COVENANT
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

Electronic Thesis & Dissertation Collection

J. Oliver Buswell Jr. Library
12330 Conway Road
Saint Louis, MO 63141

www.covenantseminary.edu/library

This document is distributed by Covenant Theological Seminary under agreement with the author, who retains the copyright. Permission to further reproduce or distribute this document is not provided, except as permitted under fair use or other statutory exception.

The views presented in this document are solely the author's.

“Pain in Childbearing”?

Seeing Grief Associated with Parenthood in Genesis 3.16a as Opposed to Physical Pain in the Process of Giving Birth

By
Christopher Huntley

A Project Submitted to
the Faculty of Covenant Theological Seminary
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts in Exegetical Theology

Saint Louis, Missouri

2022

“Pain in Childbearing”?

Seeing Grief Associated with Parenthood in Genesis 3.16a as Opposed to Physical Pain in the Process of Giving Birth

By
Christopher Huntley

A Project Submitted to
the Faculty of Covenant Theological Seminary
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts in Exegetical Theology

Graduation Date May 13, 2022

Dr. C. John “Jack” Collins
Faculty Advisor ______________________________

Dr. Jay Sklar
Second Reader ______________________________

Dr. David Chapman
Director of MAET Program ______________________________

Mr. Steve Jamieson
Library Director ______________________________

Abstract

The most common understanding of Genesis 3.16a among modern translators and commentators is that Eve was punished with an increase in the physical pain she would experience when she gives birth. This paper suggests that Eve is told she will experience more griefs associated with bearing and raising children. This proposal understands the words in the text within their proper semantic ranges, as well as making the proper syntactical connections, while maintaining proper contextual connections with Genesis 4 and the rest of Genesis.

To my wife and my children who have sacrificed more than
I could even know as I have pursued my goals.

By the shore of Sorrow's sea,
Waves of tears roll endlessly,

Cries that pierce this misty veil,
On wings of echoed winds take sail,

Osmium heart, head bowed in hand,
Her lonely footprints on the sand.

By the shore of Sorrow's sea,
Sitting, waiting patiently,

Holding every memory
On this side of eternity,

A mother's love will always be
By the shore of Sorrow's sea.

Until the day her soul is free,
She strolls the shore of Sorrow's sea.

— Patricia L. Cisco, “Shore of Sorrow’s Sea”

Contents

Preface ... **viii**

Acknowledgements ... **x**

Abbreviations ... **xi**

Chapter 1 Introduction ... **1**

Eve's Curse ... 1

Modern Translations Which Translate Genesis 3.16 as Physical Pain ... 2

Exegetes Who Understand that Genesis 3.16a Refers to Physical Pain ... 3

Other Ways to Understand Genesis 3.16a ... 8

Conclusion ... 15

Chapter 2 Vocabulary ... **16**

עצב | עצבונך ... 16

הרנך ... 33

תלדי ... 40

הרבה ארבה ... 42

The Hendiadys Deliberation ... 47

Conclusion ... 51

Chapter 3 The Exegetical Questions ... **52**

Form and Structure ... 52

The First Trial ... 55

The Etiological Purpose ... 59

Conclusion ... 67

Chapter 4 My Translation and Commentary ... **68**

Translation ... 68

Commentary....68

Conclusion....76

Chapter 5 Increased Sorrows from Conception in Genesis....78

Genesis 4....78

Other Examples in Genesis....84

Conclusion....95

Chapter 6 Conclusion....97

My Thesis....97

I Submit My Proposal for Consideration....101

Conclusion....103

Further Considerations....104

Bibliography....107

Preface

Years ago, I began to challenge my understanding of the curses in Genesis 3. Though I had always assumed the curse upon Eve concerned the pains of childbirth, pains which my own wife had already experienced several times, I wondered if I was understanding it correctly. Around that time, I knew of a woman who desperately wanted nothing more than to be a mother, but she had undergone lifesaving surgery which made that impossible. I knew of another woman who tragically lost her infant child. I knew of another woman who lamented that she was losing her child to the world. I began to wonder, could these scenarios of various sorrows be connected to Genesis 3.16?

Though a quick search through my limited resources at the time yielded nothing, I decided to pursue this line of reasoning, consulting other preachers within my circles, and gauging their thoughts. As we challenged the typical notion of "pain" together, some were convinced, others were not. But each time, I further confirmed in my own mind that physical pain could not grasp the fulness of the judgment. By the time it came to begin work on this paper, I felt that I could provide a persuasive argument. To me, it made much more sense that the greatest pain associated with childbirth, by far, was emotional grief. I also became convinced, noting the connection with Cain and Abel, that the emotional suffering was not simply confined to childbearing, but continued through childrearing. As my mentor once told me concerning children, "When they're toddlers they step on your toes; when they're teenagers, they step on your heart."

Upon beginning research with a much greater expanse of sources available to me, I realized that I was certainly not alone in my view. It has been refreshing to find others who challenge the typical view concerning "pain in childbirth" and, instead, see the

emotional suffering in God’s proclamation to the first woman. It is my hope that in this paper I will simply add my own small contribution to a groundswell that has the potential to bring new meaning to the curses of Genesis 3, as well as adding a new redemptive element of hope.

Acknowledgements

Along with my family, there are many whom I must acknowledge and offer thanks. This project would have been impossible without their help and support.

I thank Nick Soyars who has been the most stable fellow laborer in my graduate work and who had to endure talking me through my carousel of thesis ideas. He has been one of the most supportive individuals in my life and I owe much gratitude to him.

I thank the professors I have had in undergraduate and postgraduate studies. They may never know the full influence they have had on me.

I thank the Hazelwood church of Christ with whom I labored while doing my graduate studies. Having been fourteen years with the church, much of what I am as a Bible student comes from my time with this group.

I thank the Market Street church of Christ with whom I have labored over the past two years while preparing and writing this paper. From the beginning they told me to take whatever time I needed to complete this goal and have been overwhelmingly supportive.

I thank George Fox University who, during Covid protocols, was the only university which allowed me the use of their library without which I would have had no other means of conducting proper research.

I thank those who read through this and provided editing suggestions and encouragement. This list includes Julia Huntley, Becky Hafer, and Perry Hall.

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Abbreviations

CSB	Christian Standard Bible
ESV	English Standard Version
JPS	Jewish Publication Society of America Version
KJV	King James Version
MT	Masoretic Text
NASB	New American Standard Bible Update
NET	New English Translation
NIV	New International Version
NKJV	New King James Version
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
OT	Old Testament

Chapter 1

Introduction

אל־האשה אמר הרבה ארבה עצבונך והרנך
בעצב תלדי בנים

Eve's Curse

In *The Lego Movie 2: The Second Part*,[1] as the mother enters her child's bedroom, she steps on a Lego piece and screams out in pain then rates the level of pain as "close to childbirth." Whereas anyone who has stepped on a Lego piece might empathize with this pain, it, of course, does not come close to the pain level felt by a woman pushing a baby through her vaginal canal when "the average newborn's head measures 13 ¾ in."[2] Even then, Shipman informs that "one in 1,000 human mothers have a baby whose head is too big to fit through the birth canal, which necessitates a cesarean section, if medical care is available."[3]

The physical pain connected with childbirth is intense. Labor and Maguire state the obvious: "as a consistent finding, labour pain is ranked high on the pain rating scale when compared to other painful life experiences."[4] Due to the universality of physical pain in childbirth, when God tells Eve that he will "surely multiply your pain in

---

[1] Mike Mitchell, dir., *The Lego Movie 2: The Second Part*, Warner Bros. Pictures, 2019.

[2] Donna Freeborn, Heather Trevino and Liora C. Adler, "Newborn Measurements," University of Rochester Medical Center, accessed January 27, 2022, https://www.urmc.rochester.edu/encyclopedia/content.aspx?contenttypeid=90&contentid=P02673.

[3] Pat Lee Shipman, "Why Is Human Childbirth So Painful?," *American Scientist* 101, no. 6 (November - December 2013): 426.

[4] Simona Labor and Simon Maguire, "The Pain of Labour," *Reviews in Pain* 2, no. 2 (December 2008): 15.

childbearing," followed by, "in pain you shall bring forth children," it seems natural this is an etiological explanation of that physical pain. What else could it be other than an increased physical pain as described above?

Having been present for the births of each of my six children, I would never attempt to dispute or make light of the axiomatic nature of intense physical pain in the childbirth procedure.[5] Having said that, there may be other ways to understand the judgment on the woman which are just as credible, if not more so.

Although Boice suggests, "we do not need to say much about [Genesis 3.16a],"[6] I believe a proper understanding of this judgment by God upon the woman is necessary to fully grasp the etiological implications. As a beginning point to do just that, in this chapter I will look at various interpretations of Genesis 3.16a.

Modern Translations Which Translate Genesis 3.16a as Physical Pain

Most major translations translate Genesis 3.16a as referring to physical pain resulting from childbirth. Representative of the group is the ESV which renders this:

> *"I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing;*
> *In pain you shall bring forth children."*

There may be slight differences in wording, for example the CSB uses "intensify" instead of "multiply," or the NASB renders it "childbirth" instead of "childbearing," but the meaning is basically the same.

---

[5] My wife refused any pain mitigation for each birth preferring natural delivery.

[6] James Montgomery Boice, *Genesis: An Expositional Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1982), 1:178. Interestingly, he goes on to eschew the most common interpretation of the passage and briefly presents a relatively novel approach which is supported by this paper.

The KJV and the NKJV differ slightly with the use of "sorrow" instead of "pain." Even so, this translation has not affected the way people who follow their translation treat this passage. A perusal of the major translations does little to help determine how problematic the translation of this passage might be.

Exegetes Who Understand that Genesis 3.16a Refers to Physical Pain

There is no shortage of individuals who understand that Genesis 3.16a refers to physical pain. [7]

Scholars from Ancient History

Historically, many have connected God's declaration to Eve with the physical pain of childbirth, including early Christian exegetes who made this connection. Augustine (354-430) noted that the woman "clearly has her pains and sighs multiplied in the woes of this life." As he goes on to suggest, "this is the great punishment: they have come to the present bodily mortality from their former immortality."[8] It is clear, however,

---

[7] As the creators of the bestbiblecommentaries.com website state, "There are literally thousands of Bible commentaries in existence. There are numerous commentaries for every book of the Bible, from a variety of theological and denominational perspectives. Biblical scholars, Christians [sic] pastors, and even laypeople have written commentaries in every century since the time of Jesus Christ" (Daniel Isaiah Joseph, "How Many Bible Commentaries Are There? Get the Facts," Best Bible Commentaries, accessed February 15, 2022, https://www.bestbiblecommentaries.com/how-many-bible-commentaries-are-there/).

Not only would it be impossible to locate every possible commentary to cite for this paper, even more, I was limited in my available resources. Research for this paper began in earnest in 2021 when, due to Covid protocols in Oregon, I had access to only one university library, without access to any Inter-Library-Loan or other library sharing programs. I openly admit the limitations of my research which may be noticeable throughout this paper.

[8] Augustine, *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: Genesis 1-11*, ed. Andrew Louth (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 93. Though Augustine has pain in view, I admit that this is an oversimplification of Augustine's wider treatments as interaction with Augustine is not the main purpose of the paper.

that he associates pain with childbirth, as he believes Eve has become just like the other females from the animal kingdom. The only reason they endure pain is because they will die. Thus, for Augustine, the pain Eve experiences is because she (and Adam) lost their immortality.

Chrysostom (345-407) also connects physical pain with the curse. He sees the statement, "I will greatly aggravate the pain of your labor; in pain you will bear children… [as a] sentence" levied upon the woman. This was punishment for her "ingratitude." He then suggests that the pain in childbirth will occur "so that each time without fail you will personally have a reminder…of the magnitude of this sin of disobedience."[9]

More Recent Scholarship

Moving forward over a millennium, Calvin (1509-1564) expresses similar thoughts when he says, "It is credible that the woman would have brought forth without pain, or at least without such great suffering, if she had stood in her original condition; but her revolt from God subjected her to inconveniences of this kind," which refers to "all the troubles women sustain during pregnancy."[10] Though Calvin is far from dogmatic in wording, he understands the pain in childbirth as pain which could have been avoided.

Delitzsch (1813-1890) treats this as "sorrow," which "is not here regarded as motherhood, but as the wearisome bearing of the fruit of the body." He goes on to

---

[9] Chrysostom, *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: Genesis 1-11*, ed. Andrew Louth (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 92-93.

[10] John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries*, trans. John King, Accordance electronic ed. (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1847), paragraph 374.

suggest that the mother's pain under discussion "would threaten her life and that of the child."[11] Though Delitzsch uses "sorrow" and not "pain," it is the physical nature of Eve's pain which Delitzsch sees as primary.

Keil (1807-1888) is close to Delitzsch as he also understands this as "sorrows attendant upon" the condition of pregnancy. He suggests "the punishment consisted in an enfeebling of nature, in consequence of sin, which disturbed the normal relation between body and soul."[12] These punishments make it more difficult for a mother to undergo the rigors of childbearing.

Skinner (1851-1925) describes this as the "'pain of thy conception' (as in the explanatory clause which follows).-*in pain…children.*" He also compares the use of the pains of childbirth in this narrative with the other times the "pangs of childbirth are proverbial in the OT for the extremities of human anguish." In other words, the pains associated with childbirth are so intense that the prophets compare them with the intense nature of God's later judgments.[13]

Cassuto (1883-1951) sees the phrasing as referring to the woman's suffering "in general, and more particularly that of your childbearing." He understands that "during the period of childbearing women would suffer from increasing weakness and would need

---

[11] Franz Delitzch, *A New Commentary on Genesis Volume I*, trans. Sophia Taylor, (1888; repr., Minneapolis, MN: Klock and Klock, 1978), 165.

[12] C. F. Keil, *The Penteteuch*, trans. James Martin, (1875, repr., Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978), 1:103. To be fair, Keil does not specifically mention physical pain. His inclusion comes from how I interpret his words.

[13] John Skinner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis*, 2nd ed., International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1930), 82.

special attention, and when the time of parturition arrived, they would inevitably endure the most fearful pangs."[14]

Speiser (1902-1965) states the "idiomatic significance" of the phrase "is 'your pangs that result from your pregnancy.'"[15] He does not dispense much ink commenting on this phrase while presuming the phrase speaks of physical "pangs."

Westermann (1909-2000) also calls this "the pains of pregnancy and birth," clarifying that the etiological nature of this story is to explain "the burdensome, painful state of woman here and now" in regard to childbirth.[16] When he connects the last half of Genesis 3.16, he suggests that in the place where a woman would have found satisfaction, "in her relationship to her husband and as mother of her children," there is now "pain, burden, humiliation and subordination."[17]

Kidner (1913-2008) allows a possible gloss, "travail," as it can work in both vv. 16 and 17 and mean either "pain" or "sorrow."[18]

Coming into the writings from the latter part of the twentieth century into the twenty-first century, many more commentators assume Genesis 3.16a refers to physical

---

[14] U. A. Cassuto, *Commentary on the Book of Genesis*, trans. Israel Abrahams (Skokie, IL: Varda Books, 1961), 165.

[15] E. A. Speiser, *Genesis: Introduction, Translation and Notes*, Anchor Bible Commentary (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1964), 24.

[16] Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1-11: A Commentary*, trans. John J. Scullion (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1974), 262.

[17] Ibid., 263.

[18] Derek Kidner, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1967), 75.

pain. Von Rad,[19] Vawter,[20] Fretheim,[21] Davis[22] all represent contributions from the early-late part of the twentieth century. From the latter part of the twentieth century to today, this understanding of 3.16a is attested to by many including, but not limited to, such scholars as Wenham,[23] Sarna,[24] Hamilton,[25] Matthews,[26] Waltke,[27] Collins,[28] and Longman III.[29]

---

[19] Gerhard Von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary,* rev. ed. (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1972), 93.

[20] Bruce Vawter, *On Genesis: A New Reading* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1977), 84.

[21] Terrence E. Fretheim, *Creation, Fall, and Flood: Studies in Genesis 1-11* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1969), 89.

[22] John J. Davis, *Paradise to Prison: Studies in Genesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1975), 94.

[23] Gordon Wenham, *Genesis 1-15, Volume 1*, Word Biblical Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1987), 81.

[24] Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis* (Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 27-28. I include Sarna in this list, but he does allow that these pains also “include the disorders occurring during pregnancy as much as the rigors of parturition itself.”

[25] Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis Chapters 1-17* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 200.

