

Adam and Eve in Genesis: Misogyny or Misinterpretation

The story of Adam and Eve in Genesis chapters 2 and 3 is often brought up when people talk about gender and inequality. Some argue that it clearly shows misogyny, mainly because Eve is seen as the one who causes the fall of humanity. At the same time, others suggest that this idea comes more from how the story has been interpreted over time rather than what the text itself actually says. So it is not completely straightforward. This report looks at both sides, using the biblical text and also some modern scholarship, to see whether Genesis really presents women in a negative way.

If we start with Genesis 2, the creation of Adam and Eve does not immediately look unequal. Adam is created first, from the dust, and Eve is later formed from his rib. On the surface, this can seem like Eve is secondary. But when you look a bit closer, it becomes less clear. The word used for Eve as a “helper” is the Hebrew word *ezer*. This same word is used elsewhere in the Bible to describe God helping humans, which obviously does not suggest inferiority.¹ So it could be that Eve’s role is more about support and partnership than anything like submission.

There is also the detail in Genesis 2.25 where both Adam and Eve are described as naked and not feeling any shame. That feels important, because it suggests a kind of equality and openness between them. There is no hint of control or hierarchy at this stage. In a way, the relationship seems balanced before anything goes wrong.

Things become more complicated in Genesis 3, where the idea of misogyny is usually discussed. Eve speaks to the serpent, she takes the fruit, and then she gives it to Adam. Because of this order, she is often blamed more. Then in Genesis 3.16, the woman is told that her husband will rule over her, which has been used quite a lot to justify male authority.

But even here, it is not as simple as it first looks. Adam is there with Eve and also chooses to eat the fruit.² He is not forced into it. Both of them are questioned by God, and both receive consequences. The text does not clearly say that Eve is more guilty. So the idea that she is mainly responsible seems to come more from later interpretation than from the story itself.

A number of modern scholars have pointed this out. Carol Meyers, for example, argues that the Genesis story reflects its ancient context but does not necessarily promote the idea that women are inferior.³ Phyllis Trible also suggests that the story has often been misread, and that it actually shows shared responsibility between Adam and Eve.⁴ Mieke Bal makes a similar point, noting that both characters act and both are punished, so it is difficult to say that Eve alone is to blame.⁵

The statement in Genesis 3.16 about the man ruling over the woman is also debated. It might not be a command at all, but more a description of what happens after things have gone wrong. In that sense, it reflects a broken relationship rather than an ideal one. If that is the case, then the text is not promoting inequality, but simply describing it as a consequence.

Even so, it is hard to ignore the fact that the story has been used in misogynistic ways throughout history. Early Christian writers like Tertullian placed a lot of blame on women and linked them directly to sin.⁶ This had a long-term effect on how women were viewed, often reinforcing ideas that they were weaker or more easily led astray.

Because of this, it seems important to separate the text itself from how it has been used. The Genesis narrative is quite short and leaves room for interpretation. A lot of the negative views about women seem to come from later traditions rather than the wording of the text on its own.

It is also interesting to look at how Eve is presented in the story. She is not passive. She speaks, she thinks about what the serpent says, and she makes a decision. That could be seen as a form of agency, even if the outcome is negative. Adam, in contrast, is much quieter in that moment. He does not question what is happening or challenge it. Some scholars think this silence is important, and that it shows he shares responsibility just as much.⁷

The detail of Eve being created from Adam's rib can also be read in different ways. While it has often been used to suggest dependence, it could also symbolise closeness. She is created from his side, not above or below him. That might suggest equality, or at least a kind of partnership.

Overall, the claim that the Adam and Eve story is a perfect example of misogyny feels too strong. There are definitely elements that have been interpreted in that way, and historically the story has been used to support unequal views of men and women. But when you look closely at the text itself, it does not clearly present women as inferior or solely responsible for sin.

In the end, it seems more accurate to say that misogyny comes from how the story has been interpreted rather than from the story itself. The Genesis narrative is more complex than it might first appear, and different readings are possible. Looking at both the primary text and modern scholarship shows that the issue is not as clear-cut as some might think.

Footnotes

1. The Holy Bible, New Revised Standard Version (London: SPCK, 1989)
2. Genesis 3.6

3. Carol Meyers, *Discovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 72
4. Phyllis Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), p. 105
5. Mieke Bal, *Lethal Love: Feminist Literary Readings of Biblical Love Stories* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), p. 115
6. Tertullian, *On the Apparel of Women*, trans. by S. Thelwall (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1885), p. 15
7. John H. Walton, *Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), p. 225

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