to eunuchs		Paige, 2019, pp. 43-48.
Isaiah 56: 3-5	<i>Let not the foreigner who has joined himself to the LORD say, "The LORD will surely separate me from his people"; and let not the eunuch say,</i>	The following Isaiah passages about eunuchs have been interpreted to mean that, by implication, God accepts the transgendered as full and	Rodrigues, 2016. Also: Evans, 2017, p. 55.

<p>Isaiah 56: 6-7</p>	<p><i>"Behold, I am a dry tree." For thus says the Lord, "To the eunuchs who keep my sabbaths, who choose the things that please me and hold fast to my covenant- to them I will give within my temple and its walls a memorial and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that will not be cut off.</i></p> <p><i>....all who keep the Sabbath without desecrating it and who hold fast to my covenant, these I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.</i></p>	<p>legitimate members of both Judaism and by extension, the Christian Church. While these biblical interpretations are somewhat tenuous as applied directly to transgender individuals, they do support a very strong ethical imperative for the inclusion of all kinds of human beings, regardless of gender.</p> <p>This eschatological vision represents a freedom that is exhilarating, and a reframing of righteousness that is within the purview of all-without respect to physicality, nationality, or sexuality....An eschatological hope for social organization that is free from the constrictions of gender roles.</p> <p>God's willingness to accept and include eunuchs as a part of his chosen people is set out in the book of the prophet Isaiah, with which Jesus would have probably been very familiar, since he quoted from the scroll of Isaiah in the synagogue in Nazareth (Luke 4:16-20).</p>	<p>Also: Hartke, 2018, p. 87-127.</p> <p>Also: Hertzner, 2016, pp. 21-22.</p> <p>Koch, 2006, p. 383. Cited by Reay, 2009, in Althaus-Reid & Isherwood, 2009, p. 158.</p> <p>Rodrigues, 2016.</p>
<p>Jeremiah 29: 2; 34:19; 41:16</p>	<p>References to eunuchs</p>		<p>Rodrigues, 2016.</p>

<p>Daniel 1:7</p> <p>Daniel 1:8-11</p> <p>Daniel 1:18</p>	<p><i>And the chief of the eunuchs gave them names: Daniel he called Belteshaz'zar.....</i></p> <p>References to eunuchs</p>	<p>Daniel's fluid identity resists categorization and 'reawakens the ancient silences of queer spiritual ancestry'. Daniel's gender identity as a eunuch enabled him to mediate not only the gendered world but also the spiritual and physical worlds i.e. gender variant people acting as mediators of the sacred.</p>	<p>West, 2006a p.429. Cited in Reay, 2009, pp. 161.</p> <p>Rodrigues, 2016.</p>
<p>Book of Esther</p> <p>Esther1 : 10, 12, 14, 15</p> <p>Esther 2: 3, 21</p> <p>Esther 4: 4-5</p> <p>Esther 6: 2, 14</p> <p>Esther 7: 9</p>	<p>References to eunuchs</p>	<p>Eunuchs function as a 'third term' or a 'third mode of articulation', able to cross a boundary between male and female space, and are the only ones who hold all the information and are ultimately the ones with the real power in this narrative.</p>	<p>Reay, 2009, in Althaus-Reid & Isherwood, 2009, p.161.</p> <p>West, 2006b, p. 285. Cited in Reay, 2009, p. 161.</p>
<p>Other passages about eunuchs from the Jewish Bible:</p> <p>Ruth 1:16 (Naomi and Ruth)</p> <p>1 Samuel 18:1-4 (David and Jonathan)</p> <p>Daniel 1:9 (Daniel and Ashpenaz)</p>	<p>Possible references to eunuchs</p>	<p>These passages have usually been cited more narrowly as referring to same-gender relationships, since the complexity of transgender relationships is only recently being researched.</p> <p>Mollenkott goes much further in contending that there is sufficient biblical evidence to show that, "any reasonably open-minded person would have to agree that, once we take off our cultural blinders, both the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures are extraordinarily transgender friendly."</p>	<p>Neelands, Notes, 2016.</p> <p>Mollenkott, 2009, p 49.</p>

<p>Matthew 16: 27</p>	<p><i>For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what they have done.</i></p>	<p>This is Jesus' invitation to each of us to look deep down in our souls and be honest with ourselves about who we really are. To be honest about our sexual orientation, our gender identity, our unique gifts, our particular and peculiar vocational desires.</p>	<p>Hertzer, 2016, 72-79.</p>
<p>Matthew 19: 11-12</p>	<p><i>Jesus replied, "Not everyone can accept this teaching, but only those for whom it is meant (to whom it has been given). For there are eunuchs who were born that way, and there are eunuchs who have been made so by others (men), and there are those who have made themselves eunuchs (renounced marriage) because of the rule (kingdom) of heaven. Let anyone receive this message who can (as translated in Bohache, 206, p. 509. Cited in Reay, 2009.</i></p>	<p>Scholars have suggested that the eunuchs from birth are what we would know today as male to female transgender; those made by men have been castrated for societal, religious and cultural reasons; and those who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven are the celibate religious. Trad: Some have been called to a celibate life, or that marriage is not for everyone, especially if their calling is of greater importance. Trans. interp: those born intersex; those who are transgender in the broadest sense of this word and third, those who are gender different, or gender queer, that is, not conforming to the normative definitions of gender roles and identities. (Reay 2009, p. 150). 'Eunuch' used to slander Jesus and followers: birth, castration, disciples; placing Jesus in a liminal position</p>	<p>Rodrigues, 2016. Reay, 2009, in Althaus-Reid & Isherwood, 2009, p.148-167. Also: Hertzer, 2016, pp 44-48.</p>