[26] Kenneth A. Matthews, *Genesis 1-11:26*, New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishers, 1996), 249-250.

[27] Bruce Waltke, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 94.

[28] C. John Collins, *Genesis 1-4: A Linguistic, Literary, and Theological Commentary* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2006), 163. In this section, Collins only briefly mentions “pain” in childbirth which concurs with the general statements from so many other sources. This sentiment seems to be repeated in another brief mention in *Reading Genesis Well* (C. John Collins, *Reading Genesis Well: Navigating History, Poetry, Science, and Truth in Genesis 1-11* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2018), 111.). To be fair, in another publication, responding to a Christian biologist who assumes that nothing really changed after the fall, he states, “We are instead thinking of despair, of grinding oppression, of anxiety and anguish, of the waste of a life that yearns for eternity. This seems to be the kind of pain that Genesis describes as God’s verdict for the humans as a consequence of their disobedience (Gen. 3:16, 17)” (C. John Collins, *Did Adam and Eve Really Exist?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 128). Though Collins does not outright declare that he sees Eve’s pain in childbirth as more than physical pain, there is a hint that he allows for it within a larger scope.

[29] Tremper Longman III, *Genesis*, The Story of God Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), 67.

Other Ways to Understand Genesis 3.16a

Though the predominant understanding of Genesis 3.16a assumes physical pain, a handful of scholars have rejected this notion, or, at the very least, have allowed that there is more to it than simply physical pain in the birthing process.

Toil or Labor

In her seminal work concerning Genesis 3.16, Meyers rejects that the pronouncement in 3.16a refers to the physical pain which comes from childbirth, strongly asserting, "looking at the passages in which the verb is used indicates that the idea of physical pain is to be ruled out."[30] As a result, it is not physical pain from the childbirth process that is under discussion, but instead, "physical labor.…The difficulty or distress of agricultural work in an unfriendly environment is indicated."[31] To Meyers, this passage denotes the hard life women must live, distinct from an increased number of childbirths that women would undergo.

Earlier I referenced Fretheim as one who sees "physical pain" in this verse because he states, "what was formerly painless was now painful in the world."[32] He also introduces Gen 3.16b with the phrase, "in spite of the pain connected with

---

[30] Carol Meyers, *Discovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context,* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1988), 104. Meyers's views will be thoroughly discussed in the next chapter.

[31] Ibid., 105. Meyers understands the judgments on the woman as two different necessities in the early Iron Age, the time frame she supposes Genesis was written. She sees that at that time "the unique challenge of the frontier environment augmented and intensified the amount of human labor necessary for achieving subsistence" (55). She will later suggest, "The survival of a nation of pioneer farmers called for extraordinary efforts during this period of settlement. Never again would the need for so powerful a mandate for increased toil and family size be acute" (120). Thus, it was important not only for the woman to work in the fields with hard labor, but she would also need to birth more children, which is "an exclusively female contribution to Israelite society" (56). I will review Meyers's position later in this paper.

[32] Fretheim, *Creation,* 89.

childbirth…,"[33] indicating his place in the "physical pain" camp. However, this commentary was written in 1969. His wording in his Genesis commentary for *The New Interpretive Bible Commentary* in 1994 reads differently. By this point, he has been influenced by Meyers and in his minimal treatment of this section he references and expounds on her understanding of the text while giving only a brief note that "most scholars continue to translate along the lines of the NRSV and the NIV."[34]

Van Ruiten, who references Meyers frequently in the beginning of his article, seems to have adopted her views. He believes "the sentence to the woman concerns two matters–on the one hand, hard work and on the other, pregnancies."[35]

Eskenazi joins the group in her comments on Genesis 3.16a. Though not citing Meyers, she sounds like Meyers as she says, "In ancient Israel women regularly worked long hours–in food preparation and storage, in the manufacture of clothing, in farming alongside of men, and more….The writer in vv. 16-17 is accounting for the hardships of human existence and especially creative aspects of life: procreation and production of food."[36]

---

[33] Ibid.

[34] Terrence E. Fretheim, "Genesis," in *The New Interpreter's Bible Vol. 1*, ed. Leander E. Keck, (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1994), 363.

[35] Jacques Van Ruiten, "Eve's Pain in Childbearing? Interpretations of Gen 3 in Biblical and Early Jewish Texts," in *Eve's Children: The Biblical Stories Retold and Interpreted in Jewish and Christian Traditions*, ed. Gerard P. Luttikhuizen, (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2003), 5.

[36] Tamara Eskenazi, ed., *The Torah: A Woman's Commentary*, (New York, NY: Women of Reform Judaism, 2008), 16.

Longer Gestation Period

Novick accepts the use of a hendiadys, but instead of understanding the phrase to be discussing physical pain in childbirth, he suggests a different understanding. He hypothesizes this is about “shaping and forming” so that “Gen 3:16 is a hendiadys meaning ‘the shaping of your conception,’ i.e., the shaping following on your conception, or, in other words, your gestational period.”[37]

Menstruation

Though her research comes from popular culture in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, Sanders provides interesting evidence, from the way media has spoken of “the curse,” that it is overwhelmingly popular to connect the curse with women’s menstruation.[38] However, Sanders does not provide any biblical argumentation to validate this flow of thought. This may be a popular view, but not one which specifically comes from the text. She is not alone, however, Zlotowitz, who provides brief explanations of the views of prominent Rabbis from history, recognizes that some believed that in this judgment, God was going to increase the suffering “of menstruation (R´ Meyuchas; Sforno). Since this natural discomfort comes upon her monthly, the verb is duplicated: אַרְבֶּה הַרְבָּה, I will greatly increase (R´ Bachya).”[39]

---

[37] Tzvi Novick, “Pain and Production in Eden: Some Philological Reflections on Genesis iii 16,” *Vetus Testamentum* 58, no. 2 (2008): 241. This view is based on an alternative root for the word typically translated, “pain.” This view will be discussed later in the paper.

[38] Theresa Sanders, *Approaching Eden: Adam and Eve in Popular Culture* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009), 113-127. From Stephen King to *The Golden Girls*, Sanders provides many examples in modern movies and television which connect “the curse” to “menstruation” in the eyes of the public imagination.

[39] Rabbi Meir Zlotowitz, *Genesis: A New Translation with a Commentary Anthologized from Talmudic, Midrashic and Rabbinic Sources*, 2nd ed. (Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications, 1988), 130.

Nothing

Interestingly, in his treatment of Genesis 3.16a, Hartley did not reference pain at all. He simply states, "In giving birth a woman brings forth new life, thereby finding her highest destiny as man's complement as well as triumphantly challenging death."[40] To be fair, he does mention "pain" as a definition for the same word when referencing Genesis 3.17, even connecting it to the "pain" associated with "bearing children."[41] But I found it striking that when commenting on Genesis 3.16, there was no discussion of pain at all.

Everything Associated with Parenthood

When I set out to create a proposal for this paper, I had not yet come across anyone else who held to the view I was developing based on the evidence I was finding. Yet, in my research, I have uncovered a few individuals who seem to note that there is more to this phrase than simply what is happening at either conception or at childbirth, but that it extends well beyond. As Boice puts it,

> "Are we to think that Eve would have had pain in childbirth even before the Fall and that it is now only made greater? Hardly! Is it not rather that the pain associated with children's births will continue in other ways throughout the mother's (and father's) life as these who are now born in sin dishonor their parents and experience in their own lives the consequences of their disobedience?"[42]

---

[40] John E. Hartley, *Genesis,* New International Biblical Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2000), 69.

[41] Ibid., 70.

[42] Boice, 178. After introducing the discussion on Genesis 3.16a with "we do not need to say much about the first of these two judgments except to note that it probably concerns more than mere childbearing," Boice presents what seems to be a novel approach to this text. However, true to his wording, Boice does not say much about this text other than to state this approach without further reasoning provided.

In this, Boice succinctly states an approach not held by many others: the pain in childbirth continues beyond the birth process and includes the raising of children. Children are born into a sinful world and will make sinful choices and those choices are going to affect their parents and cause grief that otherwise would never have been felt.

This view, though not the most popular, can be traced back to antiquity as Genesis Rabbah 20.6 states, "THY PAIN refers to the pain of conception; THEY TRAVAIL, to the discomfort of pregnancy; IN PAIN, to the sufferings of miscarriages; SHALT THOU BRING FORTH, to the agony of childbirth; CHILDREN, to the suffering involved in the upbringing of children."[43]

Though in his comments on Genesis 3.16 Longman clearly sees the pain in childbirth as a physical pain, in a connected section in his commentary he allows that there might be more involved. When discussing the punishments from the fall, he states, "while giving birth to and raising children is often accompanied by both physical and

---

[43] Kristen E. Kvam, Linda S. Schearing and Valerie H. Ziegler, *Eve & Adam: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Readings on Genesis and Gender* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999), 92. There are other places in 2nd Temple Literature where Adam and Eve are mentioned and this text is alluded. For a full discussion, Kvam *et al*. provide detailed coverage. For a more concentrated discussion, see Nicholas Elder, "'Wretch I Am!' Eve's Tragic Speech-in-Character in Romans 7:7-25," *Journal for Biblical Literature* 137, no. 3 (2018): 743-763 or Andrew Crislip, "Emotions in Eden and After: Ancient Jewish and Christian Perspectives on Genesis 2-4," *Journal of the Bible and its Reception* 6, no. 1 (2019): 111-120.

Interestingly, after the advent of Christianity, Adam and Eve are referenced very little in ancient Jewish literature, and our text is basically non-existent. Reuling surmises there was "a deliberate change of route on the side of the Rabbis" (Hanneke Reuling, "The Christian and the Rabbinic Adam: Genesis Rabbah and Patristic Exegesis of Gen 3:17-19," in *The Exegetical Encounter Between Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity*, eds. Emmanouela Grypeou and Helen Spurling (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2009), 63). He explains this further, "it seems probable that the editors of Genesis Rabbah also responded to the way Christians appropriated the Eden account. This they did not by means of overt polemic, but rather in the majestic yet deafening silence of midrashic interpretation" (73).

emotional pain, they are also a source of great joy."[44] In this phrase he concedes that physical and emotional pain of childbirth continues into the raising of children.

In his notes for the NET Bible, Chisholm states, "'Conception,' if the correct meaning of the noun, must be figurative here since there is no pain in conception; it is a synecdoche, representing the entire process of childbirth and child rearing from the very start."[45] Ross also assumes "the word 'conception' must be taken as a synecdoche representing the whole process that begins with conception."[46] The author's use of a synecdoche is a plausible way to view the first judgment placed on the woman which will affect not only the birth of the child, but everything that is associated with the birth, from conception through child rearing.

Provan, who also rejects the idea of physical pain, allows for this conclusion as well. While commenting on Jabez's name in 1 Chronicles 4.9, which is typically tied to physical birth pains, Provan suggests that "we might plausibly understand it as a reference either to the mother's emotional state at the time of Jabez's birth or to her

---

[44] Longman, 73. This comment does not come from his specific exegesis of Genesis 3.16, but as part of the "Live the Story" addendum to the section on the Fall Narrative. In this section, Longman provides more practical and applicable lessons from the text, in which he accurately suggests that child raising has changed as much as childbirth, if not more than. Unfortunately, he does not fully explain how he reached this conclusion other than to simply state it as part of a commonsense approach to the curse.

[45] Robert Chisholm, study notes on Genesis 3:16, in *The NET Bible*, 2nd ed. (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2019), n48. Naturally, with notes in a study bible, one should not expect a deep discussion concerning the explanatory statements being offered. While I will later take issue with the notion that there is "no pain in conception," I appreciate the mention of conception as a "synecdoche." However, I am again left with an explanation that makes a lot of sense but is not substantiated. As well, Chisholm indicates that there may be translational alternatives which will be discussed in the next chapter.

[46] Allen P. Ross, *Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of the Book of Genesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1988), 146. Though Ross may be correct that conception should be viewed as a synecdoche, his reasoning for this conclusion is suspect. He suggests that one should view it as a synecdoche because "there is no pain in conception," a statement I will later take issue with. In his view, the pain must be associated elsewhere. This will be addressed later, but for now, I would suggest that if "there is no pain in conception," then using conception as the focal point of the synecdoche actually makes little sense.

challenging (painful) economic circumstances."[47] In his paper, Provan refers back to Genesis 3.16a and deducts that "the context…suggests that it does not refer primarily to emotional or more generalized pain either, but specifically to economic pain."[48] Even so, he later states,

> I propose simply adjusting this idea…so as not to limit the "pain" to the woman's experience of anxiety between the period in which conception takes place and the period of the birth of her child. She conceives in painful circumstances just as she gives birth in painful circumstances, including economic circumstances, and no doubt raises the children and watches some of them die in those same circumstances (e.g., Abel in Gen 4).[49]

With this statement, though he sees the pain in the context of 1 Chronicles 4 to be contextually dealing with economic circumstances, he seems to see economic circumstances as part of a larger anxiety which governs a mother from the conception of her children through, potentially, the death of her children. Thus, I see in Provan's assessment a view of the pain as anxiety which contains everything associated with the raising of children from conception to death.

As I continue through the paper, this final approach to understanding Genesis 3.16 will be my focus as I attempt to demonstrate that it is the most plausible and meaningful approach. Though others have stated this theory, it is my intention to add to the minimal attention this viewpoint has drawn.[50]

---

[47] Iain Provan, "Pain in Childbirth? Further Thoughts on 'An Attractive Fragment' (1 Chronicles 4:9-10)," in *Let Us Go Up to Zion: Essays in Honour of H. G. M. Williamson on the Occasion of His Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. by Iain Provan and Mark J. Boda (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2012), 288.

[48] Ibid., 289.

[49] Ibid., 293.

[50] See note 7 on page 3 above concerning my limited research.

Conclusion

As Fretheim notes, “most scholars continue to translate along the lines of the NRSV and the NIV” which assumes that the judgment refers to physical pain which comes from childbirth.[51] This is the very translation which this paper is meant to question. Instead, I propose that the best way to understand the phrase,

אל־האשה אמר הרבה ארבה עצבונך והרנך בעצב תלדי בנים

is to translate this referring not to physical pain, but to emotional sorrow or grief. I hope to demonstrate that this proposal makes the most sense when the semantics, syntax, and context are all taken into consideration.

To begin explaining my proposal, it is important to explore the different translational and exegetical issues that need consideration. In the next couple of chapters, I will focus on the translational and exegetical issues surrounding this passage and discuss their varied implications.

---

[51] Fretheim, *Genesis*, 363.

Chapter 2

Vocabulary

Having looked through various ways to understand Genesis 3.16a in the last chapter, this chapter will focus on the Hebrew vocabulary from the text. In this chapter I will go through the four main terms which are pertinent to understanding the text.

עצב / עצבון

Of all the words in this passage, the use of עצב is the most important in an exegetical discussion. עצב appears twice in the text as עצבון and עצב respectively, which is significant because, as Van Ruiten points out, the two lines parallel with one another so that "most probably, עצבונך parallels בעצב" and the use in one line should help understand the use in the other.[1]

Physical Pain

As noted in the previous chapter, on the surface it seems this judgment refers to physical pain when placed in the context of Genesis 3 and the other curses which culminate in the promise of death given to Adam. In fact, Briscoe reveals a certain irony in this as he states, "the first indication of death that woman would feel would be pain in the very act of giving life."[2] As well, the way that one understands the curse affects how

---

[1] Jacques van Ruiten, "Eve's Pain in Childbearing?: Interpretations of Gen 3 in Biblical and Early Jewish Texts," in *Eve's Children: The Biblical Stories Retold and Interpreted in Jewish and Christian Traditions*, ed. Gerard P. Luttikhuizen (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2003), 5.

[2] D. Stuart Briscoe, *Genesis*, The Communicator's Commentary (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), 65.

one translates עצב, therefore it is no surprise that most commentators treat this as physical pain.[3]

Some, such as Sarna, provide external arguments to understand עצב as physical pain. He posits that the increased pain in childbirth is due to anatomical conditions, suggesting, "intense pain in childbearing is unique to the human species and generally unknown to other female mammals."[4] In other words, had the first woman not eaten of the fruit, then humans would probably also join the rest of the mammals with a relatively easy childbirth. According to Sarna, the problem is caused by a now greater intelligence, stating, "Modern biology traces the woman's condition to the enlargement of the human skull that was entailed by the evolutionary increase in size of the human brain."[5] Cullinan agrees, arguing, "Animals give birth far more easily than human beings, and this fact would surely have been noted as soon as domesticated animals became a part of human communities."[6] However, this argument is unconvincing as it takes as given a deduction that is not specified by the text, namely, that the pain in childbirth is in contrast to other animals. In actuality, physical pain in birth is experienced by other mammals. According

---

[3] Meyers notes the seemingly circular nature of how assumed understandings affect translations and vice versa. She notes that "the process of translating the Bible has a peculiar self-perpetuating quality to it. That is, meanings provided in the earliest translations, even if arrived at by error whether unwittingly or unintentionally, tend to be replicated in subsequent translations…. Translators invariably consult the products of their predecessors' efforts; or, for many well-known passages, existing translations are already familiar. Consequently, one finds a tendency for certain renderings to be retained or repeated" (97).

