

# TO WALK WITH GOD, AGAIN

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*This article provides an interpretation of Genesis 3 that sees the serpent appealing to the first human pair's legitimate desire for knowledge which, paired with the false promise that they would become like gods, became the first temptation and resulted in the fracturing of formerly harmonious relationships. God is depicted as the Bereft Lover, the Merciful Parent and the Effectual Deliverer whose pronouncements upon the snake, the woman, and the man, were not arbitrary sentences imposed by a judge but rather God's revelation of some of the natural consequences of their actions. The man took it upon himself to bestow a name upon the woman, though that was not his creation prerogative as to name the human species was God's right. In naming the woman 'Mother' and taking for himself the name 'Human,' the man placed her outside the pale of 'real' humanness, denying her share in the federal headship by which God had appointed both to oversee God's earthly creation. The humans having failed in fulfilling their mandate, God gave the mandate to others, the cherubim. The new arrangement was, however, intended to be temporary.*

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In the two previous articles in this series it was asserted that an accurate reading of Genesis 2 reveals God's creation of the 'adam', the human species, for purposes of relationship: God's relationships with us and ours with God; our varied relationships with each other as brothers and sisters in God (we cannot say 'in Christ' just yet); our assortment of mutual relationships with the rest of creation. We noted, by a number of markers, that God created us with genuine, even passionate, love. God anticipated a rich intensity of love and fellowship with our first parents, and we will see that their relationship did begin that way.

Our question then must be: What happened? Genesis 3 provides us with a summary account and, equally important for us, the beginning of God's putting into motion the Great Reversal.

## Conversation with a Snake

Exegetically, we begin with the bridge, or link, between the end of chapter 2, with creation of the 'adam completed, and the beginning of chapter 3, with the introduction of the *nahash*, usually translated into English as 'serpent,' or 'snake.' The link between the two pericopes lies in the adjectives 'arummim' ('naked'), describing the humans, and 'arum' ('crafty,' 'subtle,' 'shrewd,' 'cunning'), describing the *nahash*. The two words sound alike (except for the necessary plural ending of 'arummim, describing *two* humans), but they are not from the same Hebrew root. The author's use of a pun here already tells the reader *something* is going on.

The humans are described as 'not ashamed' of their nakedness ('arummim) at the end of chapter 2. Eating of the fruit immediately made them ashamed, as evidenced by their hurried and makeshift attempt at covering themselves. The *nahash* used its cunning ('arum) to induce the humans to the act that made them ashamed of their state. Before a word is spoken at the opening of chapter 3, the reader knows, by the author's use of this pun, that something is going to happen, and it probably will not be good.

Adam Clarke was the premier biblical exegete of early Methodism; his *Commentary* is still a valuable resource. While agreeing that *nahash* refers to a living creature, Clarke noted biblical occurrences where it almost certainly could not mean 'snake.' The letters *nhsh* comprise four different roots in Hebrew; Clarke attached importance to a muttering, shy, and sly furtiveness he discerned in one of the roots. He held that the translation 'snake' or 'serpent' was taken over with little thought from the Septuagint. Taking this together with an etymological connection he saw with an Arabic noun meaning 'ape,' Clarke argued for the *nachash* being an orangutan, the higher primate closest to humans. Clarke's argument seems plausible, though of course it cannot be proven. What it does prove is that close consideration of the text in its minutest details is great fun!

In the interests of space, however, we must lay aside a great many interesting details and highlight only a few from the conversation between the woman and the snake - as we will call it for convenience, here. First, the Hebrew grammar of verse 1 allows - almost I would say requires - that we translate, 'the most cunning of all the creatures of the field that Yahweh Elohim had made.' This

was one of God's creatures. No Gnostic dualism is allowed, whether from assumed Zoroastrian contacts during the time of a late editing of Genesis, or by importation into the text in a first-century milieu such as that represented in Paul and Timothy's Ephesus. Of course, we cannot (and as Wesleyans would not) base an entire doctrinal assertion on a single verse. But this verse is one other piece of evidence among myriads that the Bible teaches no kind of Gnosticism, no kind of dualism.

Next, we note the serpent's statement, dripping with sarcasm, arrogance, and condescension toward the human pair, and even toward God. This opening speech usually is translated as a question. However, the Hebrew particles *'af ki* do not introduce a question elsewhere. It seems best to treat *'af* as an interjection, 'Really!' We should translate *ki* as 'that,' one of its regular uses. The entire statement, then, would read, *Really! That God should have said you may not eat from any tree of the garden!* It is a subtle opening, 'a feigned expression of surprise,' intended to elicit a response.<sup>1</sup> Not for nothing does the author describe the serpent as 'crafty' or 'cunning'; its subtlety accomplished its vile purpose.

