



Gender and Sexuality in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity

Eve and her Afterlife



The Disobedience of the Pair in the Garden

Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, 'Did God say, "You shall not eat from any tree in the garden?"'. The woman said to the serpent, 'We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; but God said, "You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die"'. But the serpent said to the woman, 'You will not die; for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil'. So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves.



The Disobedience of the Pair in the Garden

- If the first woman depicted in Genesis 3 as a dangerous being who bewitches her husband in order to gain authority?

‘From a woman sin had its beginning,
and because of her we all die’ (Wisdom
of Ben Sira 25:24).

‘Eve the Deceiver’



‘Adam was not deceived,
but the woman was
deceived and became a
transgressor’

(1 Timothy 2:14).

‘But I am afraid that as the
serpent deceived Eve by its
cunning, your thoughts will be
led astray from a sincere and
pure devotion to Christ’

(2 Corinthians 11:3).

‘Adam and Eve’, Lucas Cranach
(1472-1553 CE)



Eve - the Devil's Gateway?



God's judgment on this sex lives on in our age; the guilt necessarily lives on as well. You are the Devil's gateway; you are the unsealer of that tree; you are the first forsaker of the divine law; you are the one who persuaded him whom the Devil was not brave enough to approach; you so lightly crushed the image of God, the man Adam; because of your punishment, that is death, even the Son of God had to die. And you think to adorn yourself beyond your 'tunics of skins' (Genesis 3:21) (Tertullian, *On the Dress of Women* 1:1:2).

The Serpent Converses with Eve

'Eve and the Serpent',
Spanish 15th century

Eve as a perceptive
and/or ambitious
being?

Close link between
serpents and women
in the ancient world.



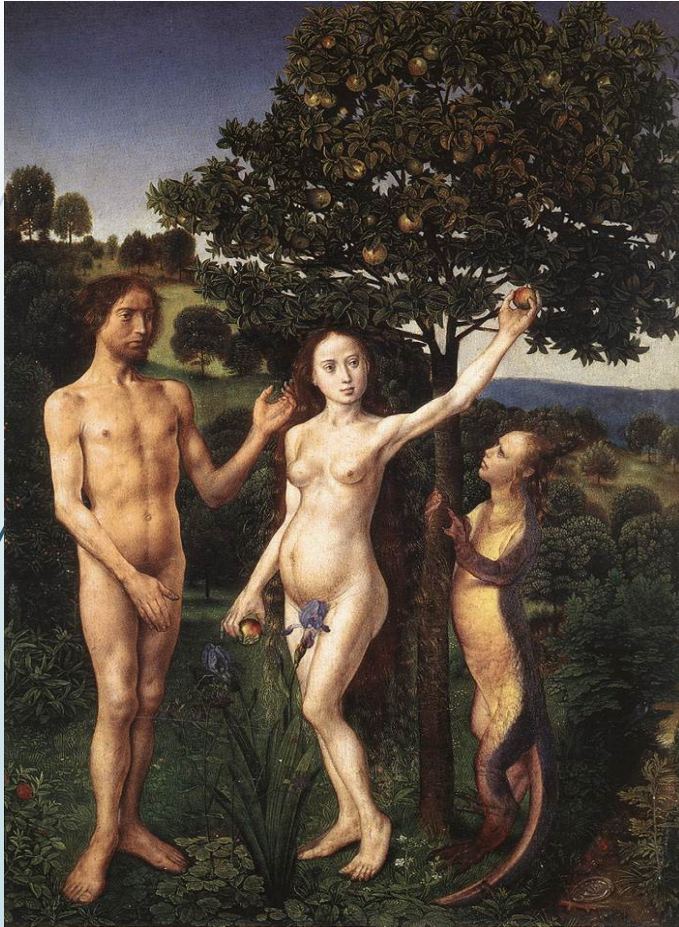
Women and Serpents



Canaanite Religion

Asherah – the Canaanite goddess – is a symbol of fertility.

The Serpent as Feminine?



‘Eve and the Serpent’
Hugo van der Goes (Vienna
ca. 1470 CE)

‘Serpent’ as a feminine
noun: many Bible
translations render
‘serpent’ as a
masculine noun (as in
Hebrew and Greek
texts).

The Serpent as Feminine?



Raphael, Fall from Grace (1511 CE, Vatican).

The Presence of 'the Man'

Serpent: 'You [plural] will not die' (Genesis 3:4).

The Woman: 'We may eat' (3:2).

'Adam and Eve', Jacopo Tintoretto, 1518-1594 CE

'And she also gave some to her husband, *who was with her....* and he ate' (3:6).



Adam's Apples





Weakness and Disobedience

- Image of human weakness (male and female).
- The man should have remained faithful to God's command; he succumbs to blaming the woman.
- Both fail to take responsibility for their deeds; the woman blames the serpent.
- The 'partnership' in the garden has been ruptured ('a love story gone awry').



God's Response to Disobedience

- God announces his verdict on the serpent (Genesis 3:14-15), the woman (3:16), and the man (3:17-19).
- Are God's words to be interpreted as a punishment or curse (see verses 14, 17)?
- Are all forms of life outside the walls of Eden a form of punishment?

Grandval Bible (Tours, ca. 840 CE)





Genesis 3:16-17 as Aetiological Statements

- Carol Meyers (*Discovering Eve*) argues that the oracles directed at the woman and the man are an attempt to account for the *reality* of everyday life in Israel during the 10th/9th century BCE (an agrarian society in which people were forced to work on unproductive land).
- Women's 'lot' during this period was to work and bear many children.

Genesis 3:16

I will greatly increase
your pangs in
childbearing;

In pain you shall bring
forth children,

Yet your desire shall be
for your husband,

And he shall rule over
you.



Genesis 3:16-17 as Aetiological Statements

- Is the woman ‘ruled’ by her husband (Genesis 3:16)? The parallelism may suggest that she is enslaved by her desire to give birth to more and more children.
- Lynn Bechtel: ‘The text speaks only of ruling the woman’s sexual desire, not her entire life’.
- No suggestion that the woman’s fate is more painful than that of the man, although its real images of labour, suffering and discord cannot be ignored.



The Legacy of the Second Wave of Feminist Biblical Interpretation

- Attempt to recover a positive message from the creation narratives.
- But are such readings overly optimistic in their attempt to 'depatriarchalize' Genesis 1-3?
- D. Jobling, 'Who, in a patriarchal culture, composed the feminist story which she takes the text to be; and how was it received, by a patriarchal culture, as its basic myth of origins?'
- A sincere attempt to bridge the gap between (traditionally androcentric) interpretation and the rise of feminism.