[4] Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis* (Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 28. Anecdotally, this argument is prevalent within the circles of churches with which I am associated. I have heard multiple preachers, among others I have been associated with, who have cited this difference of pain in parturition as proof that Eve was cursed with painful labor.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Colleen Carpenter Cullinan, "In Pain and Sorrow: Childbirth, Incarnation, and the Suffering of Women," *Cross Currents* 58, no. 1 (Spring 2008): 98.

to Martínez-Burnes *et al*., “it is commonly admitted that pain perception is comparable in humans and other mammals….parturition in all species is usually admitted as a painful process.”[7] Interestingly, there are some animals who have it worse than human mothers. From the kiwi bird who lays eggs which equal 20% of their body weight to porcupines whose babies can have quills caught in the birth canal if they are facing the wrong way, Sharma and Polan point out that birthing can be just as dangerous for other species if not more so. Perhaps the best example is that of the spotted hyena who gives birth through “phallic-like genitalia” which is called a “pseudopenis” which could rip apart in the process, causing about 15% of first-time mothers to die giving birth.[8] Wickman also debunks the idea that the cranium size of humans is the unique difference that makes human childbirth more painful than any other animal births. He informs, “Squirrel monkey infants have such large heads compared to the size of their mothers’ pelvises that they face a very high rate of birth complications.”[9] Anecdotally, when I was a child, I can remember helping my grandfather turn a calf who was turned the wrong way during birth. The mother was clearly in pain and the calf came out still born. If one tries to

---

[7] Julio Martínez-Burnes, Ramon Muns, Hugo B. Barrios-García, Dina Villanueva-García, Adriana Domínguez-Oliva and Daniel Mota-Rojas. “Parturition in Mammals: Animal Models, Pain and Distress,” *Animals: An Open Access Journal from MDPI* 11 (2021), 4. What is quoted is just one of many places where human labor is compared to the labor of various domesticated animals. They seem to specifically be dispelling this myth showing that there is more research to be done concerning the physical pain of animals in birth to help them through it. They conclude, “unfortunately, pain in animals is not regularly recognised and is treated inappropriately. If parturition is a painful process identified in humans, it should also be considered painful in animals” (18).

[8] Uma Sharma and Shira Polan, “The Most Extreme Births in the Animal Kingdom,” July 27, 2018, Business Insider, accessed March 8, 2022, https://www.businessinsider.com/most-extreme-births-in-animal-kingdom-2018-7.

[9] Forrest Wickman, “Is Giving Birth Easier for Other Animals?: Dolphins Have it Easy, but Hyenas Sure Don’t,” September 27, 2012, Insider, accessed March 8, 2022, https://slate.com/technology/2012/09/animals-giving-birth-dolphins-bear-newborns-easily-but-hyenas-risk-death.html.

suggest that human pain in childbirth is specifically because of Genesis 3 and that the lack of pain in other animals is evidence of the increased pain, then a similar explanation would be necessary for these other animals which endure pain on the same level, if not worse.

Not Physical Pain, But Emotional Suffering

While true that the overwhelming number of exegetes treat this as physical pain, the idea may not be the best understanding for this term. Though Fretheim states that "The nom. עִצָּבוֹן [found] (3x), all in Gen 3-5, refers to pain-filled labor,"[10] he also suggests that the verb form "has to do basically with inner feelings,"[11] which is obvious a few chapters later in Genesis when it says of God concerning the wickedness of man וַיִּתְעַצֵּב אֶל־לִבּוֹ ("And it grieved him to his heart" – Genesis 6.6). Though it is not uncommon for there to be a drastic change of meaning from a verb form to the nominative form, in this case, it is not necessary. This is especially true when Fretheim also suggests that "the majority of nominal forms occur in Wisdom or Wisdom-like material (including Gen 3:16-17). Their orientation is more toward the inner pain and toilsome work true of the human situation."[12] He later says "the pain includes both physical and psychic dimensions, as does the relief…[but] the physical [is seen] especially with עֶצֶב and עִצָּבוֹן."[13] Why is it necessary to differentiate and stress the

---

[10] Terrence Fretheim, "עָצַב," in *NIDOTTE,* 3:479-480.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Ibid., 479.

[13] Ibid.

physical when referring to Genesis 3.16? It seems Fretheim begins with an assumption about עצבון in Genesis 3 which affects his comments in his *NIDOTTE* entry causing him to create an otherwise unnecessary distinction.

Longman simply states, "childbearing will come with great pain" and treats these lines rather matter-of-factly with little comment.[14] What is noteworthy is the comment he makes on Genesis 3.16b. Here, he says, "the second affected relationship is with the woman's husband and this punishment comes fundamentally at a psychological level" as opposed to the physical level of the first part of Genesis 3.16.[15] This seems an arbitrary distinction. Even more, when commenting on Genesis 3.17, he helpfully shows that the punishments for men and women are not necessarily specific to only the respective gender as they each affect both. As he says, "we should not understand the punishment of the man and the woman as unique to them. Men as well as women struggle in relationships, and women taste the futility of work as well as men," though there is, for him, one exception: "childbirth."[16] Of course, I would not suggest that a man could experience the physical pains of childbirth, but if עצב does not refer to the physical pain concerning the birth of children, then is there a sense in which he might, *mutatis mutandis*, experience the same sorrows?[17] If so, then Longman's observation would be fully justified showing that all the punishments are, in certain capacities, experienced by both men and women.

---

[14] Tremper Longman III, *Genesis*, The Story of God Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), 67. The only comment he does provide concerns the use of רבה.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Ibid., 68.

[17] When the argumentation is complete, I believe my thesis will support this very assertion.

Cassuto, who also understands עצב to refer to physical pain, does note that this is not the word one would expect in this scenario. After providing a litany of words which would have been more natural with reference to childbearing, he shows that the author "chose expressions derived from the root עצב, [which] proves that it was with some specific intention—for instance, to allude to the word עֵץ—that these words were selected."[18] Thus he suggests that the word choice is simply creating a play on words. Since it was a tree (עץ) from which they ate, they will now experience pain (עצב). Ward comes close to capturing this picture when he says, "she who sought sweet delights in eating forbidden fruit finds not delights but pain—not joy, but sorrow."[19] It is, of course, plausible, maybe probable, that the words were used for their rhetorical value, but if Cassuto is accurate, that also suggests that עצב may not inherently refer to physical pain having only been chosen here as a pun. If birth pains are in view, other words would serve the purpose better.

Concerning עצבון, Walton agrees with Cassuto, stating that "the root is not typically used to target physical pain."[20] Again, if physical pain were under discussion, this root would not be the best to capture the idea. Instead, Walton suggests that "the root" refers to "mental or psychological anguish (though physical pain may accompany

---

[18] U. Cassuto, 165. I do not argue against Cassuto's view that עצב is used here as a pun. I appreciate the recognition of potential word play. I simply demonstrate that it is suspect to use Genesis 3.16 to help define a term which is used not because it is the most accurate word, but because it fits a play on words. However, if one does not try to force a definition of "physical pain" on the word, there is an opportunity for a wordplay to be in use while also providing the best gloss available.

[19] Nathan Ward, *The Growth of the Seed: Notes on the Book of Genesis* (Chillicothe, OH: DeWard, 2007), 227.

[20] John H. Walton, *Genesis*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 227.

or be the root cause of the anguish)."[21] Unlike Cassuto and Fretheim, Walton does not try to treat עצב as referring to physical pain. He prefers to translate this as "anguish you will experience in the birth process."[22] For Walton, it is mental and emotional grief which better convey the family of words from עצב.

Curley and Peterson join the discussion as they look at "The Semantic Range of עצבון."[23] In this section, they show some of the same information that has been noted by others, such as how little עצבון appears in the wild[24] and how עצב is not typically used to speak of physical pain.[25] After looking at various places where forms of עצב occur, they not only show that "in every case where the verbal form of עצב is used in Genesis, it has the meaning of emotional grief (cf. Gen 6:6; 34:7; 45:5),"[26] but they also conclude that "עצבון in Gen 3:16 does not have to mean physical pain but can just as legitimately, and more rightly, be translated as emotional sorrow or grief."[27]

Crislip's contribution concerning the emotional aspects of Genesis 3 is particularly helpful. His proposal centers around the lack of emotions before Genesis 3

---

[21] Ibid.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Christine Curley and Brian Peterson, "Eve's Curse Revisited: An Increase of 'Sorrowful Conceptions,'" *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 26, no. 2 (2016): 159-161.

[24] Ibid., 159. As it only appears "three times in this form in the OT" (here, Genesis 3.17 and Genesis 5.29), there is little to compare, though comparing it with Psalm 16.4, they believe here עצב with רבה denotes "increased emotional turmoil" (160).

[25] Ibid., 160. They show "there are no fewer than six other cases in the MT where the root עצב carries with it the nuance of emotional distress (Job 9:28; Prov 10:10; 15:1, 13; Isa 50:11; Ps 139:24)."

[26] Ibid., 161.

[27] Ibid.

which allows that “After eating the forbidden fruit, emotion is born.”[28] Specifically for our text, the emotion connected with עצב he calls “sadness”[29] or “emotional suffering.”[30] He provides a review of scholarship which shows that an emotional understanding of Genesis 3 has been historically accepted, but that various shifts in thought pushed the discussion to a more physical understanding; that “likely connected to broad societal changes in attitudes towards gender, emotional expression, and Darwinism, Christians began to read the oracle in physiological and materialist terms, as God declaims humanity’s pain in childbirth and agricultural labor.”[31] For Crislip, it is clear that if we move back to the way this was supposed to be understood, we would see “God’s oracle of Gen 3:16-17 speaks of pain and suffering holistically, with a focus on emotional pain, especially sadness, sorrow, or grief.”[32]

Kass attempts to stand in middle ground as he suggests that both physical pain and emotional stress are involved. When speaking of the disproportion between a baby’s head and a mother’s “relatively small birth canal,” Kass suggests, “The human capacity

---

[28] Crislip, 101. I appreciate Crislip’s proposal concerning the introduction of emotions in Genesis 3. He succinctly states what I have tried to convey, that “modern scholarly and popular readings of Genesis generally frame humanity’s punishment in physical and material terms…rather than engaging with the affective qualities of pain and toil.” In my own research, I have also noticed his next observation, that “Scholars may even note how inaptly ‘pain’ or ‘pangs’ capture the Hebrew, yet still translate the oracle somatically.” (109).

[29] Ibid.

[30] Ibid., 103. Here, Crislip is referring to the repetition of עצבון in Genesis 3.17 referring to the man. He suggests that unlike most who see that “her *ʿiṣṣabon* is ‘pangs,’ his ‘toil,’ the core referent here is not work itself, but emotional suffering in the face of unpleasant work.” For Crislip, there is no difference in the use of עצב as it is the same emotional suffering, just in different arenas.

[31] Ibid., 128. Crislip points out that as our current round of modern translations begins, “By 1901 with the American Revised Version…emotions had been almost entirely expurgated from the story” (126).

[32] Ibid.

for reason and freedom, embraced in the transgressive rise to humanhood and embodied in the enlarged cranium, is, at its source, in conflict with mere nature; and it comes at a heavy bodily cost to the woman, indeed, often with risk to her very life."[33] In this, he clearly is proposing the physical pain which is associated with childbirth. However, as he continues, he speaks of what he refers to as an even greater pain:

> This bodily conflict between the mother and her emergent child anticipates the often much more painful act of separation, when the child, exercising the newly awakened mental powers made possible by his large head, reaches for his own autonomous knowledge of good and bad and repeats the original rise and fall from obedience and innocence in the ever-recurring saga of human freedom and enlightenment.[34]

Though Kass allows that there is a physical component of pain involved in the birth of children, he also affirms that the more painful experience comes not as physical pain at birth, but an emotional grief as part of raising children who will repeat the same fall from innocence as every generation before them. Though Kass seems to be looking for a middle ground, his argumentation leans more towards seeing עצב as an inward emotional grief instead of a physical pain.

Physical Labor

With a slightly different perspective, perhaps the most influential novel addition to the discourse comes from Meyers whose conclusions have shaped the discussion over the last few decades since the publishing of her seminal work, *Discovering Eve: Ancient*

---

[33] Leon R. Kass, *The Beginning of Wisdom: Reading Genesis* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 112.

[34] Ibid.

Israelite Women in Context.[35] Meyers rejects the notion that עצבון refers to physical pain that occurs in childbirth as she notes that "of the fifteen places in which [the verbal form of עצב] is used, all but one refer explicitly to psychological or emotional discomfort, not to physical pain."[36] She goes on, "Even in that one late instance (Eccles 10:9), in which a physical state is indicated, the verb seems to refer to an injury rather than the accompanying pain of that injury."[37] In her footnote concerning Ecclesiastes 10.9, however, she gives an alternate explanation: "This use of the *ʿṣb* may in fact derive from a separate root related to an Arabic word for 'cut.' The verse in Eccles 10:9 would then read: 'Whoever removes stones would be cut by them; and he who chops wood shall be endangered by this."[38] If so, then the only exception that Meyers sees would not actually be an exception so much as, perhaps, simply a homograph.

For Meyers, "the most appropriate interpretation of the use of *ʿiṣṣabon* in Genesis 3:16 is as physical labor rather than an abstract condition of distress—but not ordinary physical labor…. The difficulty or distress of agricultural work in an unfriendly

---

[35] In the research conducted for this paper, among writings written after 1988, no other resource was quoted or referenced as much as this book. Some agree with her and some reject her conclusions, but undoubtedly this work has greatly affected the recent study of Eve in Genesis. There will be more interaction with Meyers throughout this paper.

[36] Meyers, 104.

[37] Ibid.

[38] Ibid., 202n13. Seufert also deals with the connection between Ecclesiastes 10.9 and Genesis 3.16 (Matthew Seufert, "The Presence of Genesis in Ecclesiastes," *Westminster Theological Journal* 78 (2016): 87). Here Seufert correctly connects Qoheleth's concerns as various forms of hard labor. Seufert focuses not on the emotional grief which seems to be the underlying current through Ecclesiastes, but instead on the difficulty and physical pain of the labor. I would suggest that an understanding involving the grief of labor could also be plausible here.

environment is indicated."[39] Being an Israelite woman in the early Iron Age was fraught with hard work and labor and she stresses that this is the most fundamental way to understand עצב. Even so, when speaking of the second line, she also concludes, "a life of hard work and multiple childbirths will not be without its times of distress…a word denoting the stressful aspects of hard work indicates the psychological toll of the physical condition."[40] For these reasons, though she believes that "while the Hebrew effectively brings together both physical and mental aspects of *'eṣeb*, the translator finds no satisfactory English equivalent."[41] Though she does not sound confident with her choice, in the second line, for עצב, Meyers prefers the gloss, "travail," because "'travail,'[is] a word that means 'very hard work' and so preserves the parallelism with 'toil,'"[42] which was her gloss for עצבון in the first line.

Eskanzi agrees with Meyers as she alludes to the original audience and what the lives of women would have been like. She notes, "In ancient Israel women regularly worked long hours—in food preparation and storage, in manufacture of clothing, in

---

[39] Ibid., 105. For Meyers, the original audience of Genesis 3 were "those who ventured into the highland wilderness at the beginning of the Iron Age" (70). Meyers paints a picture of the Israelites as those who have been through many hardships and threats to their population and were "conscious of the implications of underpopulation for the labor needs of their pioneering agrarian mode of life." In other words, the women in Highland Iron Age Israel had to be women who worked as hard as their husbands for the survival of the family. In this picture, "a value system or an ideology encouraging women to have large families—while simultaneously contributing their own productive labor—would have been an effective adaptive mechanism" (71).