Of course, the serpent's 'feigned surprise,' dripping with sympathy for these poor creatures, slandered God's character. God had forbidden the fruit of *one* tree, a beginning exercise in moral development. To suggest God had forbidden *every* tree was to tempt the humans to think of God as heartless, putting wonderful things within reach, then forbidding their enjoyment. The Hebrew text of the woman's first reply (v 3) does not allow us to assume either a substantive addition to God's instruction ('or *touch* it') or a weakening of the consequence ('*lest* you die'). In the Hebrew text, both are faithful representations of what God had said.

The serpent appealed, ultimately, to the human pair's desire for knowledge: innate, God-given, usually legitimate and laudable. Paired with the false promise that they would become like gods themselves, however, this legitimate desire was transformed into the first temptation presented to the human species, resulting in the 'bent-ness' that fatally weakened them and their line after them.

The text is clear: the man was 'with her.' She did not save an 'apple' and give it to him with his supper when he came in from pruning the pomegranates on the back forty. He listened to the

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<sup>1</sup> Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1-17* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 186.

entire conversation without a word, without backing up the woman as she defended God from the serpent's attempt at character assassination, without suggesting that, at a minimum, they should wait until they had a chance to talk with God about this. The man watched her eat, without a word of protest, without taking her hand in his and attempting to persuade her at least to wait. He accepted a fruit from her hand; he raised it to his own lips; he ate. Paul said correctly the woman was deceived. He also said correctly the man was *not* deceived (1Tim 2:14), and therein lay the greater culpability.

The pair received, after a fashion, the knowledge they had bargained for. But *experiential* knowledge of evil is always deadly, and death began for them, and us, that day. Their new sense of shame at their physical nakedness signaled their all-encompassing loss of transparency, and loss of transparency is a slow corrosion, a rusting of the human person, inside and out.

### God, the Bereft Lover

We come to the most heart-rending scene of the entire saga, the equal of anything in Scripture until the fateful day of Calvary, for this is the day God's heart first was broken. The simple phrase, 'the sound of Yahweh Elohim walking' (3:8), sets the scene. The verb is a participle; it denotes repetition, regular occurrence. This was God's habit, to come and meet the human pair. Everything points to the conclusion that this was a *daily* tryst. Already, we may infer that God anticipated it, delighted in it, else why meet with them daily? But the stem of the Hebrew verb carries more volitional and emotional freight. This is a *hitpa'el*; God did not merely arrive at the usual meeting place, see the human pair was not present, and leave, nor yet sit down to wait for them. (How else are we to speak of this, and many other scenes in Scripture, *without* using anthropomorphic imagery?) God paced to and fro! God was eager to see them again, though God had met with them only the day before, and the day before that, and...As the minutes passed, God's eagerness turned to anxiety. Where *are* they? What's *keeping* them?

Now I believe as firmly as most that God knew where they were, and what was hindering them from keeping their usual date with God. But the language of the text itself compels us to understand God's frame of mind and emotional state this way. (Again, how else if not anthropomorphically? We have no other means or medium.)

God loves; God delights in human presence; God is ‘anxious’ when we are absent; God grieves over our rejection - for the hurt we do ourselves, to be sure, but also for the pain our turning away inflicts upon God.

We have spoken earlier in this series of the exquisite care and attention with which God sculpted and built the human pair, the crown of this earthly creation. And that still is important to know, to ponder, to rest on in confidence: our Maker values us supremely. But by itself, our creation is not the total proof of a relational love. Maybe I should rather say: by itself it is not the finally convincing *demonstration* of a relational love. Especially in our now-groaning world, a person of only a mildly skeptical nature may be able to think God loves her because she is God’s ultimate project, God’s final masterpiece. God’s ‘love’ really is the pride of creation and ownership, different only in degree from a thousand examples she has seen in human architects and builders, authors and composers, and even in the sometimes-defectively-loving parents of prodigies.

But here we have the raw pain and grief of the divine Lover, rejected, tossed aside for an impudent stranger, an interloper in the Garden heretofore held sacred, by Yahweh and the humans alike, to the joys of their personal, intimate communion. They have allowed in the Enemy, and the sanctuary is befouled. They have let in death, so before they can be rescued, they must die. They will watch their own children die, and be helpless to prevent it. The infinite Lover knows that he himself will be helpless to prevent it. To reverse it will cost him the death of his own beloved Son.

