

# *The use of desire in Genesis 3:16b – part two*

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## *Introduction*

The previous article examined the context of the word translated as “desire” תְּשׁוּקָה (*t<sup>e</sup> šūqâ*) in Genesis 4:7 and suggested that a reading of “gift” *t<sup>e</sup> šūrâ* (gift) achieved a more satisfactory contextual fit. The following article will investigate the implications this new perspective has for understanding Genesis 3:16b.

## *Interpretive approaches*

N. Sarna lists three possible interpretations of the phrase; “*Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you*” (3:16). “Rashi understood this, together with the next clause, to refer to the satisfaction of female desire being traditionally dependent on the husband’s initiative. Rambam took it to mean that despite the discomforts of pain attendant upon child-bearing, the woman still desires the act that brings about this condition. Third, it may describe a “social reality” in which “the woman was wholly dependent for her sustenance upon what her husband could eke out of the soil, in striking contrast to the situation in Eden,” where food was bountiful.<sup>1</sup>

Another view has been argued by Susan T. Foh,<sup>2</sup> noting the parallel with Genesis 4:7, where, in accordance with the generally accepted interpretation, sin seeks control over Cain but he must master it. Hence Foh argues that the urge is not a desire for the intimacy of procreation but a desire to be independent of or to dominate her husband, but he will rule over her. Wilson follows this view and explains that the word “desire” in Genesis 3:16 is the same word found in Genesis 4:7, in which God tells Cain that sin was seeking to master the course of his life. In the same way, when God cursed Eve, He was saying to her, “Okay, Eve. You want to be the boss

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<sup>1</sup> N. Sarna, *Genesis*, (JPSTC; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1989), 28

<sup>2</sup> Susan T. Foh, ‘*What is the Woman’s Desire?*’ *WTJ* 37 (1974/75), 367-83

and make the decisions? When you leave this garden you will always want to control and lead the course of your husband's life. But he will rule over you instead!"<sup>3</sup>

Contra this view Walton observes that in each of the three texts where *t<sup>e</sup> šūqâ* appears there is no common object desired, so it is better to regard it as referring to a basic or inherent instinct.<sup>4</sup>

The above views are rejected and a fresh perspective is offered on the basis of the alternative interpretation of Genesis 4:7 established in the previous article:

If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, the sin-offering is lying at the door [of the sanctuary]; his **gift** is for you, and you will overcome. (Genesis 4:7)

*Parallel readings*

The parallelism between Genesis 3:16b and 4:7b is more far reaching than mere lexical or grammatical coincidence as both chapters display symmetry in their approach – Genesis 4 is a further outworking of the themes in Genesis 3.

<b>Genesis 3</b>	<b>Genesis 4</b>
I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception; In pain you shall bring forth children <b>(3:16)</b>	Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, and said, "I have acquired a man from the LORD." <b>(4:1)</b>
And I will put hatred between you ( the serpent) and the seed of the woman, <b>(3:15)</b>	Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him. <b>(4:8)</b>
Cursed <i>is</i> the ground for your sake <b>(3:17)</b>	Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to the LORD. <b>(4:3)</b>
Your desire <i>shall be</i> for your husband, And he shall rule over you." <b>(3:16)</b>	And its desire <i>is</i> for you, but you should rule over it." <b>(4:7)</b>

<sup>3</sup> P.B.Wilson, *Liberated through submission*, (Eugene, OR: Harvest House), 56-57

<sup>4</sup> H. Walton, *Genesis*, (NIVAC; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001)

Gen 3:15 has great typological significance; as early as the 2nd century AD it was given Christological significance and called the *protevangelium*. Although this verse has a general reference to the human race yet the question one asks is: 'Who is the descendant of Eve who may be said to be victorious over the serpent?'<sup>5</sup>

The context is therefore the promised Messiah – the curse was related to the labour pains that the “mother of the living” had to endure in order to come to the birth. The Messiah would rule מַשַׁל (*mashal*) over the serpent. He would deal the serpent a death blow and overcome. The same word is used in Psalm 8:6-7; “You have made him to have dominion מַשַׁל (*mashal*) over the works of Your hands; You have put all *things* under his feet.....even the beasts of the field.”<sup>6</sup> The LXX translates the term in 3:16 with κυριεύω, which means "to lord it over," but uses a verb form of ἄρχω ("to rule over") in 4:7, possibly to depict a more governmental, autocratic concept.<sup>7</sup>