[40] Ibid., 108.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Ibid. Meyers is trying to distance the understanding of עצב from pain in childbirth. Even so, she does allow that "'travail can also refer to difficulty in childbirth, but the difficulty here seems to be the stresses of parenting rather than the strains of parturition." In other words, she is careful to distance her translation from the general pains involved with childbirth and if anyone wants to make a comparison, they can only compare to the outlying experiences and not the norm, which is how it is typically understood.

farming alongside of men, and more. For the Torah's original audience, this story would have brought such labors readily to mind." In reference to the idea that עצב can refer to physical pain, she states, "Genesis 3:16 neither imposes physical pain upon the woman nor condones it. The passage describes the hardship that often accompanies birthing and raising children."[43] For Eskanzi, an ancient Israelite woman's life was marked by all the difficulties that came with motherhood which not only included caring for the children but laboring in many other ways as well. It was a hard life.

Though Meyers *et al.* propose a solid argument based on semantic ranges, given the context of Genesis 3, the picture seems out of place. Whereas the section concerning the man (Genesis 3.17ff) focuses on the hard work of the field, that is introduced after the section with the woman is completed. Other than the repetition of עצבון, there is not much that connects the sections together. Unfortunately for Meyers and those with her, Novick rightly points out "there is no indication in the verse itself, or in the story more generally, that Eve has a role to play in the field."[44] Curley and Peterson take this a step further when they add, "none of the matriarchs after they are married appear working in the fields."[45] Meyers's entire premise rests in placing the woman into an early Iron Age context in which women worked alongside their husbands while also taking care of many other domestic responsibilities. But this picture of work, while compelling, is more a figment of Meyers's imagination than it is an insight into the biblical culture. Collins challenges Meyers's position by saying, "Meyers's interpretation seems unduly

---

[43] Tamara Eskanzi, ed., *The Torah: A Woman's Commentary* (New York, NY: Women of Reform Judaism, 2008), 17.

[44] Novick, 240.

[45] Curley and Peterson, 163.

dependent on her hypothesis that the story reflects life in the highland settlements."[46] As many note, in the cultural context of Genesis 3, there is something specific about the judgment to the woman and the judgment to the man. For example, Wenham suggests, "A woman is doomed to suffer in her fundamental role as wife and mother, man will be similarly affected in his basic role as farmer and food-producer."[47] For these reasons, I find the argument, that עצב in Genesis 3.16 refers to physical labor, lacking.

Problems Relating to the Wife / Husband Relationship

Provan takes a unique approach to understanding the עצב which is multiplied. He agrees with Meyers *et al.* when he says, "it is quite unlikely…that labour pains are in view in Genesis 3:16," but diverges when he continues, "it is much more likely that the 'pain' envisaged is bound up with the difficult *circumstances* into which the woman will now bring children as they are born."[48] Provan later becomes more specific concerning what these "circumstances" are as he surmises, "Whence might come this generalized pain? The context of Genesis 3 suggests that it is most immediately connected with the change that occurs in the woman's relationship with her husband."[49] From here, Provan

---

[46] John J. Collins, *The Bible After Babel: Historical Criticism in a Postmodern Age* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 93n102.

[47] Wenham, 82. Though I previously accepted that each judgment applies to the other gender, the notion is that they are loosely connected, not that they are the same punishment.

[48] Iain Provan, *Discovering Genesis: Content, Interpretation, Reception* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015), 87.

[49] Ibid. This change, of course, is referring to the rest of Genesis 3.16.

provides a spiral of hypothetical scenarios in which the change in the relationship with her husband will create a generally painful environment for her children.[50]

There is something compelling about Provan's position which provides a connection from Genesis 3.16a and Genesis 3.16b. Whereas most who connect these sections of Genesis 3.16 suggest that the increased pain in childbearing will stand in conflict with the sexual relationship that a woman would desire with her husband,[51] Provan's view allows one section to further describe the other.

Though Provan provides an interesting view, it has some drawbacks. First, Provan provides hypothetical scenarios as the probable scenarios to form his conclusion, similar to Meyers's assumptions concerning the scenarios by which women fit into Israelite society.[52] Second, and perhaps the greatest issue with Provan's proposal which rests not with his treatment of עצבון as much as how he understands עצבון with הרן, Provan derives his conclusions from the way the Greek translation treated הרן. As he states, "it is interesting that already back in ancient times the Greek Septuagint (LXX) translation of Genesis 3.16 also read the line as referring to generalized pain—it makes no reference to

---

[50] Provan suggests that Genesis 3.16b denotes "marital dysfunction" which is meant to explain an increase in the woman's conceptions, "possibly the idea is that sex will become detached from sensible, responsible dominion of the world, which should involve among other things a commitment to the well-being of all human beings (including women)" (Ibid.).

[51] Not all commentators understand Genesis 3.16b to refer to a sexual desire for her husband. But of those who do, Delitzch poetically describes this, suggesting, "her reward for [her sinful action] is the almost morbid and continual desire she should experience towards the man in spite of the perils and pains of child-birth" (166). As Fretheim states it, "despite the pains of childbirth, she will still long for sexual intimacy" (*Genesis*, 363). It is not within the purposes of this paper to delve into Genesis 3.16b. For a history of scholarship and a somewhat novel approach to understanding this section, see Joel N. Lohr, "Sexual Desire? Eve, Genesis 3:16, and תשוקה," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 130, no. 2 (2011): 227-246.

[52] Even so, Provan's view has more legitimacy than Meyers's as the dysfunction he speaks of is found in some of the marriage relationships in Genesis, such as Abraham and Sarah as well as Jacob and his wives.

childbearing."[53] Wevers, who published *Notes on the Greek Text of Genesis*, allows "much freer is the rendering στεναγμόν for הרן 'conception'; the term refers to the 'sighing, groaning' attendant on giving birth."[54] Even though Wevers suggests that the Greek translation speaks of groaning associated with parturition, Provan is technically correct that it is not the term for giving birth. Therefore, עצבון could be "referring to generalized pain," as technically, in the LXX, the phrase "makes no reference to childbearing."[55] Be that as it may, Provan, using the LXX rendering of הרן to then explain עצבון feels like he is performing a sleight of hand, especially since the second-line parallel in the Greek translation does specify childbirth.[56] Though Provan's view has much to commend it, it fails to provide the most acceptable understanding of עצבון.

Gestation Period

Novick has the most drastic view as he attempts to direct focus to another potential definition of עצב. Novick suggests there are two different roots which have the same vowel structure: עצב. He introduces the two עצב-I and עצב-II and then suggests, "עצב-I has to do with pain, anxiety, and toil, while the basic sense of עצב-II involves

---

[53] Provan, *Discovering Genesis*, 87.

[54] John William Wevers, *Notes on the Greek Text of Genesis* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1993), 45.

[55] Provan, *Discovering Genesis*, 87.

[56] Though, as will be discussed when looking at הרה, there are some who believe the LXX is more faithful to the original meaning than what many modern translators have assumed.

wrapping, shaping, fashioning."[57] He bases each of these on separate Arabic cognates.[58] Thus, for Novick, he sees Genesis 3.16a as referring not to "pain" from conception, but instead as something having "entirely to do with shaping, forming." Therefore, he sees Genesis 3.16 as "a hendiadys meaning, 'the shaping of your conception.' i.e., the shaping following on from your conception, or, in other words, your gestational period."[59] If Novick is accurate, then what has been greatly multiplied is not the pain involved in childbirth, but the time from conception to childbirth. He sees that this connects with the second line referring to bearing children in pain as he surmises, "because of the long gestational period, the fetus will be large at birth, and parturition will therefore prove painful."[60] With this view, Novick sees that the judgment speaks of "three stages in the formation of the child: conception (הרנך), gestation (עצבונך), and birth (תלדי)."[61]

Again, a novel approach requires consideration because, as Curley and Peterson note, Novick's "lexical work is very insightful." But they then go on to point out that his understanding of "gestational period" does not flow well with "the larger rhetorical presentation of the author of Genesis." [62] Along these lines, Provan notices an immediate issue concerning the way Novick's view of עצב fits in Genesis. Novick assumed עצב-II in Genesis 3.16a and Genesis 3.17, but he attributed עצב-I in the second line of Genesis

---

[57] Novick, 240.

[58] He acknowledges that there are already two roots using עצב, but he notes, "with the exception of HALOT [the sources which acknowledge the second root] all associate עצב-II" with the wrong Arabic cognate, one that means, "to cut, bore" and then "assign to עצב-II the meaning, 'to build, make." (Ibid. n18).

[59] Ibid.

[60] Ibid., n20.

[61] Ibid., 243.

[62] Curley and Peterson, 164.

3.16a.[63] Thus, according to Novick, the author of Genesis used the same root twice but a different root with the same letters, as he "unquestionably puns,"[64] in the space of just a few lines. While it is certainly possible that the author deliberately made a play on words, the use of the parallelism seems to make it more unlikely. Adding to this that through the rest of Genesis there is never mention of the significance of longer gestational periods, Novick is unconvincing in showing how his differentiating עצב-II affects the greater narrative in Genesis.

As well, Provan points out how Novick's own critique casts further doubt on the likelihood of his proposal.[65] Though he tries to spin it in favor of his view, Novick readily admits that here, "The attribution of gestation to the mother ('*your* shaping') should not be surprising, even though, in most other biblical passages, it is naturally God to whom formation of the child is attributed. We may perhaps imagine God intentionally disassociating himself from the now 'accursed' birth process."[66] In other words, Novick believes this is unique in that the formation of the baby is credited to the mother instead of to God. This seems contrived as I see no reason that God would be "intentionally disassociating himself from the now 'accursed' birth process." As Novick points out, God does not typically do this in other passages, which occur after the birth process has already become "accursed." There would be no reason for him to do so now.

---

[63] Provan, "Pain," 288n17.

[64] Novick, 242.

[65] Provan, "Pain," 288n17.

[66] Novick, 241-242n20.

Though I appreciate the lexical work and the attempt to weave multiple elements together, Novick's approach is unconvincing. He attributes an action to God which the text does not suggest. His view of usages seems overly selective, and to get around problematic areas he simply calls them "puns." Perhaps most of all, his view of עצב in Genesis 3.16 does not further advance understanding of how Genesis 3.16a fits in with the rest of Genesis.

My Preference

In my estimation, the best understanding of עצב in Genesis 3.16a is an emotional grief or sorrow. God tells Eve that she will experience multiplied sorrow because sin is now in the world. To more properly understand this multiplied sorrow, it is important to look at the word to which it is connected.

הרנך

Though עצב is clearly the most important and controversial word in this text, והרנך proves to be almost as important and controversial in light of how it is often treated. As with עצבון, what appears to be uniformity by the translators covers a different reality. Most translations and commentators translate והרנך as connected to the act of childbirth in some way assuming that it is derived from the root הרה;[67] but scholarship is not as uniform in its treatment. In fact, those who agree with the translators were surprisingly lacking in justification of the position.

[67] While most translations match the ESV and use "childbirth" or "childbearing," there are some, like the NET which, assuming a hendiadys, translate it as "labor pains" connecting it with עצב. The most notable exceptions are the KJV / NJKV which both treat this as "conception."

Conception or Childbirth?

Cassuto suggests that combining הרה with עצב would literally be, "Your suffering and your childbearing."[68] Even so, he suggests the best interpretation of the phrase is, "*your suffering* in general, and more particularly that of *your childbearing*." Cassuto sees this as the time when pregnancy reaches its most difficult stages leading up to and including delivery when women "would inevitably endure the most fearful pangs."[69]

Delitzsch, one of the foremost Hebraists of the nineteenth century, renders this as "conception." But even so, he follows it up by explaining that the "conception…is not here regarded as motherhood, but as the wearisome bearing of the fruit of the body" and "is meant more generally of the troubles combined with the female constitution, apart from conception."[70] Delitzsch recognizes that the term itself has to do with conception, but he allows the full context to change the meaning. Of course, there is nothing wrong with using context to determine the meaning of a word, and it is an important part of translation, however, one must first consider all potential options before turning to an amended understanding.

Most surprising was Hamilton who, in his entry for הרה in *NIDOTTE*, begins with four forms of הרה found in the Hebrew Bible: 1) הָרָה "be(come) pregnant, conceive;" 2) הָרֶה "either an adj. 'pregnant' or a part. of הָרָה;" 3) הֵרוֹן "childbearing (hapleg. in Gen 3:16);" 4) הֵרָיוֹן "conception."[71] It is interesting that every form of the word, save one, is

---

[68] Cassuto, 16.

[69] Ibid.

[70] Delitzsch, 165.

[71] Victor Hamilton, "הָרָה," in *NIDOTTE*, 1:1033-35.

given a definition which concerns "conception." The only one which has a different definition, "הֵרוֹן 'childbearing,'" is considered a *hapax legomena*, which means there are no other occurrences of this form of the word to compare with to make this judgment. Hamilton provides no justification for veering away from the way the other forms are treated (conception) as he treats this particular form with a different concept (childbearing), he simply states it as fact. But there are many others who challenge the idea that הֵרוֹן requires a definition which is inconsistent with the rest.

Van Ruiten, while also noting that "הרון is a *hapex legomenon*," suggests it is possibly "connected with the term הריון,[72] which means 'conception' in the two places where this term is used in the Hebrew Bible."[73] Van Ruiten also connects הרון with הרה "which means 'to conceive' as well as 'to be pregnant,'" and concludes, "הרון in Gen 3:16a seems to concern more the *beginning* of pregnancy than its end. If this is true, something painful *in childbearing* seems to miss the point of הרון."[74] Van Ruiten's assumptions flow better with the entirety of the rest of הרה's lexical range than does Hamilton's.

Provan is equally as adamant that "the word הרן is of very questionable connection to the birthing of children" because "in its two occurrences within the Old Testament [it] clearly refers to conception, and not to birth." Provan then cites both examples which are Hosea 9.11 and Ruth 4.13. While looking at Ruth, Provan points out that "Ruth 4:13 tells us that Boaz 'went to her [Ruth], and the LORD enabled her to

---

[72] Westermann points out that in Genesis 3.16, "the Samaritan reads הרינך" which could be a point of comparison here (262).

[73] Van Ruiten, 4.

[74] Ibid.

conceive (lit. gave her to conception, הריון), and she gave birth (ילד) to a son.'"[75] In this instance, there is a clear distinction between conception and the action of giving birth. הרה is associated with conception, not childbearing.

Interestingly, three years after writing "Pain in Childbirth" found in *Let Us Go up to Zion* which was referenced above, Provan slightly amends his view of הרה in *Discovering Genesis*. Though still rejecting the idea of childbirth, he now states that "elsewhere in the OT *herayon* clearly refers to conception or pregnancy, and not to childbirth."[76] This may not seem like much of a difference, but the potential evolution of thought allows a further range of meaning. If the word meaning "conception" could also mean "pregnancy," then how far does the lexical range extend?

Along the same lines, Meyers echoes Provan's semantic reasoning when she suggests that "The Hebrew term *heron* in fact does not mean childbirth. In the developed vocabulary of human reproduction, it refers to the period of pregnancy and not to the process of childbirth, which terminates pregnancy." She is helpful in narrowing the range down as she allows "the word shows a tendency to be more associated with the initiation of pregnancy rather than with its duration or conclusion. In its verbal form, the word regularly means 'to become pregnant,' that is, 'to conceive,' rather than 'to be

---

[75] Provan, "Pain," 292.

[76] Provan, *Discovering*, 87. Of course, as has already been noted, Provan then eschews these thoughts altogether and focuses on the rendering of "the Greek Septuagint (LXX)" which "makes no reference to childbearing." Thus, Provan connects הרון as those "back in ancient times" who "read the line as referring to generalized pain" disassociated from conception or childbirth (Ibid.) As I argued earlier, Provan's rejection of the MT for the Greek rendering is hardly convincing as Wevers points out that even the Greek's translation "refers to the 'sighing, groaning' attendant on giving birth" (45). In other words, it is true that the Greek word is not the specific one for conceptions, but it is a word that is often tied to the birth process in some way.

pregnant.'"[77] To Meyers and Provan, it is certain that הרה typically refers to conception with the potential that it could also refer to the duration of the pregnancy. But the most important aspect is that both reject the notion of הרה referring to childbirth.