One word further in the Hebrew text and we hear God’s anguished call, ‘Where are you?!’ We hear the voice of the Lover: ‘Why have you not come today? What have I done, that you should desire to avoid me now?’ ‘What have *you* done?’ will come in a moment, but we need to hear first the voice of the bereaved Lover, because that is the first voice of this cry.

We speak too glibly, I think, of God’s immutability, of the unmoved Mover, of the Giver who needs no gift. Of course, with respect to God’s *being*, all that is true. Nothing humans or others can give could enhance or enrich God, intrinsically or materially. Nothing humans or others can do could destroy or diminish God, or introduce defect into God’s nature or character. But with respect to relationship, nothing could be further from the truth, by the testimony of every page of Scripture, though hardly any as sharp, clear, and poignant as this one. Human acceptance of God’s invitation to intimate communion, with God and with each other in

God, gives God almost infinite joy and pleasure. Human rejection of God breaks God's heart, fills God with pain, renders God bereft.

God does not enter this story in anger, nor in a posture of emotional neutrality, ready to apply an objective justice. God enters this story grief-stricken, heart-broken, crushed, bereft of the human lovers and companions who had brought God joy and pleasure for we do not know how many days. Until we begin to fathom how much the loss of our presence grieves and bereaves God, we cannot begin to fathom how much God loves us.

### **God, the Merciful Parent**

God's love is expressed in actions that extend again to us the life God personally breathed into our first parent. God 'had' to find a way to bring the human pair to Godself again, and to begin that process of redemption and restoration, God had to bring them to account.

We have said already that, objectively, God knew what the humans had done, why they were hiding, and where they were hiding. God's questions on that score were designed to elicit confession, perhaps even contrition, though the text does not indicate that contrition was forthcoming either from the woman or the man. God needed to assume here the role of divine Parent, confronting children caught with their hands in the cookie jar. The image of Parent, rather than Judge, is appropriate here because the resolution was not, strictly speaking, a judgment or a sentence. It was, rather, a loving parent spelling out consequences that could not be avoided, either in justice or in mercy (if, indeed, those two are opposites, as we so often construe them). Yet, God mitigated the consequences of the fatal decision, insofar as they could be mitigated, and promised an ultimate reversal. In a delicious irony, the promise to the woman, and through her to all humans, is couched in God's words of condemnation to the serpent. He had been her undoing; her offspring would be his ruin.

In the man's response to God's question (v 10), 'the sound of you' is first, for emphasis. Always before, the sound of God's approach had been a daily source of delight, presaging an interlude of joyous communion with their Maker and Friend. Now, guilt had introduced dread. 'I was afraid' is the first biblical occurrence of the verb 'to be afraid.' One may wonder whether the irony of their situation dawned upon the miscreants; their craven fear was a far cry from the

equality with God they had thought they were acquiring in tasting of the forbidden fruit. Such foolish arrogance could not survive even God's disappointment expressed in the simple one-word question. How if God had spoken in anger? We may assume they would have been undone immediately.

But the death God had foretold was not to be manifested in immediate physical death. 'I was afraid' *was* the man's proper response, but as the first occurrence of this verb in Scripture, it also leads to the observation that in many accounts when humans were afraid at God's (or God's representative's) appearance, they were encouraged, 'Do not fear!'<sup>2</sup> Because of our sin, humans naturally fear God's judgment, but this kind of fear is not God's permanent desire for us. God desired and would provide restoration of the lost intimate relationship.

That the man's answer was in the singular throughout ('I heard'; 'I was afraid'; 'I was naked'; 'I hid myself') suggests that his initial impulse may have been to protect the woman, and take responsibility for their transgression upon himself. If so, this was his first and last chivalrous act in the entire account. But let us give credit where credit is due; as Hamilton says, 'He does not incriminate her with "we hid ourselves."<sup>3</sup> The staccato brevity of his response, four short clauses in only nine Hebrew words, parallels the initial narrative of the woman's taking of the fruit (v. 6) and indicates his desire to conclude the interview and escape as quickly as possible. His answer was not a confession, but an evasion. However, as all good parents learn, God knew more was needed.

To that end, God asked another, follow-up, 'parental' question or, rather, two questions (v 11). And again, God knew the answers to both these questions, but the man needed to be brought to admission of his sin. God's purpose here still was restorative confession, not condemnation. To the first question, the literal answer was, 'No one.' No one had said to him, 'You are naked!' In fact, the tempter deliberately had avoided bringing that up; it would have detracted from his nefarious purposes. However, the narrator's portrayals, both explicit and subliminal, of the intimacy of the previous relationship between God and God's beloved human pair allow us to infer that God not only knew, but also felt intense pain, in the moment their eyes were opened (v 7) and they possessed a premature and shamed knowledge of their nakedness.

