



Women and Religion(HPHI5032/6032)

Disobedience and Death: A Reading of Genesis 3



Genesis 3

¹ Now the serpent was craftier than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, ‘Did God really say, “You must not eat from any tree in the garden”?’

² The woman said to the serpent, ‘We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, ³ but God did say, “You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die”’. ⁴ ‘You will not certainly die’, the serpent said to the woman. ⁵ ‘For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil’. 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.

Genesis 3

⁷ Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves. ⁸ Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden.⁹ But the Lord God called to the man, ‘Where are you?’ ¹⁰ He answered, ‘I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid’.

¹¹ And he said, ‘Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?’

¹² The man said, ‘The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it’. ¹³ Then the Lord God said to the woman, ‘What is this you have done?’ The woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.”



Genesis 3

¹⁴ So the Lord God said to the serpent, 'Because you have done this,

Cursed are you above all livestock
and all wild animals!

You will crawl on your belly
and you will eat dust
all the days of your life.

¹⁵ And I will put enmity
between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and hers;
he will crush your head,
and you will strike his heel'.

Genesis 3

¹⁶ To the woman he said,

‘ I will make your pains in childbearing very severe;
with painful labour you will give birth to children.
Your desire will be for your husband,
and he will rule over you’.

¹⁷ To the man he said, ‘Because you listened to your wife and ate fruit from the tree about which I commanded you, “You must not eat from it”, Cursed is the ground because of you;
through painful toil you will eat food from it
all the days of your life.

¹⁸ It will produce thorns and thistles for you,
and you will eat the plants of the field.

¹⁹ By the sweat of your brow
you will eat your food
until you return to the ground,
since from it you were taken;
for dust you are
and to dust you will return’.

²⁰ Adam named his wife Eve, because she would become the mother of all the living.



Genesis 3

²¹ The Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them. ²² And the Lord God said, 'The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat and live forever'.

²³ So the Lord God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken. ²⁴ After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.



The Disobedience of the Pair in the Garden: Is the Woman to Blame?



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



‘Eve the Deceiver’

‘From a woman sin had its beginning, and because of her we all die’ (Wisdom of Ben Sira 25:24, Jewish text around 2nd century BCE).

‘Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor’ (I Timothy 2:14, early Christian text 1st century CE).

'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 (150-220 CE), *On the Dress of Women* 1:1:2.

The Serpent Converses with Eve

Eve as a perceptive
and/or ambitious being?

Close link between
serpents and women in
the ancient world.

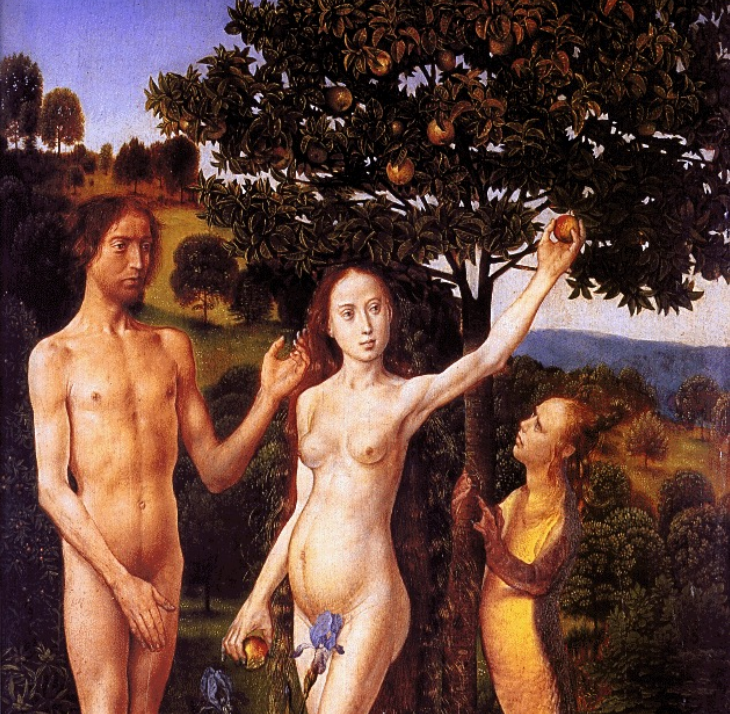
‘Eve and the Serpent’, Spanish
15th century



Women and Serpents

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





The Serpent as Feminine?

- ▶ 'Serpent' as a feminine noun: many Bible translations
- ▶ However, 'serpent' is a masculine noun in the Hebrew and Greek texts of Genesis.



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



‘The Fall
from Grace’,
Raphael,
fresco in the
Vatican,
1511 CE.



The Presence of 'the Man'

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

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

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

'Adam and Eve', Titian, ca. 1550 CE, Museo del Prado.



‘Adam and Eve’,
Jacopo
Tintoretto,
1518-1594 CE



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?

God's Response
to the
Woman's
Disobedience -
Genesis 3:16

a: I will greatly increase your toil
[Hebrew: *issabôn*; NRSV: pangs in
childbirth];

b: in pain you shall bring forth children,

c: yet your desire shall be for your
husband,

d: and he shall rule over you.

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' was to work and bear many children.



‘Yet your desire shall be for your husband,
and he shall rule over you’ (Genesis 3:16cd)

Is the woman ‘ruled’ by her husband (3:16d)?

The parallelism (3:16cd) 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 (Second Wave) Feminist Biblical Interpretation

- ▶ Attempt to recover a positive message from the creation narratives.
- ▶ An attempt to bridge the gap between (traditionally androcentric) interpretation and the rise of feminism.
- ▶ Some claim that it is overly optimistic to try to 'depatriarchalize' Genesis 1-3.
- ▶ '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?' (D. Jobling)