Pain Just Before Delivery

Davis, while also suggesting that הרה is tied to "conception," assumes that since "pregnancy and childbirth would be accompanied by *'iṣṣabôn*, ('sorrow'), a word which is usually translated 'pain, sorrow, toil and labor' in the Old Testament (cf. 3:17; 5:29) [then] this is exactly what a pregnant woman experiences during 'labor' just prior to birth."[78] Davis's assumption is the closest one could get to connecting הרה to childbirth without actually connecting it to the childbirth itself. He is still, technically, within the timeframe before childbirth, which, as Meyers states, "terminates pregnancy."[79] Even so, if I wanted to pinpoint a single moment meant by הרה while wanting to maintain that עצב meant physical pain linked with הרה, Davis's view would be tempting as it seems to combine these ideas. However, as I see עצב as emotional pain and not physical pain, if I were to pinpoint a single moment meant by הרה, I would lean away from Davis's view having no reason to connect it to the physical pain of labor.

---

[77] Meyers, 102.

[78] Davis, 94.

[79] Meyers, 102.

Trembling

Tsumura presents an intriguing idea concerning הרנך. Instead of assuming that הרנך is a unique, or, "incorrect" form of הרה and connected to הריונך, Tsumura believes "The meaning of Hebrew root **hrr* then might be better explained in the light of Akkadian *arāru* 'to tremble…' which seems to fit in the present context of Genesis." This would mean that connected with עצב, the combination would be the result of "the increase of woman's 'pain and trembling'" which connects with "the second line of the parallelism [which] refers more specifically to the pain of woman in travail."[80] Tsumura's view is intriguing as it also makes more sense of the Greek text which uses "στεναγμόν…[which] refers to 'sighing, groaning' attendant on giving birth."[81] Perhaps Kalmanofsky would concur with Tsumara's thoughts as she, looking at how the prophets used childbirth as an analogy, says, "while giving birth, a woman experiences fear and confusion. She trembles from both pain and panic."[82] Curley and Peterson seem to agree with this assessment as they state, concerning Tsumura's article, "On the surface this makes sense." However, they go on to say, "arguments like that of Tsumura's focus too heavily on the birthing of children as opposed to the act of conception, which הרון seems to connote."[83] Novick adds further criticism while showing three different proposed

---

[80] David T. Tsumura, "A Note on הרון (Gen 3,16)," *Biblica* 75, no. 3 (1994): 400.

[81] Wevers, 45.

[82] Amy Kalmanofsky, "Israel's Baby: The Horror of Childbirth in the Biblical Prophets," *Biblical Interpretation* 16, no. 1 (2008): 66. Kalmanofsky's article is interesting as she compares the prophets' use of childbirth with the modern-day horror genre. For the prophets, the "laboring woman…is not a pitiful figure that works to elicit empathy, but a repulsive figure that asks the audience to reject her and look away…thus prophetic rhetoric asks *real* Israel, the prophets' intended audience, to identify with the figure of the laboring woman in order to reject her."

[83] Curley and Peterson, 164.

suggestions that הרן comes from "the geminate root הרן" 1) "attested in Arabic with meaning 'to howl' (possibly with sexual desire)" (Chaim Rabin), or 2) "in Ugaritic with the meaning of 'desire'" (Mitchell Dahood), or 3) "in Akkadian with the meaning 'to tremble'" (David Tsumura)."[84] In response, Novick suggests "there is slim evidence for the proposed cognates—the Arabic root rarely occurs in specific association with sexual desire; the Ugaritic root is attested only once; and Akkadian *arāru* 'to tremble' cannot confidently be identified with הרר—and all three approaches must posit an otherwise unattested BH root הרר."[85] Though compelling, it seems Tsumura is attempting to replace what he sees as a problematic lexical issue with one which is just as problematic and has less substantiation. This is especially true when the problem, "that BH ordinarily uses not הרן but הריון to indicate pregnancy," is not as much of a problem as Tsumura seems to think because, as Novick points out, "הרן can easily be understood as a byform of הריון."[86] Ryle concludes, speaking of the shift found in the Greek text, "the change is needless."[87]

My Preference

Of the various ideas concerning the proper meaning of הרה in Genesis 3.16a, the focus on conception seems the most accurate. It clearly should not be treated as "childbirth" as, has been shown throughout, the word typically refers not to parturition

---

[84] Of these, Tsumura's was the one which seemed most plausible as an alternative and therefore worthy of inclusion as a possibility.

[85] Novick, 238-239.

[86] Ibid., 239. For a more detailed and helpful explanation concerning the intricacies of the Hebrew grammar for this discussion see Novick, 238-240.

[87] Herbert Edward, *The Book of Genesis* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1921), 55.

but to conception. As is also pointed out by many, it could carry with it the idea of pregnancy as well. For Walton and Chisholm, this word is the lynchpin for rhetorical devices which cause the term to carry an even greater meaning. Walton considers this term the first part of a merism in which the author is intending to speak of "the anxiety that a woman will experience through the whole process from conception to birth,"[88] which will be discussed in the next section. Both Chisholm and Ross independently suggest that, as Ross states, "'conception' must be taken as a synecdoche representing the whole process that begins with conception."[89] This view is not far from Walton's merism idea and will also be dealt with in a later section.

תלדי

The next important word to grapple with is the other Hebrew term translated with the idea of "childbirth." Whereas the popular renderings of עצב and הרה were highly contested, there is not nearly as much discussion centered around תלדי, a form of ילד. Though Hamilton addresses no fewer than ten forms of ילד in his contribution to *NIDOTTE*, the only one that connects with the *Qal* imperfect תֵּלְדִי is the standard use, יָלַד, which means, "bear, bring forth, beget."[90]

Meyers is careful to make a distinction between what ילד would or would not actually reference. She notes that the verb here "belongs to the biblical vocabulary of pregnancy and birth, and refers to the childbirth process itself, not to the preceding stages

---

[88] Walton, 227.

[89] Ross, 146. Chisholm has a very similar statement (Study note on Gen. 3:16, in NET Bible).

[90] Victor Hamilton, "יָלַד," in *NIDOTTE*, 2:447.

of intercourse, conception, and gestation." This being the case, she also points out "the verb *yld,* often translated 'to bear children,' can also be a general term for having children, applied to either or both parents."[91] For Meyers, the key is finding whether there is an object to the verb. According to Meyers, "when the verb *yld* is intransitive, it normally denotes the birth process; but when it is used transitively, it refers to the status of parenthood." Thus, in Genesis 3.16a, where the verb is followed by בָּנִים, the focus is "not on labor and parturition but rather on the more abstract notion of becoming a parent, or having children." [92] For Meyers, the use of ילד here is a more general use of the word and is not specific to the wife at the moment of childbirth.

Van Ruiten pushes back against Meyers's position as he states, "I am not completely convinced by her interpretation of ילד and the differences she makes between the transitive and the intransitive use of it." He suggests that even if "it might sometimes be possible that ילד points to fatherhood or motherhood, and not to the physical process of childbirth, nevertheless in all places it refers to the very *beginning* of childbirth, the moment of being born."[93] For Van Ruiten, the distinction between transitive and intransitive is not as important because it all points back to childbirth. While I appreciate Van Ruiten's caution and agree that the main point lies with the focus on "childbirth," I also see validity in Meyers's distinction. It seems there is certainly a middle ground where ילד is transitive and speaks of parenthood in general with a focus on the moment in which parenthood begins: birth.

---

[91] Meyers, 106.

[92] Ibid.

[93] Van Ruiten, 6n12.

Walton, without actually mentioning ילד, has an interesting notion of the use of this word in the passage. Without following Meyers's distinction concerning transitive and intransitive usage, he simply sees ילד as referring to childbirth. Then, observing the parallelism with הרון in the previous line, he concludes the author intended a merism and is speaking of "the whole process from conception to birth."[94]

I think the idea of merism makes a lot of sense in this passage. But instead of limiting the merism to Walton's "from conception to birth," if we add in Meyers's contribution, the end result is not "birth," but "parenthood." Thus, the parallel lines in Genesis 3.16a would show a merism which speaks of the whole process from conception into parenthood. This fits closely with Chisholm's and Ross's conception of הרון serving as a "synecdoche, representing the entire process of childbirth and child rearing from the very start."[95]

הרבה ארבה

In Genesis 3.16a, the declaration begins with what Meyers calls "a complex verbal structure" in which "The regular verbal idea…is accompanied in the Hebrew by an infinitive absolute, another form of the same verbal root." As she points out, "the use of the infinitive absolute before the verb serves to emphasize or strengthen the action represented by the verb."[96] Wevers shows that the Greek translation retains the duplication of the verb when "Gen renders הרבה by the cognate participle preceding the

---

[94] Walton, *Genesis*, 227.

[95] Chisholm, study note on Genesis 3:16, in NET Bible. Ross has a very similar statement (146).

[96] Meyers, 99.

infinite verb, thus πληθύνων πληθυνῶ."[97] English translations are far from uniform in the treatment of this phrase, but whether they use "surely multiply" (ESV), "greatly increase" (NRSV, NET) or "make most severe" (JPS), the understanding of the phrase is uniform. Therefore, questions behind this phrase are more philosophical. Is God introducing something that did not exist before? Was there already pain, but now it is simply intensified?

רבה simply means "become numerous, increase, multiply."[98] Meyers suggests that the range of uses for רבה "nearly always involves a concept of numerical increase. A quantity of something…is indicated."[99] She goes on to point out that the same "particular construction, verb plus infinitive absolute, is found twice again in Genesis…in both places the idea of population increase is expressed by this verbal arrangement."[100]

The language used in English translations assumes the pre-existence of עצב. You cannot increase something that does not already exist. It is impossible to multiply zero by anything. Provan notes "that the woman is not envisaged in Genesis 3 as only *beginning* to experience pain after evil enters the world. Suffering does not *begin* at this point in the biblical story; it only *increases.*"[101] Longman, criticizing the NIV translation which reads,

---

[97] Wevers, 45. It is unfortunate that the English language does not accommodate this structure as easily as the Hebrew or Greek since English, as Meyers points out, "has no syntactic equivalent to this doubling of the verb" (99). Perhaps the translators could say something such as, "increasingly increase," but that is still awkward to the English speaker's ears.

[98] Andrew E. Hill, "רָבָה," in *NIDOTTE*, 3:1034. Specifically, Genesis 3.16 is mentioned in the section for "The hi. רָבָה" which "most often means make numerous or multiply," which is in line with the standard definition.

[99] Meyers, 99.

[100] Ibid., 100.

[101] Provan, *Discovering*, 87.

"I will make your pain in childbearing very severe," says the translation "misses an important nuance…even if Adam and Eve did not sin, there would have been pain in childbearing, but sin intensified that pain."[102]

Whereas I can understand this view from the perspective of the typical English rendering, I wonder how much this fastidiousness of the English translation was also felt by the Hebrew audience. As Hill suggests, even with the *hiphil* use of רבה it could be "make numerous or multiply."[103] If we wish to be fastidious in our approach, one can also make something numerous that does not, as of yet, exist. If I were to sit my seventeen-year-old down and have a serious discussion about what will happen in a few years when he leaves the house and goes out on his own, I would inform him that his financial responsibilities (which are zero at the moment) would be made numerous. If I were using Hebrew words, I would use רבה to describe the great responsibility he would have. While reading *Pride and Prejudice*, perhaps רבה would be a good word to use to describe the many penalties imposed upon Kitty due to Lydia's elopement with Mr. Whickham. As Mr. Bennett established new rules he declared, "No, Kitty, I have at last learnt to be cautious, and you will feel the effects of it," followed by a list of changes which would be in place. If I were writing with Hebrew text, I would use רבה to describe the numerous prohibitions she would now face as consequence for Lydia's actions, prohibitions that did not previously exist.[104]

---

[102] Longman, 67.

[103] Andrew E. Hill, "רָבָה," in *NIDOTTE*, 3:1034.

[104] Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* (1813; repr., New York: Barnes and Noble, 1993), 217.

This is borne out in the beginning of the Exodus narrative as YHWH, speaking with Moses, tells him, "I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and though I will רבה my signs and wonders in the land of Egypt, Pharaoh will not listen to you" (Exodus 7.3-4). As of yet, YHWH has not begun working "signs and wonders" in Egypt, yet he promises that he will make numerous his signs using a *hiphil wayyiqtol* form of רבה, which corresponds to the *hiphil imperfect* form in Genesis 3.16. I would suggest that reasoning like that of Davis, who states, "God said he would 'multiply,' or increase, that pain, implying that Eve could or did experience some pain prior to the fall,"[105] is unnecessary. Whatever is being modified by רבה does not have to currently be in existence, even in potentia. Collins agrees with this sentiment as he suggests, "The first two lines of Genesis 3:16 do seem to introduce 'pain' and danger into the woman's experience of childbirth and to imply that an unfallen Eve would have delivered children without them."[106]

Setting aside a fastidious attention to a specific conception of רבה, Collins provides the most important observation from the author's use of רבה: the author connects Genesis 3.16a with Genesis 1.28. As Collins observes, "there is a play between the use of the root *r-b-h* in 3:16 ('I will surely *multiply* your pain in childbearing') and its use in the commission of 1:28 ('be fruitful and *multiply*')."[107] More likely than the author trying to imply the presence of pain and suffering in the Edenic paradise, the author is focused on the situation concerning the woman and her place in the very first divine commandment. As the one from whom offspring comes, her role is crucial in the fulfillment of this

---

[105] Davis, 94.

[106] C. John Collins, *Genesis 1-4*, 163.

[107] Ibid., 169.

mandate. And even before they have begun to fulfill it through procreation, they have already brought troubles to the fulfillment of the command. As Collins goes on to show, "Whereas procreation had previously been the sphere of blessing, now it is to be the arena of pain and danger."[108] In *Reading Genesis Well,* Collins also connects Genesis 1.28 with Genesis 3 as he speaks of the differences between the blessing and the curse:

> In [Genesis] 1:28 we read, "And God *blessed* them. And God said to them, 'Be fruitful and *multiply*...." In Genesis 3 the "blessing" (ברך, *brk*) has turned to "curse" (ארר, *'rr*), the proper antonym. And whereas formerly the blessing was for them to *multiply* by having children, after their disobedience God says to the woman that he will "surely *multiply*" your pain in childbearing"—the arena of blessing has turned into one of pain and danger.[109]

For Collins, the use of "multiply" in both passages shows the connection between what was a blessing and is now part of the curse. Rather than focusing on whether pain and suffering existed before Genesis 3 based on the author's use of רבה, we should be focusing on the literary and theological implications concerning what has now changed in the first couple's mandate to multiply and fill the earth. This is what affects not only the first man and woman, but what affects every other person in humanity who continues to populate the earth through childbearing.

Meyers is helpful when determining how the use of רבה connects with the author's use of עצב. As already stated, Meyers points out that רבה "tends to be used for commodities or persons that can be counted." She concludes that "its usage with 'pain' as the direct object is surprising and would be an unusual, if not impossible, occurrence. Pain defies quantification…. It is difficult to imagine the ancients conceiving of pain in

---

[108] Ibid.

[109] C. John Collins, *Reading Genesis*, 111.

quantitative terms."[110] In what ways can we count the increase of "pain" during a woman's delivery of a child?[111] For Meyers, the answer is to disconnect עצב from physical pain and consider it something different which is quantifiable, that is the increase of areas in a woman's life that would result in hard work and labor. As I have already rejected that notion, I do believe there is a way to understand רבה as noting a quantifiable change in the sorrows that a woman endures due to the judgements spoken of in Genesis 3, as will be shown in the next few sections.

The Hendiadys Deliberation

Outside of determining the semantic ranges for the chosen vocabulary, whether the author intended a hendiadys is, perhaps, the most important issue concerning the chosen vocabulary. The presence of a hendiadys changes the way translators treat this phrase. If the phrase is meant to be read as a hendiadys, then it would be something like, "I will greatly multiply the pain which is associated with your childbearing." On the other hand, if no hendiadys is intended, it would read something like, "I will greatly multiply your pain and also your childbearing."[112]

---

[110] Meyers, 100. While I agree with Meyers in principle concerning רבה in Genesis 3.16, her assumptions concerning the use of רבה to primarily refer to the numeric value of objects is perhaps overstated. There are clearly times in which רבה is used to define something unquantifiable, such as when referring to the love of YHWH (i.e., Ps 130.7).

[111] Having been in the hospital with my wife a number of times for the births of children, I am well aware of a system in place in hospitals to do this very thing. But it is also important to note that the system of providing a number from one to ten or choosing a face ranging from smiley to frowny are highly subjective and would not, technically, be considered quantifiable.