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<sup>2</sup> See for example Gen 15:1; Judg 6:23; Dan 10:12; Matt 28:5, 10; Rev 1:17.

<sup>3</sup> Hamilton, 193.

It is difficult to convey in English the force of God's disappointment as expressed in the Hebrew syntax of God's second question here (v 11). Even a literal translation does not express all its pathos, but we may start there, 'From the tree which I commanded you *not* to eat of it, have you eaten?!' As noted earlier, when some element other than the verb begins a Hebrew clause, it almost always is a sign of great emphasis. Also, the inverse of the usual arrangement, with the verb itself at the very end of the clause ('have you eaten'), adds a climactic emphasis in its own right. The *emotional* impact of their deed upon God included genuine and disappointed 'surprise,' even if, as many Christians believe, God possessed the foreknowledge that they would eat of the fruit of this tree. The clear and consistent testimony of Scripture, too often unacknowledged or underemphasized in our theology, is that God really does experience emotion without effecting change in God's *character*; emotion, too, is one of the ways we are created in God's image. The very syntax of this question reflects the biblical truth that God is love. Moreover, it points up in vivid contrast the despicable hypocrisy of the 'feigned surprise' of the serpent's initial 'inquiry' concerning the nature of the single proscription (v 1).

Though many have tried since, the first man, at least, knew he could not lie to God. But before admitting his own culpability, he attempted to shift the blame to the woman, and even onto God. The boldness of this attempt comes across clearly; the verbs are the same, in Hebrew as in English, 'The woman whom you *gave* [to be] with me, she *gave* me of the fruit, and I ate.' His tone was, 'What *else* could I do? *You* gave me the woman, and *she* gave me the fruit. *I* had no say in the matter!' The cheekiness of his response gives rise to the suspicion that it may have been premeditated. Did the man stand silently by during the entire conversation with the serpent, *hoping* the woman would succumb to the temptation to eat of the fruit which he also desired fiercely? Did he spend the time talking to himself instead, framing this phrasing of his blame game in the event God should call them on it? Was a part of his sin his preparation to try avoiding responsibility for it? Even his admission of guilt, unavoidable in the end, he placed at the end of his rationalizing statement, framing it in a single word, as though hoping God would not notice it, and would move on. The only mitigating feature of this answer is that the climactic placement of his one-word admission does parallel the placement of the verb in



God's arrangement of the question: 'Have you eaten?' (v 11); 'and I ate' (v 12).

At first, it may have seemed to the man as though his strategy had succeeded; God did move on. God's question to the woman was much shorter, as was her answer. The facts of the case now were very near to being established. She no more could deny their transgression than could her husband. God's question to the woman was, however, a very serious one; its simplicity in English hardly transmits its gravity in Hebrew. Even today, in Israel, one can hear this question exactly as God put it to the woman, in tones of astonishment and disbelief that anyone could act so fecklessly, so recklessly, so mindlessly, so foolishly. An analogous expression in colloquial English is, '*What* were you thinking?!

The woman, too, attempted to shift the blame, but wisely did not try to include God in her excuse. She said merely, 'The serpent deceived me' (v 13), and this was true. Deception is not always an outright lie, though the serpent did lie in saying they would not die (v 4). The more powerful attraction of the serpent's line, and of the fruit itself, lay in his statement that they would become like God (or 'gods'), knowing good and evil (v 5). True, they did come to know good and evil, but in a disastrous and deadly way, not at all in the way(s) God knows evil, then or ever. If the woman spoke truly (and we have no reason to doubt her in this) she really did allow herself to believe the serpent's lies and deceptive partial truths, probably because she wanted as desperately as her husband to have an excuse to eat of the forbidden fruit.

The comment of Dorotheus of Gaza is entirely apropos;

So it is, my brethren, when a man has not the guts to accuse himself, he does not scruple to accuse God himself. Neither the one nor the other stooped to self-accusation, no trace of humility was found in either of them. And now look and consider how this was only an anticipation of our own state! See how many and great the evils it has brought on us - this self-justification, this holding fast to our own will, this obstinacy in being our own guide.<sup>4</sup>

## God, the Effectual Deliverer

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<sup>4</sup> Dorotheus of Gaza, cited in Andrew Louth (ed.), *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: Genesis 1-11* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 87.

