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Is the narrative of Adam and Eve in Genesis a perfect example of misogynism?

Figure 1



Genesis 1:27

Genesis 2:18 *(Genesis 2:18–25)*
Then the LORD God said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner.

Genesis 2:23

Genesis 3:6 *(Genesis 3:1–6)*
When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.

Figure 2



Genesis 3:12

Genesis 3:17

Genesis 3:16 *(Genesis 3:12–16)*
To the woman he said, "I will make your pain in childbearing very severe; with painful labor you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you."

RECEPTION HISTORY (PETER HARRISON)

Western art often portrays Eve as the primary agent of humanity's fall, reinforcing themes of temptation and female culpability. Yet these images reflect centuries of interpretation of Genesis 2–3, shaping wider cultural understandings of the Fall, as explored by Harrison (2007). [1]

THE GENESIS NARRATIVE (GORDON J. WENHAM)

Genesis 2–3 presents a carefully structured narrative describing the creation of humanity, the introduction of disobedience, and its consequences (Wenham 1987).[2] The woman is formed as ēzer kĕnegdô ("a helper corresponding to" the man) (Gen 2:18), a phrase suggesting partnership rather than inferiority. Yet in Genesis 3, the woman engages the serpent first and is later addressed with consequences that have been historically read as reinforcing male authority over her.

THE CHARGE OF MISOGYNY (PHYLLIS TRIBLE)

Critics argue that the Genesis narrative places disproportionate blame on Eve, establishing a theological foundation for misogyny. Eve's dialogue with the serpent, Adam's deflection of responsibility (Gen 3:12), and the pronouncement that "he shall rule over you" (Gen 3:16) have been interpreted as legitimising male dominance. Feminist scholars such as Phyllis Trible note how these verses have been weaponised historically to justify women's subordination (Trible 1978). [3]

REINTERPRETING THE FALL (CAROL MEYERS)

Contemporary biblical scholarship challenges simplistic readings of blame and hierarchy in Genesis 3. The serpent addresses the woman not because of inferiority, but because she demonstrates theological curiosity and interpretive agency. Adam's silence throughout the narrative has led some scholars to question traditional assumptions of his passivity and innocence. Moreover, Genesis 3:16 may be descriptive rather than prescriptive, portraying the distortion of relationships after the fall rather than God's intended order Meyers (2013). [4]

For this reason, whether the narrative of Adam and Eve in Genesis is inherently misogynistic remains debated. While the text itself is brief and symbolic, its interpretation has profoundly shaped attitudes toward women. Distinguishing between the biblical narrative and its reception invites a more nuanced theological evaluation of the text and its interpretation.

Figure 1. Hugo van der Goes, The Fall, Adam and Eve Tempted by the Snake, from the Diptych of the Fall and the Redemption, left wing, c.1470, oil on oakwood, 33.8 × 23 cm, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, inv. 945. Reproduced in The Visual Commentary on Scripture, "The Fall," https://thevcs.org/fall (accessed 12 February 2026).

Figure 2. Titian, Adam and Eve, c.1550, oil on canvas, 240 × 186 cm, Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid, P000429. Reproduced in The Visual Commentary on Scripture, "The Fall," https://thevcs.org/fall (accessed 12 February 2026).

1. Harrison, Peter. The Fall of Man and the Foundations of Science. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

2. Wenham, Gordon J. Genesis 1–15. Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987.

3. Trible, Phyllis. God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978.

4. Meyers, Carol. Rediscovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.