[112] Kvam et al. provide more examples of how this phrase is translated with and without a hendiadys (34-35.). It is noteworthy that the ancient Greek translation does not treat this as a hendiadys. In his *Notes on the Greek Text of Genesis,* Wevers indicates that the Greek structuring of Genesis 3.16 "avoids the hendiadys of the Hebrew, i.e., 'pains and (i.e. of) childbirth' by using parallel terms" (45). Though Wevers

The vast majority of modern translations translate this phrase assuming a hendiadys. The most notable exception is the NKJV ("I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception") derived from the original KJV which first translated this passage without an explicit hendiadys. In my own research, I have found scholarship is much more diverse than the translations in that support for or against a hendiadys is nearly equal.

For some, there is no discussion necessary. Speiser declares this "A parade example of hendiadys in Heb,"[113] while Westermann calls it a "typical hendiadys."[114] Walton, as well, is confident in the intended hendiadys; he announces it is a hendiadys with no further discussion necessary.[115] On the other side of the discussion, Meyers's translation is built on the absence of hendiadys as she concludes, "we are faced with a situation whereby pain and pregnancy would be linked if hendiadys is assumed. But such a linkage is highly improbable."[116] Eskanzi and Van Ruiten, both following Meyers's approach to עצב in her translation, do not even approach the subject. The rejection of hendiadys is simply assumed.

---

is discussing the lack of a hendiadys in the Greek text, he implicitly shows support for a hendiadys in the Hebrew text.

[113] Speiser, 24.

[114] Westermann, 262.

[115] Walton, 227.

[116] Meyers, 103. Meyers assumes עצב refers not to a kind of pain, but to the hard work and labor associated with the lives of women in the early Iron Age. Thus the "pain" is actually "labor" or, as she prefers, "travail," which is distinct from "conceptions." Therefore, even though she admits that "grammatically, a hendiadys is possible but not necessary" (101), her contextual arguments do not allow it.

Even so, there are some who take a more cautious approach. Instead of being confident, Skinner says that "it is better to assume a *hendiadys*."[117] Wenham is far from forceful as he suggests, "'Your pains and your pregnancies' is probably hendiadys for 'your pains of pregnancy.'"[118] Kvam *et al.* do not even choose a side in the discussion. They simply show the various options and let the reader decide.[119] On the other side of the discussion, Keil, while not emphatic, does suggest that "the sentence is not rendered more lucid by the assumption of a *hendiadys*."[120]

It seems the main reason to reject a hendiadys is to match assumptions made concerning the terms. It is almost as if some, like Meyers, reject the notion of a hendiadys because accepting one would cause a change in definitions to match the hendiadys, as if a hendiadys automatically has to connect "physical pain" with "childbirth," which is not the case, though the translators and many commentators do just this and amend the terms to match their desired end phrase. I appreciate Provan's snarky response as he points out that "The invocation of hendiadys does not magically allow the transformation of הרן (conception) into בטה (birth)—although it is such alchemy that commentators and translators have nonetheless attempted to deploy, when they have read עצבונך והרנך as

---

[117] Skinner, 82.

[118] Wenham, 81.

[119] Kvam, *et al.*, 34-35.

[120] Keil, 1:103. Because "an increase in pregnancies…could be no punishment," Keil specifies that the "sorrow" is that which is "peculiar to a woman's life" but was also, "(or more especially) thy pregnancy (*i.e.* the sorrows attendant upon that condition)." In other words, it seems that Keil sees that the curse includes the general sorrows that are a part of being a woman first and then sorrows (and pain) that accompany childbirth as being associated with הרה. For him, a hendiadys is not necessary as he already assumes the end result of a hendiadys in the second part of what is multiplied.

referring to pains in pregnancy or birth."[121] So Meyers and others prefer to find a way to use their views of the terms as separate from one another. If, like Meyers, one assumes that עצב is more about laborious work than any kind of pain, then it would not make sense to connect it with הרה and the translation would necessitate rejecting the hendiadys. However, if there is another way to demonstrate that עצב is somehow connected to הרה, then assuming a hendiadys is natural.

As I am convinced semantically that עצב is best rendered "grief" and הרה is best rendered "conception," my view on this matter matches Curley and Peterson who believe the author intended a hendiadys, stating, "if עצבון והרכנך is rendered as the hendiadys 'your sorrowful conceptions,' then the translation satisfies the immediate and larger context."[122] But they also allow the other option, "Even if one rejects the hendiadys, the translation 'your sorrow *in* your conception' also suits the context well."[123]

One important aspect of this discussion which is rarely mentioned concerns the parallel lines in Genesis 3.16:

A. הרבה ארבה עצבונך והרנך

B. בעצב תלדי בנים

The repetition of עצב in both lines is a clear indication that these two lines are running a form of parallelism. The fact that הרה and ילד both have connections to the process of procreation solidifies this connection. Walton notes this connection and assumes that the author is trying to cover the "anxiety that a woman will experience through the whole

---

[121] Provan, "Pain," 292.

[122] Curley and Peterson, 164.

[123] Ibid.

process from birth to conception." He calls this section "an extended merism (two endpoints used to refer to everything in between)."[124] If these paralleled lines are, indeed, meant to parallel one another, then the addition of something such as hard work, or something too specific, like menstruation, which does not fit neatly into both parallels falls amiss.

Therefore, in my translation, I assume the presence of a hendiadys which joins together griefs with conceptions. It not only fits within the semantic range of the terms in use, but it fits well with the parallel structure of both lines in Genesis 3.16a.

Conclusion

Having looked at the semantic ranges for the most important terms in the phrase and noting how they work together, the next step is to look at various exegetical questions. How does our text fit into the larger picture of the surrounding section of Genesis? How should it be understood in light of the purpose for the writing? These and other questions will be addressed in the next chapter.

---

[124] Walton, *Genesis*, 227.

Chapter 3

The Exegetical Questions

Having wrestled with the various terms and having determined the best way to understand them, I now move forward to look at the immediate context and other questions concerning purpose. After answering these questions, I will provide my own translation and commentary on this text.

Form and Structure

Genesis 1-11 as a Unit

Genesis 3 sits in the larger recognized section of Genesis 1-11 which describes Israel's primeval history. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, liberal scholarship converged on the Pentateuch attempting to discern how it was pieced together from various sources. As Wenham observes, "For the best part of a century following the publication of J. Wellhausen's works *Die Komposition des Hexateuchs* … and *Prolegomena zur Geschichte Israels*…, there has been a widespread critical consensus about the composition of the Pentateuch."[1] It continued to the point that "in the latter half of the nineteenth century the Pentateuch was so rigorously dissected that it was not uncommon to find a single verse parceled out between two or even three sources, since each of these was held to have its own vocabulary, character and theology."[2] This was the

---

[1] Wenham, xxvi.

[2] Kidner, 18.

predominant view which was generally assumed through the twentieth century. However, there has been a recent trend to spurn the documentary hypothesis as some, like Garrett, suggest that, "beyond being a dubious enterprise, source criticism of this kind is of doubtful heuristic value."[3] Though not necessarily rejecting the documentary hypothesis, Ibrahim admits,

> "It is moving to the period which scholars are going to look at some of the so-called 'diversity' by some conservative, Liberal and even evangelical scholars who are now against the Mosaic authorship, to see the entire Pentateuch as a literary unity of the whole Book. Scholars are admitting that the books use common words, phrases and motifs, parallel narrative structures, and deliberate theological arrangement of literary units for teaching and memorization support viewing the five books as a literary whole."[4]

As Ibrahim sees it, scholarship is moving away from focusing on the documentary hypothesis to seeing the writings as received as a complete package. Sailhamer includes Genesis 3.14-19 as part of a structured series of poems in Genesis-Deuteronomy which show that "the original shape of the Pentateuch has been remarkably stable." He goes on to say, "Either [the Pentateuch's] present form is its original shape and there has been little structural development, or its original shape has been preserved despite its many stages of development" which would be unlikely as "redevelopment over a long period surely would have eroded much of the clear structures now noticeable in the Pentateuch's

---

[3] Duane A. Garrett, *A Commentary on Exodus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2014), 18.

[4] Philemon Ibrahim, "Pentateuchal Authorship: A Critical Analysis of Existing Imaginations," *Journal of Biblical Theology* 3, no. 2 (April-June 2020): 193. In this article, Ibrahim only seems to be presenting the current state of affairs without attempting to persuade to any point of view, though he does state that he does not believe that "documentary hypothesis in many respects is outdated and needless for the scholarship" (Ibid.).

present shape."[5] This will be obvious as we look at the ways in which Genesis 3 fits into a larger narrative. As opposed to dissecting the passage and attempting to divide out the various original sources, I will focus on the ways in which the passage is clearly united together. Though there is much that can be discussed concerning Genesis 1-11 as a single package, my focus will remain on Genesis 1-4 and the immediate context of the Genesis 3 pericope. Even then, it is not my purpose to provide an in-depth discussion but to simply highlight the nature of the connectivity of the passage.

Genesis 1-4 as a Unit

Collins provides a series of reasons to see the first four chapters of Genesis as a complete unit.[6] As Collins sees it, Genesis 3 sits in a literary unit that ends with chapter 4 as the "זת ספר תולדות" marker in Genesis 5.1 marks a new section. Following DeRouchie's line of thought, that "linguistic analysis suggests the *toledot* are best read as titles rather than colophons,"[7] Collins sees that Genesis 5.1 "starts a new section of the book." As well, Collins notes a number of linguistic connections within these chapters. He then notes there are also "literary features that connect Genesis 4 with Genesis 1-3." This provides a legitimate reason to see that these chapters should be considered a single

---

[5] John H. Sailhamer, *The Meaning of the Pentateuch: Revelation, Composition and Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 278.

[6] C. John Collins, *Genesis 1-4,* 189-191. The fact that Collins's entire monograph focuses on Genesis 1-4 as a section demonstrates the confidence he has in these chapters as an intended literary section. In these pages, assuming that Genesis 1-3 is commonly understood as a section, he is defending his decision to include chapter 4 in his book.

[7] Jason S. DeRouchie, "The Blessing-Commission, the Promised Offspring, and the Toledot Structure of Genesis," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 56, no. 2 (June 2013): 224. DeRouchie notes that the תולדות were typically viewed as "subscriptions for what precedes" but that in more recent scholarship they are typically viewed as "superscriptions for what follows" (222).

unit. Hamilton agrees, confidently stating, "obviously there is no break between chapters 3 and 4 of Genesis. The narrative is to be read as a continuous whole."[8] Because of this, whatever is happening in Genesis 3 is part of what is happening in the larger whole. Thus, Genesis 3 is part of "the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created" (Genesis 2.4) which extends through chapter 4 at which it, as Matthews notes, "concludes on the high note of another evidence of God's grace toward Adam and Eve. Seth, Adam's third son, replaces the murdered Abel and heads a new lineage that is remembered as the benchmark for 'when men began to call on the name of the LORD' (4:25-26)."[9]

Though knowing that Genesis 3 sits in a section that focuses on man from creation through the first post-fall narrative, what place does our section specifically play in this narrative? Many have suggested that Genesis 3.14-19 comprise what should be seen as a judicial setting.

The First Trial

After the first man and woman eat from the prohibited tree, the LORD appeared in the garden. Though translations are nearly unanimous in rendering the theophany as something like "when they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day…," some, such as Niehaus, believe this ubiquitous translation may not be an accurate portrayal of what was actually happening. Niehaus suggests that a better rendering is that they "heard the thunder (*qwl*) of Yahweh God as he was going back and

---

[8] Victor P. Hamilton, *Handbook on the Pentateuch* (Grand Rapids, MI: 1982), 58.

[9] Matthews, 259.

forth (*mthlk*) in the garden in the wind of the storm (*lrwh hywm*)."[10] Concerning this drastically different understanding of Genesis 3.8, Stuart states that it "has attracted approving attention in the scholarly literature and has been adopted already by some commentators."[11] If Niehaus's view is accurate, this theophany is one of God coming in judgment in the storm. From his entrance, YHWH has come as a judge. As Westermann suggests, "It is clear what the whole is about: it is a story of the breaking of a law and punishment," or, as he also puts it, "The paradise story then is a primeval narrative of crime and punishment."[12] Fretheim imagines the scene where "God acts as judge, calling each of the participants before the bench (in order of vv. 1-6) and pronouncing sentence on each in typical courtroom speech (which immediately takes effect)." He then goes on to suggest, "the sentences pertain to their primary roles in life (in culture), roles of stature among the animals, roles of wife and mother, roles of tiller of soil and provider of food."[13]

In the midst of the trial discussion, Levine shows how "the narrative at the beginning of Genesis can be read in contrast and counterpoint to larger intertextual

---

[10] Jeffrey Niehaus, "In the Wind of the Storm: Another Look at Genesis III 8," *Vetus Testamentum* 44, no. 2 (April 1994): 265.

[11] Douglas Stuart, "'The Cool of the Day' (Gen 3:8) and 'The Way He Should Go' (Prov 22:6)," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 171, no. 683 (Jul - Sep 2014): 259. Stuart's point concerning Niehaus's view is to lament that, though a proper translation, no popular translation would actually use it for fear of upsetting a populous that is too used to what is probably an incorrect translation. Even so, I have no qualms in suggesting that it is the proper translation of the passage describing God coming in judgment.

[12] Westermann, 193.

[13] Terrence Fretheim, "Genesis," in *New Interpreter's Bible Vol. 1*, ed. Leander E. Keck (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1994), 362.

patterns, specifically the blessing of Moses to Israel at the end of Deuteronomy."[14] This connection is intriguing as the contexts are similar with the use of blessings and curses proclaimed to God's covenant people. Provan agrees with this assessment as he sees that an etiological purpose for this passage was to present all of God's people with a choice to either obey which results in blessing, or to disobey which results in cursing.[15]

As God stands in the place of the judge, this creates another question that must be answered: Are these judgments meant to be understood as descriptive or prescriptive judgments? Kvam *et al.* phrase it this way, "was God predicting the destructive behaviors set in motion by human sin, or was God prescribing punishment for sin?" As written, with the first-person imperfects, it sounds as if God is placing prescriptive punishments. Cullinan describes how many have dogmatically thought of the judgment on the woman, that "Scripture was absolutely clear on this point: the pains of childbirth are punishment for sin, period."[16] Even so, the predominant view within scholarship is that these are descriptive statements "describing the new circumstances of life on earth for the serpent, woman, and the man,"[17] according to Arnold. As Vawter described it, this speaks of the judgment on the woman which is done "not precisely with a curse, but with what he

---

[14] Nachman Levine, "The Curse and the Blessing: Narrative Discourse Syntax and Literary Form," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 27, no. 2 (2002): 189. Rather than focus on conceptual similarities, Levine focuses heavily on syntactical similarities. Even so, the conceptual similarities also tie the two narratives together.

[15] Provan, *Discovering*, 93.

[16] Cullinan, 98. Cullinan wants to create a different picture of the pain of parturition which is not tied to punishment, but instead, "the image of a woman in labor, struggling to give birth to a child, can be placed alongside the image of Jesus on the cross, suffering to give birth to graced, divinized humanity" (103-104). This is an intriguing picture, but as it does not specifically connect with my accepted semantic ranges, it is not a view I intend to interact with.

[17] Bill T. Arnold, *Genesis* (New Cambridge Bible Commentary. Cambridge, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 70.

considered to be the dire consequences of her transgression that now would affect her in her natural role of mother and wife."[18]

Not everyone sees Genesis 3 as a narrative of overbearing judgment. Brueggemann begins his treatment of this passage showing that even though "The text is commonly treated as the account of '*the fall*,'" in reality, "Nothing could be more remote from the narrative itself."[19] This is not meant to suggest that there is no punitive action in place, but Brueggemann suggests that "Perhaps the sentence of 3:8-19 is heavy. But it is less than promised, less than legitimate. The miracle is not that they are punished, but that they live. Graciousness in this narrative is not just in verse 21, after the sentence. God's grace is given in the very sentence itself….. [The sentence] is nonetheless life when death is clearly indicated…. When the facts warrant death, God insists on life for his creatures."[20] Even so, Brueggemann still follows the same conclusion that these are descriptive judgments, even if he does invite us to see a greater grace.

I agree with the consensus that the only way these judgments make sense is if God, as judge, is not stating what he will change about the man, the woman, and the world to make life worse; but, as with the blessings and the curses for Israel, he is describing the new reality that sin brings with it. Even so, caution is warranted concerning a writing intended for an ancient audience. As Hamilton points out, "Perhaps this question [of descriptive or prescriptive consequences] is inappropriate, for it may

---

[18] Vawter, 84.

[19] Brueggemann, 41.