God's attitude toward the serpent at this point was totally dismissive. The introduction to God's speech gives the first clue, its words coming in the normal order of Hebrew syntax, 'Then Yahweh Elohim said to the serpent' (v 14). By contrast, when God spoke to the woman and to the man, 'the woman' (v 16) and 'the *'adam'* (v 17) come first in their respective sentences for emphasis; God's name and title do not even occur in these verses. God continued to care for and about them.

Having consented to be used as the agent of the lawless one, having used its exalted status against the humans who were his God-appointed overlords, the serpent had forfeited any right it may have had to a hearing. God had no need in justice to listen to any excuse it may have been inclined to offer. Moreover, we may infer its punishment already had begun. Whatever exactly its gifts had been, the serpent's crafty cunning had allowed it to speak to the humans. Having used that gift for evil, it already had lost it; the serpent would not speak again.

The consequences fit the deed in another way, also. We should not translate, 'Cursed are you *above* all the livestock and...animals!' (v 14). None of the other creatures was cursed, either on this occasion or later, so the preposition *min* cannot carry here a comparative force, as it often does elsewhere. Here it is a partitive, the 'from' of separation, exclusion, alienation. We should translate, with Hamilton, 'Banned shall you be from all cattle and from every creature of the field.'<sup>5</sup> The serpent was now cut off from all other creatures, alienated from all former relationships and formerly appropriate relationships. The serpent had been *'arum*, cunning/crafty, *above* the other creatures; now it was *'arur*, cursed, diminished to a status *beneath*, and separated from, the other creatures. Both categories of the larger creatures are mentioned here, 'all the livestock and all the wild animals,' rather than the single all-inclusive category we take 'the creatures of the field' to be in verse 1. This doubling of the categories emphasizes the totality of this creature's exclusion from all its former or potential associations. This exclusion extended, of course, to its banishment from the company of the humans with whom it just had been holding converse, virtually as an equal. Having persuaded the humans to eat of the forbidden fruit, it now would 'eat dust' in perpetual humiliation. Certainly, losing the power of speech and the ability to walk upright, losing its privilege of association with God's other

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<sup>5</sup> Hamilton, 194.

creatures (however that may have been previously, in practice), and being consigned to move about forever in the dust, was a mortifying degradation for an intelligent creature, whether snake, orangutan, or something else. No wonder it would harbor enmity toward the humans, whom it would regard as the cause of its downfall.

'You will eat dust' does not mean the creature's diet henceforth would be, literally, the soil of the ground, as is the earthworm's intake, for example. However, with its head always near the ground (if it was the snake), it would 'eat' plenty of dust every day, though its diet was primarily rodents and other small creatures. This is yet another example, one of many, of the phenomenological approach of this entire account (Gen 1-3). The author told it as we *experience* it, or as it *seems* to be upon casual observation, not how we know it to be scientifically (when those two approaches do not agree). This is not primitive ignorance, but a way of speaking to all humans through the ages, whatever their level of 'scientific' knowledge.

We render verse 15, 'Moreover, I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed. As for him, he will strike your head, and as for you, you will strike his heel.' Those who see primarily an aetiological explanation here note the usual animosity of humans for snakes, and the ease with which snakes may strike unsuspecting humans when they come too close. They note also that humans usually kill snakes by striking them on the head, or by severing the head from the body; snakes usually strike humans on the heel or the lower leg. Others, seeing a morality tale instead of or in addition to an aetiology, find instruction in resisting temptation. Be alert for the 'snake' of temptation; strike it quickly and surely by moral resistance, and it will die - lose its power to tempt you. Walk carelessly into temptation, and it will strike without warning; *you* may die. Neither of these explanations is necessarily 'wrong'; however, neither by itself is, nor are both together, adequate or sufficient.

We should notice, first, that 'I will place' (v 15) is one of only two first-person verb forms from here to the end of the chapter; the second is 'I will multiply' in God's announcement to the woman (v 16). Only in these two places did God pronounce a sentence that God personally would carry out, an action that God personally would do. This first one was a God-ordained change in the relationship between the serpent and the human race - the woman and her descendents. 'Enmity' is a feminine noun from the same root ('*ayab*, 'be hostile') as the participial form which often is translated 'enemy.' God would see to it that the serpent and the human race would be

enemies. This strongly suggests more than the antipathy of all or most humans to an animal they find distasteful, or even to one they may fear. This was God's doing, by God's own declaration. While this is only the beginning of the story, and we cannot see from here the story's end, we are justified in understanding already from God's action, announced in this beginning, something much more than a mere aetiology. That 'something' will be revealed, though still cryptically, in God's climactic statement to the serpent, the next and final line of this pronouncement.