		The fact that Jesus included eunuchs i.e. gender variance in the same conversation about God creating humans male and female shows that Jesus was well aware that male and female were not the only realities.	Moxnes, 2003, pp. 75, 89, cited in Reay, 2009.
Matthew 25:34-36	<i>For the King will say to those on his right, "Come, you who are blessed by my father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry, and you gave me something to eat. I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink. I was a stranger and you invited me in. I needed clothes and you clothed me. I was in prison and you came to visit me."</i>	By extrapolation, "I was transgender, and you accepted me and welcomed me".	Rodrigues, 2016.
Matthew 25:40	<i>The King will reply, "I tell you the truth, whatever you did for the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me."</i>	Principle of inclusion	
Mark 14: 13-15; also Luke 22: 8-13; Matthew 26: 17-19	Jesus sent two of his disciples and said to them, "Go into the city. A man carrying a water jar will meet you. Follow him. Wherever he enters, say to the owner of the house, "Where is my guest room where I can eat the	In that time, carrying water was the task of unmen-women, children and slaves. So this was not just any man. Scholars have suggested that the man was a figurative if not literal eunuch. Alternatively, he might be a person assigned	Paige, 2019, pp. 137-8.

	Passover meal with my disciples?"	male at birth (AMAB) who has decided to transition to a new identity.	
John 9: 1-3;	<i>As Jesus walked along, he saw a man who was blind from birth. Jesus' disciples asked, "Rabbi, who sinned so that he was born blind, this man or his parents? Jesus answered, " Neither he nor his parents. This happened so that God's mighty works might be displayed in him."</i>	Trans gender hearers of this passage have derived great comfort from the fact that the subsequent expulsion of the man from the synagogue after Jesus had restored his sight paralleled the way in which their parents had chosen to save their own reputations in their churches and communities by turning their backs on their adult children.	Hertzler, 2016, pp. 95-99.
Acts 8: 27	<i>And he (Philip) rose and went. And behold, an Ethiopian, a eunuch, a minister of the Can'dace, queen of the Ethiopians, in charge of all her treasure, had come to Jerusalem to worship</i>	Acceptance and baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch supports a very strong ethical imperative for the inclusion of all kinds of human beings, regardless of gender. By extension, it can be interpreted as indicating the acceptance of a transgender individual in the sense implied in Matthew 19:11-12 in relation to eunuchs. See Isaiah 56: 3-7, page 6 above.	Rodrigues, 2016. Also: Hertzler, 2016, pp, 22-27.
Acts 8: 34	<i>And the eunuch said to Philip, "About whom, pray, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?"</i>		
Acts 8:36	<i>And as they went along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, "See, here is water! What is to prevent my being baptized?"</i>		
Acts 8: 38-39	<i>And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized</i>		

	<i>him. And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught up Philip; and the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing.</i>		
Romans 3:22	<i>.....the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction.....</i>	Principle of inclusion	Rodrigues, 2016.
Romans 8:1	<i>There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.</i>	Principle of inclusion	Rodrigues, 2016.
Galatians 3:28	<i>There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.</i>	In the Greek, the text is actually, "There is no male and female." That is, in Christ, (binary-sex) marriage does not count.	Neelands, 2016. Also: Evans, 2017, p. 45. Also: Paige, 2019, 121-125
Galatians 5:16-25	<i>But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.....If we live by the Spirit, let's follow the Spirit. Let's not become arrogant, make each other angry, or be jealous of each other.</i>	Some writers on this passage have made the inference that if trans people did not live out their gender identity it would be easier for them and other Christians whose views they champion. But Paul makes it clear that this seeking advantage or ease at the expense of others is moral cowardice and unfitting for a Christian. He points to his own sufferings and is clear that there is a cost to being a Christian.	Beardsley and Dowd, 2020, pp. 60-61.

Colossians 3: 11	<i>Here there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scyth'ian, slave, free-man, but Christ is all, and in all.</i>	Principle of inclusion	Rodrigues, 2016.
1 Timothy 4: 11-16	<i>These are the things you must insist on and teach...Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you through prophecy with the laying on of hands by the council of elders. Put these things into practice.....for in doing this you will save both yourself and your hearers.</i>	Timothy is encouraged to find out who he is, not to let others despise his...identity and for him to speak the truth.	Clare-Young, pp. 37-38.

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