[20] Ibid., 49.

assume ways of thinking that are alien to the ancient Hebrew mind. That is, it is difficult to conceive of an ancient Israelite who did not attribute all phenomena in life to God."[21]

The Etiological Purpose

Speaking of Israel's primeval history, Bill Moyer asks this question: "These words are so familiar to us, they are almost cliché. What do you think they must have sounded like to the first people who heard them?"[22] This is, ultimately, the first question that exegesis must ask before the second important question, "What do [the stories] mean for us, now, in our lives…. How do they help us make sense of the world today?"[23] As Collins astutely states, "the goal of biblical interpretation is to learn how to cooperate with the author's intent."[24] So I begin with the question: What was the intended purpose of Genesis 3.16a for the original audience?

To answer this, we must first determine the original audience. Though there are different audiences that are hesitantly suggested by various commentators, Meyers stands out as one who more confidently asserts a specific original audience for this primeval narrative. For Meyers, the narrative served two purposes for the original audience when she says, "Broadly speaking, Genesis 2-3 belongs simultaneously to two genres of folk

---

[21] Hamilton, *Genesis*, 201. I would suggest that though I agree with a descriptive view of the judgments, whether descriptive or prescriptive, my overall proposal remains unaffected. A prescriptive view does not necessitate that God specifically causes each instance of grief, though at times he might, but that he has introduced grief into the world.

[22] Bill Moyers, *Genesis: A Living Conversation* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1996), 5.

[23] Ibid., xiv.

[24] C. John Collins, *Reading Genesis*, 84.

literature: ‘creation myths’ and ‘etiologies.’”[25] For this reason, Meyers sees that the original context is important to understanding the meaning of the woman in Genesis 3 and her understanding of the text is specifically shaped by that context. As Meyers concludes:

> The societal conditions—the context—which best suit the thrust of the poetic oracles to the female and male in Genesis 3:16-19 seem to be those of the Israelite highlanders in the earliest period of their corporate existence and of their self-consciousness as Yahweh’s people. That was the period which called for an outpouring of labor and a growth of population that would have exceeded preceding or succeeding eras. The early Iron Age stands out as the period in which the historical and environmental features provide the most suitable background for the blunt imperatives concerning the use of human energy in these oracles. The survival of a nation of pioneer farmers called for extraordinary efforts during this period of settlement. Never again would the need for so powerful a mandate for increased toil and family size be so accurate.[26]

Understanding how difficult the early Iron Age was for Israel who were creating their own “self-consciousness as Yahweh’s people,” Meyers sets the context of the judgments in Genesis 3 in this scenario which informs that life is going to be difficult in these arenas which matter so much to them in their stage in history. This is why, as earlier noted, she understands עצבון as referring to toil and hard work. As Meyers puts it, “On the one hand, the passage sets forth the woman’s enlarged role in the productive, agrarian tasks of society; on the other, it mandates an increased procreative role.”[27] Arnold provides a similar, though less specific, contextual setting. For Arnold, “The memory of Israel’s

---

[25] Meyers, 79. Meyers clarifies that “The use of the word ‘myth’ does not mean either that these two chapters of Genesis are false or that they are recounting some quaint and antiquated story. Rather, ‘creation myth’ suggests that Genesis 2-3 is a tale dealing with origins; as such it is a tale meant to help human beings come to grips with the nature and meaning of their own existence.”

[26] Ibid., 120.

[27] Ibid., 105.

ancestry in ancient Mesopotamia provides the backdrop for the harsh realities of life in the Levant, where husbands and wives had children and raised their families while working the rocky ground for meager subsistence,"[28] which falls close to Meyers's assumptions.

As much as I appreciate Meyers's devotion to determining an original context and viewing the passage in light of that context, many of the same critiques mentioned before apply here as well. Her entire argument rests on an assumption concerning who the original audience is. As Collins notes, "Meyers's interpretation seems unduly dependent on her hypothesis that the story reflects life in the highland settlements."[29] This fact is exacerbated by Novick's observation that "there is no indication in the verse itself, or in the story more generally, that Eve has a role to play in the field."[30] Meyers accepts her assumptions concerning a woman's role in the early Iron Age highland settlements as given and conducts eisegesis instead of exegesis. Though Meyers helpfully provides principles for exegetical exploration, her specific assumptions concerning the historical context are not properly substantiated.

Perhaps a lesson to be learned from Meyers is the danger in creating a very specific point in time and confidently asserting the writing to that date. For this primeval history, the actual first audience, or what Collins calls the "real or empirical first

---

[28] Arnold, *Genesis,* 71.

[29] John J. Collins, 93n102.

[30] Novick, 240.

audience" may not be as important as what Collins calls the "implied audience."[31] Collins suggests the implied audience is "the Israelites who crossed the Jordan River under Joshua's leadership" with the assumption that "each subsequent audience should imagine themselves as the heirs of this first one."[32] Given this implied audience, what is the purpose of this text so early in Israel's history?

Arnold walks through what he sees as the etiological theme of the first few chapters of Genesis. He briefly begins with what phenomenal questions are answered in creation, such things as "why day turns to night, and night to day, in a seemingly ceaseless cycle of common human experience, how the dome fixed above prevents catastrophic flooding, why the earth sprouts vegetations," etc. When he comes to our pericope, he states, "The Great Transgression of Genesis 3, of course, culminates in important etiologies as well: serpentine locomotion, human hatred of snakes, pain in childbirth, and the inextricability of life and work."[33] Without focusing on the specific conclusions which Arnold draws, his view of etiology for Genesis 1-11 is helpful. This is generally what the author is accomplishing in these early texts.

With this view of etiology in mind, Meyers is instructive when she suggests a distinction between what she calls "archetypes" and "prototypes." Meyers states that archetypes are presented to show how something in one moment should be a universal truth in all moments. In contrast, prototypes "are formative events that happen in time

---

[31] C. John Collins, *Reading Genesis*, 124. The "real or empirical first audience" is exactly that, the first real audience who received the words of this text. The "implied audience" is "those whom the reader is to imagine reading the story."

[32] Ibid., 126.

[33] Bill T. Arnold, "Genesis and the Challenges of a 21st-Century Reading," *Pro Ecclesia* 29, no. 4 (November 2020): 396-397.

and influence subsequent generations."[34] The archetypical characteristics of the first man and woman "are features thought by the ancient author to be shared by all: our differentiation from God on the one hand and from plant and animal life on the other."[35] Finding this distinction is helpful in seeing how the תולדות for the heavens and the earth encompasses an archetypical etiology. Many aspects of the first few chapters are meant to provide an archetypical view of life.

However, Meyers and I diverge when she suggests that "the problem for the biblical creation stories is that they contain archetypes but are cast as prototypes by virtue of their place at the fore of what is the first great historical tradition ever recorded."[36] She disconnects sin as a primary part of the Genesis 2-3 narrative suggesting "the etiological flavor of the story calls into question the traditional interpretation that focuses on the supposed cause-and-effect relationship between the 'sin' and the punishment."[37] By seeing the entirety of the Genesis 2-3 narrative as archetypical and not prototypical, this narrative loses its notoriety as a "fall narrative" and becomes what she calls "a wisdom tale" which is there to "help the audience to which it was directed accept an aspect of reality that could not effectively be conveyed by more direct means."[38]

Meyers is by no means the only one to reject the idea of a "fall narrative." Against the claim that this is a fall narrative, Brueggemann confidently asserts, "Nothing could be

---

[34] Meyers, 80.

[35] Ibid., 81.

[36] Ibid., 80.

[37] Ibid., 88.

[38] Ibid., 93.

more remote from the narrative itself," suggesting that "the Old Testament is never interested" in "how evil came into the world."[39] For Brueggemann, this text could possibly be seen as an archetypical text, but certainly not the prototypical text it has come to be. In fact, he points out that it has such little place in the Old Testament imaginative mind that "this is an exceedingly marginal text" and "No clear subsequent reference to it is made in the Old Testament."[40]

Provan joins those who do not see Genesis 3 serving a prototypical role in Israelite history. Provan notes that "the remainder of the OT does not view the events of Genesis 3 as *cataclysmic* events that somehow inevitably change everything about the world in which we live."[41] He does allow that the OT understands facets of this story, things like chaos, darkness, and sin, show that man can choose to go into sin. But he suggests that "the OT does not regard it as inevitable that we must live in the world of Genesis 3, and indeed it urges us *not* to do so, but in turning to God to know a different world."[42]

Though Meyers *et al.* provide points to ponder, they remain unconvincing. From Genesis 4 onward, the world is a drastically different place from Genesis 2. In Genesis 1.31, God saw his creation and said, "it was very good," which is the basis upon which the Genesis 2 תולדות for "the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 2.4) is introduced. Seth's

---

[39] Brueggemann, 41.

[40] Ibid. Though he does allow that, perhaps, Ezekiel 28 references Genesis 3. Rejecting the notion of a fall is common among various resources I consulted. However, it is not a universal given. Collins provides pushback to this commonly held view which is worthy of consideration. See C. John Collins, *Adam and Eve*, 66-72.

[41] Provan, *Discovering Genesis*, 94.

[42] Ibid.

תולדות begins not with that which is טוב, but with a genealogy characterized by the phrase, "וימות." At the end of Seth's תולדות in Genesis 6.5, God saw "the wickedness of man" was multiplied in the earth. Something drastically changed between Genesis 2 and Genesis 5 which means that the pericopes between each תולדות must carry a prototypical etiology explaining the difference. As Collins puts it, "we can see easily enough, without explicitly telling, that this was some kind of 'fall.'…. No biblical author calls the event a 'fall,' but that is a good descriptor."[43] Elsewhere Collins calls us to view the implied audience and note that "the average Israelite's experience is probably more like Genesis 4 than it is like Genesis 1 or 2. This cries out for an explanation."[44] The explanation, of course, comes from Genesis 3 which serves etiologically to answer these questions concerning the difference between life in Genesis 2 and life in Genesis 5.

The implied audience, those who enter the land of promise under Joshua, must have seen that life was difficult and drastically different from what the first man and woman experienced in the Garden. Even so, the etiological effect of Genesis 3 has not diminished. While noting that there is division among those who attempt to date the writing of Israel's primeval history, Kvam *et al.* conclude that "In the more than two thousand years since its writing, however, Genesis 1-5 has had a profound effect on its readers."[45] As well, Collins points out that "the descendants of Adam and Eve, who did not disobey as they did, nevertheless find themselves forbidden to reenter the garden…. Genesis does in fact indicate that all humankind suffer from the painful toil introduced in

---

[43] C. John Collins, *Reading Genesis*, 177.

[44] C. John Collins, *Adam and Eve*, 55.

[45] Kvam *et al*, 20.

the curses for the first couple's transgression."[46] On this point, it becomes clear that our passage serves not simply to enlighten the implied audience of Joshua's day, but the same message applies even to our own time. Until such a time as the current existence of God's people and God's creation matches the harmony and complete fellowship demonstrated in Genesis 2, Genesis 3 will continue to serve an etiological purpose. As Walsh posits, "The Eden account is an etiology of the human condition."[47] Thus, whatever effects come from Genesis 3.16a, [48] they should still be as applicable now as they were to the implied

---

[46] C. John Collins, *Reading Genesis*, 229.

[47] Jerome T. Walsh, "Genesis 2:4b-3:24: A Synchronic Approach," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 96, no. 2 (June 1977): 173.

[48] One of the effects left unexplored in this paper is the proposal submitted by Cozens and Ochs that the key issue in Genesis 3 is not, necessarily, the introduction of sin, but the introduction of shame. Noting that the word "sin" is not used until chapter 4 and the word "guilt" is not used until much later in Genesis, it is odd that these are the words most often associated with the Eden narrative. For Cozens and Ochs, they note that "at the seam between the second creation account and the so-called fall narrative in Gen. 3, a new concept is explicitly introduced and weaved into the tapestry: *shame* (2:25)….the fall account is bracketed with an *inclusio* which explicitly mentions shame (2:25) and links it to one of its manifestations, bodily exposure (3:21)." They then go on to show how "the narrative repeatedly evokes common shame reactions by referring to feelings of nakedness and exposure…fear and the desire to hide…self-reflexive awareness and self-perception…scapegoating behavior…and annihilation. The reader is given the full phenomenological depiction of the shame experience." (189). This focus is intriguing and has merit. It provides an etiological framework which explains a change in humanity which comes with having eyes opened to observing something after eating the fruit that was previously unobservable, notably, that they "were naked." They conclude that "the feeling of shame is the first response and marker of our 'fallen,' altered anthropology, and therefore shame should be considered as primary to the exegesis of this passage" (192). For the full treatment, see Simon Cozens and Christoph Ochs. "'Have You No Shame?' An Overlooked Theological Category as Interpretive Key in Genesis 3," *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 13, no. 2 (2019): 186-199.

Though I find the proposal convincing and helpful as it relates to the place of shame and the reactions of the first man and woman, the treatment of the entire text is inadequate. If the story truly portrays "the concepts of *shame* and *fear* as interpretive framework" (188), how does that framework make sense of what is typically called the "curses" of 3.14-19, which include my text under consideration? These judgment texts are the texts which specifically focus on the concept of change that occurs from chapter 2 to chapter 5 and they do not seem to be spoken of in a "shame" framework. Unfortunately, Cozens and Ochs do not address these verses, which I find odd. Had they addressed the judgment section and provided plausible insight as to how shame is the exegetical framework in which to see them, I might be inclined to follow their lead. As it is, the exegetical framework of "shame" in Genesis 3 remains an important aspect of exegesis, but it does not explain all that Cozens and Ochs seem to suggest, which is why it remains unexplored in my paper.

audience. As Longman puts it, “the story of Adam and Eve is not just a story about Adam and Eve…but rather tells us what we would have done in their situation.”[49]

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have attempted to answer the most important exegetical questions surrounding Genesis 3.16a. I find that this passage is set within a specific context which is part of the תולדות for the “heavens and the earth” begun in Genesis 2.4 and running through ch. 4. Because of this, when we look to the first trial and see a loving and compassionate judge who is not administering punitive justice as much as he is describing to his creation how things have now changed for them, including the עצבון which will be experienced in הרון, we know that this pericope is serving an etiological purpose not only for the implied first audience of those who entered the land under Joshua, but for all subsequent readers as well.

[49] Longman, 72.

Chapter 4

My Translation and Commentary

Translation

Having worked through the semantic ranges of the key terms in the passage, having looked at how these terms are supposed to work together, and having answered the important exegetical questions, I now propose my own translation and commentary on the text in question: Genesis 3.16a.

אל־האשה אמר הרבה ארבה עצבונך והרנך

To the woman he said, "I will make exceedingly great your grief from conception,

בעצב תלדי בנים

With grief you will have children."

Commentary

The Terms

The first woman faces a new reality when it comes to conceiving children. She will now experience grief. This grief comes not as a result of physical pain in the childbearing process, but as a result of bringing a child into a drastically different world, "a world that is ruled by sinful human beings and which is the means by which those humans find toil and frustration."[1] This grief would result from bringing a child into a world where Adam and Eve's sin "so corrupted the divine-human, human-human, and

[1] C. John Collins, *Genesis 1-4*, 166.

human-creation relationships that we are born into a warped and distorted world."[2] More than the physical pain of bearing children is the emotional pain surrounding the concept of bearing children.

The Literary Devices

I accept that in the first line, עצבון and הרן are tied together as a hendiadys. The etiological purpose is to show that women will emotionally suffer with everything concerning conception. As well, this connection is further bolstered by the second parallel line which Collins calls "the explanatory clause" where "the clause restates the punishment."[3] As the explanatory clause doubles the use of עצב and provides another word loosely associated with conception, it makes sense to understand this curse as being more than just the moment of conception, but, as Walton calls it, a "merism…referring to the anxiety that a woman will experience through the whole process from conception to birth."[4] This means, as Chisholm and Ross both suggest, that the הרנך in the first line is used as a synecdoche referring to everything associated with a conception, which includes not only the gestation period and birth, but raising the children as well.[5] Every aspect of parenthood from beginning to end is now different from what it would have been in Genesis 2. It is not that anatomy has changed or that there is a physical pain

---

[2] Longman, 72.

[3] C. John Collins, *Genesis 1-4*, 153n18.

[4] Walton, 227.

[5] Chisholm, study note on Genesis 3:16 in NET Bible. Ross, 146.

involved unknown before, but now there is an emotional grief and suffering that would have hitherto been unknown.