Before proceeding, though, we note that *zera'* ('seed') is a collective noun. It is singular in form but may be either singular or plural (collective) in meaning. If this verse were all we had to go on, we probably would be justified in translating it as a plural, 'descendents,' in both its occurrences here. However, even here the last line of God's pronouncement upon the serpent would give us pause, because both its verbs are singular in form, not plural. God did *not* say to the serpent, 'They [her descendents] will strike their [your descendents'] heads, and they [your descendents] will strike their [her descendents'] heels.' Rather, God said, 'As for *him*, *he* will strike *your* head, and as for *you*, *you* will strike *his* heel' (v 15b). All the pronouns are singular, not plural, and the two subject pronouns are not even necessary, grammatically. The author used them precisely for the purpose of giving this statement considerable extra emphasis, pointing the reader to think in a specific direction - that this emphatic prediction, this clear declaration of God's purpose, *must* presage more than the usual antipathy between humans and snakes.

The Hebrew root is *shuph*; translating 'strike' in both clauses allows for the 'normal,' expected interaction of human and serpent, but does not close out the possibilities realized in the ultimate fulfillment of God's threat to the serpent, which was, at the same time, a promise to the woman. The woman's seed would be wounded - that is all we may say from this statement *alone* - but the serpent would be mortally and eternally crushed.

As with the serpent, most of God's pronouncements upon the woman and then the man, were not arbitrary sentences imposed by a judge who had several to choose from in the law. Rather, they were God's revelation of some (not all) of the natural consequences of their actions. Having tried to sever their relationship with God, they now would find all their heretofore harmonious relationships

fractured: with God, with themselves individually and internally, with each other, and with the earth and its other inhabitants, their fellow creatures. At the same time, they would find their dependencies increased, in unhealthy rather than healthy ways, because of the new realities they themselves had introduced into the world.

God revealed three results to the woman, all of them almost universally misunderstood. Most translators and commentators have treated the pairing of the first two nouns as a hendiadys, and have translated the first clause similarly to NIV's 'your pains in childbearing' (v 16a). However, this reflects the failure to notice that the noun *'itstsabon* occurs only three times in the Hebrew Bible: here; in the next verse; and in Gen 5:29. Moreover, all three contexts call for the same understanding; in all three, *'itstsabon* must mean 'hard work, difficult toil or labor.' We should translate this first clause, 'I will greatly multiply your toil and your conception.' 'Toil' here means hard work of any and every kind, but principally, in antiquity, the hard and sustained physical labor of working the fields to wrest a livelihood from them, just as it does in the next verse, and in 5:29.

The biblical, the archaeological, and the anthropological records all demonstrate that both men and women always have worked hard in agrarian subsistence societies, such as our first ancestors began to experience upon their expulsion from the garden, and as ancient Israel did in their central highlands homeland, especially in the first generations of their settlement following the entrance into Canaan under Joshua. Our romantic picture of the woman spending all her time in or close to the house, while the man tilled the fields and tended the vineyards, orchards, and livestock simply does not accord with ancient reality - or, for that matter, with much of modern village reality in that part of the world. God would curse the ground (v 17), and by that means greatly multiply the woman's *toil* together with that of her husband, in what now would become their daily struggle to sustain themselves, no longer having access to the Tree of Life.

Moreover, God would also greatly multiply the woman's *conception*, that is, the number of her pregnancies. Rather than a few well-spaced conceptions, she would conceive regularly and often. Nothing in this first clause relates either to *childbearing*, or to the pain supposedly mandated here as inevitable in the *process* of childbirth. It bears repeating: this clause announces only the multiplication of days of difficult toil over a lifetime, and the

multiplication of the number of children she would conceive in her fertile years.

Similarly, the second clause does not refer to pain. It, too, announces arduous toil, labor, hard work; the root is the same (whether *'tsb* II, or a postulated *'tsb* III is debated). We should translate, 'With labor you shall produce children.' This did include the labor of childbirth, when childbirth is accompanied by hard labor, as it can be, but it is by no means *limited* to that 'labor.' In fact, the labor of childbirth is not even primarily in view here; it is but a small part of the hard work that bearing and rearing children now would entail. We must note one further element, a more important nuancing than the physical burdens of toil entail. In the new world they had fashioned and now were entering, this labor (*'etseb* and *'itsabon*, both) often is characterized by anxiety, and often by irksomeness. We could translate 'onerous labor,' or 'anxious labor,' in both clauses. In the first, this is the labor of daily work which is often both onerous and anxiety-producing. In the second, it is the anxious, often onerous labor through the years of childrearing, including but certainly not limited to the sometimes very difficult labor of childbirth itself. This, too, bears repeating: the supposed universal sentence upon women, of unavoidable pain in childbirth, simply is not present in this verse, or anywhere else in the Bible.