Scholars have noted that each participant in the drama receives only one punishment **except Eve** who receives two punishments; (1) the pain of childbirth, (2) subjugation to her husband's rule. Other scholars argue that the second “punishment” is not prescriptive but descriptive – it simply states the obvious consequences of the fall - sin has corrupted the willing submission of the wife and the loving headship of the husband. The relationship is full of dominating, negative

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<sup>5</sup> Bill T Arnold, *Encountering the Book of Genesis*, (Grand Rapids :Baker Books,1998),39

<sup>6</sup> A different word is employed in Genesis 1:26, but with essentially the same meaning: רָדָה (*radal*), dominion, rule, tread down: Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have **dominion** over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."

<sup>7</sup> Irvin A. Busenitz, *Woman's Desire for Man: Genesis 3:16 Reconsidered*, (Grace Theological Journal 7.2, 1986: 203-12), 205

attitudes, manipulation and struggle. While the truth of this is a sad reflection of a broken creation this article suggests an alternative that is far more satisfactory:

"And I will put enmity between you [=the serpent] and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall crush your head [serpent's head], and you shall bruise His heel." To the woman He said: "I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception; in pain you shall bring forth children; **your gift** *shall be* for your husband, and he shall rule over [the serpent]"

The strength of this reading is that it harmonizes Genesis 3:16 and 4:7. Eve was promised the gift of a child that would save her and her husband and give him rule over the serpent. Cain could have used the gift of a lamb left by his brother and thus overcome the serpent. The irony that is implicit in the text is that Eve believed her firstborn to be the fulfilment of that promise. The curse of childbirth was more than physical pain; it was the sorrow of seeing one son, murder another – a curse perpetuated throughout history, particularly in the tension between nomadic societies (shepherds) and agricultural societies (who built cities –civilization like Cain).

### *The use of desire in Song of Songs*

The only other place (besides Genesis 3:16b, 4:7b) that תשוקה (*t<sup>e</sup> šūqâ*) is used is in Song of Songs 7:10;

I am my beloved's and his **desire** is for me.

Robert Davidson comments; "Following her eager wish in verse 9b, the woman responds openly and unashamedly to her lover's advances. She belongs to him "and his desire is for me" (v.10). The only other place in the Old Testament where this word "desire" is found is in Genesis 3:16 where, as part of her penalty for disobeying God, Eve is told: Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you. That desire in Genesis is something imposed upon Eve, and indicates her submission: here it expresses the joyful claim that links man and woman, to each other. She thinks of his desire not as domination, but as shared joy. It may be that as in the case

with Ecclesiastes (see p.24) a motif taken from earlier biblical material is being deliberately used with a different meaning”.<sup>8</sup>

In Canticles the word seems to be a straightforward expression of longing and desire in what is thought of as being essentially a love poem.<sup>9</sup> If that is the case then we have to assume that textual corruption only occurred in Genesis - the LXX translates Songs 7:10 as ἐπιστροφή – using the preposition ἐπί (*epi*) attached to the verb στρέφω (*strepō*), when used transitively it means “to make to turn towards” (to convert); literally – “his turning is towards me” (DRA)<sup>10</sup> or, “his desire is toward me” (NKJ). The LXX (LXE) translation is: “I am my kinsman's, and his <1> desire is toward me. {1) Lit. turning}.” The LXX differentiation in preposition<sup>11</sup> with Genesis is not necessarily significant. It is therefore possible that the LXX translators on this occasion also translated what they mistakenly thought to be the Hebrew *t<sup>e</sup> šūbā* (return) with the Greek verb *strepō*. However, is this likely? Can we assume the same translational path – that *t<sup>e</sup> šūbā* (return) was interpreted instead of *t<sup>e</sup> šūrā* (gift) or *t<sup>e</sup> šū’ā* (salvation)? Could the verse possibly read as follows?

I am my beloved’s (kinsman’s LXX) and his gift/salvation is for me.