The third result of her sin with which the woman would find herself burdened - again, a natural *consequence* in the now sin-infected world, and *not* God's judicial punishment - has been the most tragic for women across the millennia. We should translate the first clause here, 'And to your husband shall be your desire'; so far, this is as it should be. But now the man would take advantage of her desire (and of the usually greater physical strength of the human male) to impose his will upon her: 'and he will rule over you.' The joint-stewardship mandate of Genesis 1:26-31, confirmed in multiple ways as God's will for human gender equality in the more detailed creation account of Genesis 2, now would be usurped by the man's arrogation of authority and control to himself alone. He would rule her more severely and more harmfully than ever he would rule any portion of the natural world.

Turning attention to the man, five times in verses 17-19 God used the verb 'eat.' The Great Transgression had been an act of eating; now all eating would reflect the disruption of the natural order it had caused. 'Cursed' (v 17b) is the same verb used in God's

pronouncement upon the serpent; here, it carries the same basic meaning. The ground would be changed in its relationship to the human family, from what it had been in the garden. It would be 'banned' from the fullness of its creatively intended relationship with the human family, prevented from exercising fully the natural productivity of the soil, at least in its capacity for lavish, abundant yielding of food for human consumption; the originally intended largesse of the ground would be diminished. Work is not a curse; the humans had worked before, but now their work for food would be greatly increased both in time and in effort, their reward greatly diminished both in quantity and in satisfaction.

We will understand this more clearly if we note the significant difference between our common understanding of 'curse' and the biblical/theological meanings of the terms often translated in English, 'curse/cursed.' In English usage we often equate 'cursed' with 'damned,' and assume that anyone or anything 'cursed' is consigned sooner or later to destruction, if the curse or the one doing the cursing is powerful enough to make it happen. That is not the meaning of either of the two common Hebrew roots ('*rr*' and '*qll*') often translated 'curse' or 'cursed.' (Hebrew has other ways of denoting someone or something as 'damned.') As noted above (v 14), the root here ('*rr*') carries the sense of being banished from contact, or from some previously privileged standing or relationship, with the one or in the arrangement from which the person or thing now is 'cursed.' God informed the man that the ground no longer would be in the relationship ('with respect to you') of producing abundant, nutritious food for the human pair with minimal, but entirely satisfying, labor on their part. The ground was not 'damned.'

'Through anxious, onerous toil' (v 17*b*) marks the third time in this encounter that God used this root. Twice God had told the woman that now her reproduction would be accompanied with anxious toil; the litany of woeful forecast is completed with this prediction to the man. Just as grains are much more prolific under human cultivation, so thorns, thistles, and many other 'weeds' often grow very well in cultivated fields, or where the soil has been cultivated in the past. There is the danger they will choke out the precious seed-bearing grains (see Matt 13:7), yet if the farmer pulls them out from among the grain, he easily pulls up the growing grain, as well (see Matt 13:29). Thus, verse 18 reflects the change from eating the abundant produce of the Garden, obtained through pleasant work, to the hardscrabble cultivation of fields for relatively meager harvests of less nutritious grains. Verse 19, 'By the sweat of

your brow' (more literally, 'nose,' or 'nostril'), continues this vivid picture of stoop labor in the field. Preparation of the ground, seeding, weeding, harvest and ingathering; all are labor-intensive, sweaty tasks, and all are necessary in the economies based in subsistence agriculture that have dominated most of human history.

God had taken the first human ('*adam*') from the ground ('*adamah*'; 2:7), sculpting a noble being in God's own image. For such a creature, 'dust . . . to dust' (v 19c) is an ignominious end. Yet immortality with the kind of knowledge of evil the pair (and we) now possess(ed) would be a fate worse than death. Mercy dictated their removal from access to the Tree of Life. This statement is a threat of death deferred. Yet the original prohibition (2:17) against eating of the forbidden fruit had seemed to indicate immediate death, 'on the day you eat of it,' according to many translations. Some have said the man and woman died spiritually on the day they ate of the fruit, as physical death began to work in them. Before this, they had not experienced even the beginnings of death working in their bodies. This may be a legitimate inference, but it is hard to discover in the text itself.

Given the insight afforded here in 3:19, a better translation of 2:17 may be 'for on the day you eat of it, you are destined to die.' The syntactical form *mot tamut* will bear this meaning, and obviously the man and woman did not experience physical death the day they ate the forbidden fruit. For God's prediction to be truthful, their physical death did not have to be instantaneous; it did have to be certain, eventually.

We translate verse 20, 'Then the '*adam* called the name of his wife, *Havah*, because she became the mother of all living [humans].'  
At this point in the narrative, it becomes accurate, in one sense, to begin calling the first couple 'Adam' and 'Eve.' However, the reason is not a positive one. The man took it upon himself to bestow a name upon the woman, though that was not his creation prerogative. Before (2:23), he had declaimed the common nouns 'man' and 'woman,' neither of which was a formal naming. To name the human species was God's right. As we shall see in 5:1-2 (a summative 'flashback'), God exercised that right, calling the human species, as a whole, '*adam*'. Now the man arrogated to himself the name '*Adam*', 'Adam,' and in a formal naming (cf. 2:19-20) bestowed upon the woman the name *Havah*, 'Eve.' 'Mother of all living' sounds like an honorific, but it was a largely empty honor. In naming the woman



'Mother' and taking for himself the name 'Human,' the man placed her outside the pale of 'real' humanness, denying her share in the federal headship by which God had appointed both to oversee God's earthly creation. How quickly the man began to fulfill God's prediction that he would rule over her!

The point is often made that God's provision of clothing ('garments of skin,' v 21) involved the shedding of blood, and can be regarded as the first sacrifice for sin. This may be a valid point, but if so, it is proleptic. The laws of sacrifice were not instituted until many centuries later. Alternatively, this may have been as simple and practical a matter as God knowing the human pair would need more substantial clothing than fig-leaf skirts, as they left Eden to make their way in the wider world. In sum, Genesis 2:25 notes the human pair were naked and unashamed; 3:7 reports they knew they were naked and attempted to clothe themselves; 3:21 records God's solution to their problem.

With the introduction of God's statement, 'Behold the 'adam has become' (v 22), we see that in God's view 'adam remained a collective noun, though the man had begun to arrogate it to himself as his personal name. As God was expelling both humans from the Garden, both are included in the designation, 'the 'adam.' The human pair were now like God and the angels only in 'knowing good and evil,' though their knowledge of evil was experiential, as God's was not, is not, and cannot be. The humans had been allowed access to the fruit of the tree of life. Now if they were to continue eating of it, their estrangement - from God, from themselves individually, from each other, and from the rest of creation - not only would continue; it would increase, and grow ever more disastrous in its consequences.

In relating God's action, the narrator used the same verb (*shalah*) God had used in stating the problem; 'Lest they send forth their hand and take' (v 22), 'God sent them from the Garden' (v 23). The word play is intentional and powerful. Moreover, 'take' (v 22), is the verb (*laqqah*) used of the woman's first act in verse 6, 'and she took.' They had taken of the forbidden fruit; now they would not be allowed again to take of the fruit of the Tree of Life. Lest they should send forth their hands to do so, God sent them from the Garden.

The first statement of verse 24, 'So God drove out the 'adam,' is not redundant. 'Drove out' (*garash*) has a stronger force than the 'sent out' (*shalah*) of verse 23. The repetition of the statement, but using the more forceful verb, is for the purpose of literary climax, and also to emphasise that there would be no possibility of return.

Perhaps not so incidentally, 'to the east of the Garden of Eden' suggests a single entry/exit point to the Garden. In antiquity, gardens usually were enclosed by walls or thick-set hedges.

Artists often have rendered the final scene with one of the cherubim holding the sword, though the cherubim (plural) and the sword (singular) are a compound direct object and two distinct entities. The artistic representation is not impossible, but the text does not actually say it, and the reflexive participial form of the verb, '[the sword] flashing itself this way and that,' would seem to make it unlikely.

The humans were driven from Eden where they had been placed; they were bereft of their previously happy home. What of the Garden they had been appointed to serve and to guard (2:15)? Cassuto astutely observed that God did not leave the Garden without protection. The humans having failed in fulfilling their mandate to protect it, God gave the mandate to others, the cherubim.<sup>6</sup> We may add that, on the scale of eternity, God intended the new arrangement to be temporary. They would in due course walk with God again.

In our final essay in this series, we will consider briefly a few of the many theological mandates, implications, and cautions inherent in these marvelously profound opening chapters of the Jewish/Christian sacred texts.

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<sup>6</sup> Humberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis: Part I, From Adam to Noah* (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1961), 174.