This would be an unusual turn of phrase in a “love poem” but this is no ordinary love poem as it celebrates covenant love – Yahweh’s deliverance of his people from the Assyrians during the reign of Hezekiah. Canticles is not simply a collection of oriental love poems but an allegorical

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<sup>8</sup> Robert Davidson, *Ecclesiastes and the Song of Solomon*, (OT Daily Study Bible Series, Westminster John Knox Press,2006),148-149

<sup>9</sup> S. Craig Glickman, *A Song For Lovers*, (Downers Grove: Inter Varsity,1976),86-87

<sup>10</sup> The Douay-Rheims American Edition (1899)

<sup>11</sup> Although the LXX of Genesis 3:16 and 4:7 employs the preposition *apo* to form *apostrophiē* it does not have to carry a negative (turning away) meaning – see the previous article footnote 11.

dramatization of covenant love, employing characters such as Solomon and the Shulamite.<sup>12</sup> Salvation is an expression of Yahweh's covenant love for his people. Interestingly, the next verse (Song 7:11) has an **enigmatic connection** with Genesis 3:16;

“Come, my beloved (LXX: kinsman), Let us **go forth to the field**; Let us lodge in the villages”.

Similar phraseology is encountered in Micah 4:10 “Be in pain, and labor to bring forth, O daughter of Zion, like a woman in birth pangs. For now you shall **go forth** from the city, you shall dwell **in the field**,<sup>13</sup> and to Babylon you shall go. There you shall be delivered; there the LORD will redeem you from the hand of your enemies”.

The immediate context is the deported captives transported to Babylon<sup>14</sup> by the Assyrians, who find themselves suddenly liberated (returned).....left standing in the empty field.....when the Assyrian army was slaughtered by Yahweh. Note that the metaphor of a woman giving birth is used (cf.66:7-8) in connection with redemption from the enemy (Gen 3:15-16) – this “bringing” to the birth was Yahweh's doing – Hezekiah was “resurrected” and a faithful remnant saved. The last section of the phrase – let us lodge in the villages, or more exactly.....let us spend the night in the village (*kaphar*). This is surely reminiscent of the kinsman (Boaz) covering (cf. Heb. for atonement; *kaphar*) Ruth with his “skirt” (*kanaph*) when he found her at his feet during the night. Divine love in Ruth 3:4 was so scandalous (as it could have ruined the plan to redeem the land) that Boaz could not reveal his secret liason (love) for Ruth (although nothing untoward happened) until his case had been presented. Similarly in Hezekiah's time – Yahweh revealed his

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<sup>12</sup> It is not within the remit of this article to provide evidence for the theory proposed here, we refer the reader to H.A. Whittaker, *Bible Studies: An Anthology*,(Biblia,1987),123-126. A. Perry takes a similar approach to the book of Job and sees it as a parabolic dramatization of the same period. Andrew Perry, *Job*, (Willow Publications, 2007) <http://stores.lulu.com/willowpublications>

<sup>13</sup> The phrase “in the field” also has connections with Genesis for it is the place (Samaritan Pentateuch) where Cain murdered Abel.

<sup>14</sup> The reference to Babylon is usually seen as “late” post-exilic composition particularly for “Deutero-Isaiah” – however it was common Assyrian practice to “swap” populations in conquered territories. See further H. A. Whittaker, *Isaiah*, (Biblia, 1988), 72-75

love for his people at the last moment – he redeemed them and the land– and Eve “the mother of the living” gave birth to a righteous seed – Hezekiah did not die childless.

### *Conclusion*

Our two part investigation of the word “desire” offers the conclusion that a more intelligible reading can be achieved with **gift/salvation**, which is almost identical to “desire” in the Hebrew. It is very probable that the term was corrupted very early on and that it originally had a linking function between Gen 3:16, Gen 4:7 and Song 7:10 given to it by the “men of Hezekiah” during the redaction of the Pentateuch and the writing of Songs which occurred at roughly the same time.<sup>15</sup>

The proposed readings make sense in context:

If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, the sin-offering is lying at the door [of the sanctuary]; his **gift** is for you, and you will overcome. (Genesis 4:7)

And I will put enmity between you [=the serpent] and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall crush your head [serpent’s head], and you shall bruise His heel." To the woman He said: "I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception; in pain you shall bring forth children; **your gift/salvation** *shall be* for your husband, and he shall rule over [the serpent]. (Genesis 3:15-16)

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<sup>15</sup> The book of Proverbs (Prov.25:1) probably took its final shape then as did the Psalms (Thirtle, H.A.W.), Job (Thirtle, A. Perry, H.A.W), Isaiah (Thirtle, A. Perry, H.A.W) and Ecclesiastes (H.A.W.)

I am my beloved's (kinsman's LXX) and his **gift/salvation** is for me  
(Song 7:11).