The Reality of My Translation and Commentary

Grief and Sorrow

By this, I do not mean that every aspect of every birth that every woman undergoes will be fraught with emotional grief. It means that now there is the potential for grief and sorrow in every aspect of childbearing, from conception to adulthood. Further, this grief and sorrow will be ubiquitous. As Longman allows, "giving birth to and raising children is often accompanied by both physical and emotional pain."[6] Here are some ways in which a mother could experience grief due to her children.

Grief and Sorrow in Conception

On this side of God's judgment pronounced to the woman, there is grief associated with conception. For some, that pain comes with the inability to conceive. As Warner, herself childless, describes it, "There seems to be something primal about the drive to procreate, and it gives rise to a desire in women, in particular, that can be the cause of great pain when conception proves elusive."[7] Anecdotally, I have seen the pain

---

[6] Longman, 73. To be fair, Longman's point with this quotation is not, as I have used it, to state this as a truth. Instead, Longman uses it as a given in the full quotation, "while giving birth to and raising children is often accompanied by both physical and emotional pain, they are also a source of great joy (Ps 127:3-5)." Though I do not believe I was misrepresenting his quotation and I accurately conveyed what he was stating about how pain is involved in both "giving birth" and in "raising children," I thought it was important to provide the full point he was making which was lost with my usage.

[7] Meg Warner, "'Sing, O Barren One Who Did Not Bear': Childlessness, Blessing and Vocation in the Old Testament," *Modern Believing* 60, no. 2 (2019): 112. Though Warner never conceived, she readily admits that her greatest desire had more to do with finding a spouse than bearing children, and that she felt

and grief felt by women I have known who have been unable to bear children, a pain which, at times, caused me to feel guilt as my wife would conceive time and again.

For some, the grief in conception comes from fulfilling the duty to conceive. Contrary to what some, such as Ross, assume, namely that "there is no pain in conception,"[8] the act of sex itself is an arena which can be fraught with emotional grief and sorrow. Though there are many for whom coitus may be a fulfilling and joyful action, there are also many for whom it brings emotional suffering. In this fallen world, a man forcing himself onto a woman and raping her is a reality. Close to this are women who were put through sexual abuse who carry heavy emotional scars. Even in marriages, there is no guarantee of sexual happiness and emotional fulfilment with one who is loved. Through the years arranged marriages have been normal in many societies, putting together two individuals who may not have any kind of intimate connection. In these cases, as well as many others even in some Christian circles, women are taught that the sexual act is "construed as fulfilling a duty, rather than partaking in pleasure."[9]

Grief and Sorrow in Gestation

Assuming the merism described by Walton, this emotional suffering would also include emotional suffering in the gestation period. Opposite those unable to conceive,

---

"blessed not to experience the drive to procreate as strongly as some of [her] friends have done." This article speaks of finding purpose even if the purpose of procreation is unavailable. Her conclusion: "even if my childlessness is sadness, or a grief, to me, I may nevertheless know myself to be blessed, and richly, by the God who calls me to serve the world in a multitude of ways, and to sing a special song, written just for me" (121).

[8] Ross, 146. This is the basis upon which Ross assumes that "conception" must be a synecdoche. He assumes that no "pain" can exist in the act of conception, so the word "conception" must represent something else which is painful. This is a painfully unempathetic view of "conception" towards many women.

[9] Curley and Peterson, 167.

this could include women who have no desire to conceive. The earliest record of abortions dates back to before the Exodus from Egypt.[10] Through the millennia, wherever there have been women becoming pregnant, there have been women attempting to end pregnancies. Closely related, there have been many who, desiring children, have lost the child due to a miscarriage. Not only is there the "loss that can feel both utterly devastating and enormously complex," but as well, "most include an element of horror."[11] Even in less extreme cases, perhaps in cases which will remain completely normal, Walton suggests there is still plenty of anxiety the hopeful mother faces: "anxiety about whether she will be able to conceive the child, anxiety that comes with all the physical discomfort of pregnancy, anxiety concerning the health of the child in the womb, and anxiety about whether she and the baby will survive the birth process…anxiety defines the birth process."[12]

Grief and Sorrow in Parturition

For those who come to term with their children, births do not always commence as planned. There are those who deal with the emotional suffering giving birth to a still-born child. Death in labor, whether of the child or the mother, has historically been a danger and is still a relatively common experience around the world, though these numbers have decreased with advances in technology. Even those who survive near-death

---

[10] Malcolm Potts and Martha Campbell, "History of Contraception," Global Library of Women's Medicine, accessed April 12, 2022, https://www.glowm.com/section-view/heading/History%20of%20Contraception/item/375#.YlR-79PMKUk.

[11] Mindy Newman, "Healing from Miscarriage," Summer 2020, Tricycle, accessed August 27, 2021, https://tricycle.org/magazine/healing-from-miscarriage/.

[12] Walton, 227.

experiences, whether for themselves or for the baby, carry emotional scars through the rest of their lives. In fact, "one study from 2003 found that around a third of mothers who experience a 'traumatic delivery,' defined as involving complications, the use of instruments to assist delivery or near death, go on to develop PTSD."[13]

Grief and Sorrow in Raising Children

Even after the completion of parturition, a mother's emotional sorrow from her children does not conclude.

There are mothers who give birth to children with disabilities which dramatically affect their lives. These disabilities can range from developmental disabilities, such as down syndrome or Smith-Magenis syndrome to physical disabilities such as spina bifida or other bodily deformities. For these mothers, grief is a life-changing reality as they are continually confronted by how different life now is, with no hope of change. After hosting a discussion for mothers of children with such disabilities, Brown notes that "The mothers' words reveal recurrent grief as an adaptive, dynamic and circular process throughout each stage of the child's life. This process is found to encompass a gradual letting go of the double dreams, and the constructing of a new reality for the child and themselves around the disability."[14] This grief changes the life of the mother and does not end.

---

[13] Sarah Griffiths, "The Effect of Childbirth No-One Talks About," April 24, 2019, BBC, accessed August 27, 2021, https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20190424-the-hidden-trauma-of-childbirth.

[14] Judith M. Brown, "Recurring Grief in Mothering a Child with an Intellectual Disability to Adulthood: Grieving Is the Healing," *Child & Family Social Work* 21, no. 1 (February 2016): 119. Having a niece with Smith-Magenis Syndrome (SMS), I have firsthand seen the grief of the parents, particularly the mother, as they have re-shaped their lives around this reality. It is hard to properly express how deeply this grief is felt, a grief from which there is no relief.

As Crislip suggests, looking at Hesiod's *Works and Days* as a point of reference, "The raising of children will bring nothing but emotional pain, as men see that their children do not look like them (their wives habitually unfaithful), and will grow to disrespect them and neglect them in their old age."[15] This is not simply fiction, these kinds of things are a reality for many who raised children only to find themselves neglected by those children. Hood, while attempting to connect Genesis 3.16 with the Fifth Commandment of the Decalogue supposes, "Perhaps the rebelliousness of children makes the mother's task painful, and so the fifth Word is about a reversal of the curse, calling for the obedience of the children."[16] Boice, as well, contemplates this eventuality when he writes, "Is it not rather that the pain associated with children's births will continue in other ways throughout the mother's (and father's) life as these who are now born in sin dishonor their parents and experience in their own lives the consequences of their own disobedience?"[17] Ultimately, there is a greater grief felt by many mothers, which is "the circumstance into which children are born and then raised, and in which they die."[18] Later, Provan reinforces this as he states, "[A woman] conceives in painful circumstances just as she gives birth in painful circumstances, including economic circumstances, and no doubt raises children and watches some of them die in those same

---

[15] Crislip, 108.

[16] Jared C. Hood, "The Decalogue of Genesis 1-3," *The Reformed Theological Review* 75, no. 1 (April 2016): 51. Hood continues his thought and suggests that because ילד "is overwhelmingly connected with childbearing, not 'bringing up' children…the verse does not connect with the fifth word." However, given my proposal concerning ילד in Genesis 3.16a, it would naturally fit in his thesis.

[17] Boice, 178.

[18] Provan, *Pain*, 290.

circumstances."[19] Much of Provan's focus is on the socio-economic situations into which children are born, in which they grow and suffer and experience grief, into which they bring their own children. For Provan, the great suffering is the lament of a parent who knows that life will be as difficult for her child as it was for her. Even so, even if inadvertently, Provan touches on the greatest source of grief for a mother: the death of her child. There are few scenarios in life which cause a greater grief than a mother who outlives her baby. Singer-songwriter, Lin-Manuel Miranda, catches this grief with Alexander and Eliza Hamilton after the death of their son in *Hamilton*:

There are moments that the words don't reach.
There is suffering too terrible to name.
You hold your child as tight as you can,
And push away the unimaginable.
The moments when you're in so deep,
It feels easier to just swim down.
The Hamiltons move uptown,
And learn to live with the unimaginable.[20]

As I write this, I know that tomorrow I will attend a funeral service to comfort an aged mother who lost her middle-aged son and who is feeling this grief. She is not alone in her grief. In a short survey I conducted with a limited number of women who faced emotional grief of various kinds surrounding their children, I found without fail the greater pain was not that which was experienced during labor (for those who had experienced childbirth), but the emotional grief surrounding other issues like barrenness, miscarriages, children born with birth defects, deaths of children, and parents whose children rejected them. One such mother wrote concerning her grief, "I cry every week, it

---

[19] Ibid., 293.

[20] Lin Manuel Miranda, "It's Quiet Uptown," in *Hamilton: An American Musical* (Atlantic Records, 2015), MP3.

is an unspeakable loss and grief." More than one mother spoke of putting "grief" in a "pocket" yet never being able to get over it. The emotional grief from conception far outstrips any physical pain in parturition. One question asked if the mother had ever connected Genesis 3.16a to emotional grief and here is the answer of one mother who describes the condition perfectly:

> Bearing and raising children has left me scarred and bruised in the flesh and heart. I used to think the pain was contained in the labor pains, but that is a small part. The curse of sin permeates motherhood. Physical pain is the minor penalty. The trauma of losing and even raising children is real. It is hard. It requires the sacrifices of pieces of yourself you never knew were there. My heart has been torn. The curse is real.

Conclusion

I was with my wife through six childbirths. I would never attempt to minimize the physical pain she endured, particularly as she received no pain medication. I am fully aware that the pain was intense and with every child I could see the pain on her face. Even so, that pain could have been mitigated. As Skowronski concludes concerning physical pain associated with childbirth, "the medical profession has been developing techniques that provide excellent pain control, little interference with motor function or awareness, with few adverse effects and an excellent safety record….Mothers and children will be the ultimate winners." Moving into the future, the physical pain of childbirth will become less of a problem.[21] What will never change is the emotional

---

[21] G.A. Skowronski, "Pain Relief in Childbirth: Changing Historical and Feminist Perspectives," *Anesthesia and Intensive Care* 43, no. 1 (Suppl, 2015): 28. This article touches on a tangential issue concerning the notion that Genesis 3.16a refers to physical pain. If the punishment for the woman was pain in childbearing, some question whether it is right for a woman to seek pain medication to circumvent her God-given burden. Walton notes, "I have even heard stories of those who refuse anesthetics because they feel obligated to accept willingly the punishment God has imposed" (238). Whereas there may be many valuable reasons to reject drugs during childbirth, I would suggest that guilt concerning Eve's punishment should not be one of them.

suffering that accompanies raising children in a world in which sin reigns. The amount of emotional grief has become very great indeed, especially for mothers.

In this chapter I have provided my own translation and the commentary to further explain and support my thesis. In the next chapter, I will demonstrate how "grief" is much better conceptually for Genesis 3.16a by going through the rest of Genesis, beginning with Genesis 4, and showing some of the places where grief is the best explanation for the problems associated with conception, childbirth and childrearing.

Chapter 5

Increased Sorrows from Conception in Genesis

As I hope to demonstrate, one of the greatest issues with the typical rendering of "pain in childbirth" is that it does not actually have any bearing on the rest of Scripture, particularly in the immediate context of Genesis. In contrast, understanding that Genesis 3.16a refers to "griefs" associated with every aspect of childbearing and childrearing will be evident throughout the Genesis narrative.[1]

Genesis 4

The Birth of Cain and Abel

As has already been noted, Genesis 4 is a continuation of Genesis 3. Thus, when the first man and woman enter life outside of the Garden, one would anticipate that the judgments placed on the man and the woman would affect them in their new lives. Immediately, the first opportunity for such a moment occurs. The author does not waste any more time before introducing the first couple as the first parents.

This new section begins with Adam and Eve becoming intimate[2] in which Eve "conceived" and bore a son. The word for "conceived," "ותהר," is the *wayyiqtol* of "הרה"

---

[1] Though there are many places where this thesis could help to more fully explain situations in the Scripture outside of Genesis, I am limiting the scope of my proposal to the most immediate context of the passage. Genesis alone should provide sufficient demonstration to confirm my thesis.

[2] Though many commentators feel the need to explain that here "ידע" refers to the sexual relationship, as Ward points out, "it is at once obvious that this is not a 'Hi, how are you' kind of knowledge, because of its result: *she conceived"* (76). I agree with Ward and suggest that it is unnecessary to define this term and should probably go without saying.

which featured in the first line of Genesis 3.16a. God stated that from now on, grief from conceptions would become great and now, in the very first words of the new section, we see the first conception. If the judgment was great physical pain with childbirth, the fulfillment of this judgment should be seen in this narrative of the first childbirth. However, nary a word is provided that even hints of physical pain. In fact, the remainder of the description of Cain's birth provides an account that seems far from one writhing in the agony of intense pain.

Upon the first recorded birth, instead of crying out in pain, Eve cries out in jubilation: "I have gotten a man with the help of the LORD."[3] Hartley suggests this is "a triumphant report of the birth of the first human."[4] Cassuto connects the first birth with the judgment of Genesis 3.16a which he, looking at the silver lining, shows that by decreeing that the women would bear children in pain, God is declaring the woman would bear children, effectively promising that humanity would continue. He sees this as "the benison of fertility and the assurance of the continued existence of the species, a promise that begins to be realized immediately."[5] Though Cassuto connects Genesis 4.1 with Genesis 3.16, he does not connect the promised pain to the first birth narrative.

---

[3] Concerning this translation, as Von Rad suggests, "Every word of this little sentence is difficult" (103). There are many suggestions as to what, exactly, Eve was trying to say. Some, like Boice, prefer to see this statement as something like, "I have brought forth a man, *even the deliverer*" (201). Others, like Provan, suggest that the unusual word choice shows Eve is putting herself on an equal footing with God in creating a new man, showing "the human tendency towards self-divination" (*Discovering,* 99) or, as Alter puts it, she "imagines herself as a kind of partner of God in man-making" (Robert Alter, *The Five Books of Moses: A Translation with Commentary* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton, 2004), 29). As interesting as this discussion is, very little of it specifically concerns my proposal.

[4] Hartley, 79.

[5] Cassuto, 163.

Likewise, Matthews provides an interesting statement given his earlier remarks. Apparently forgetting he had just written that "her penalty stresses the 'painful labor' she must endure in childbirth,"[6] when commenting on Genesis 4.1 Matthews confidently asserts, "The first birth recorded in the Bible is *consonant with all remaining Scripture*, which invariably attributes conception and life to the unique work of God and as evidence of his blessing."[7] Whereas I do not deny that the rest of Scripture "attributes conception and life to the unique work of God," not all remaining scripture focuses solely on the "blessing" of birth if Genesis 3.16a is considered.

Fretheim attempts consistency as he translates "קניתי" from Eve's declaration as "purchased" instead of "made." Concerning the purchase, Fretheim states, "Clearly no price is involved. It must be understood in the light of 3:16, where it is stated that woman will have a great deal of pain and difficulty in bearing children." Assuming J authorship of this section, he gives J the benefit of the doubt stating, "Certainly J would not have overlooked [pain and difficulty in bearing children] in connection with the first child to be born. The 'purchasing' thus has reference to the difficulty of the birth. This is the price she had to pay for sin."[8] While I appreciate Fretheim's attempt at consistency, I feel he is being too generous with J and this connection creating a concept that is not, inherently, in Eve's declaration. Even then, Fretheim is the exception rather than the rule.

Westermann also references the judgment as he comments on Genesis 4.1, when he says, "This joy of the mother at the birth of the child, expressed in words and often

---

[6] Matthews, 249.

[7] Matthews, 265. Emphasis mine.

[8] Fretheim, *Creation*, 95.

retained in the name of the child, and following the pains of pregnancy and birth, 3:16, is characteristic of the Old Testament and constantly recurs."[9] Again, I appreciate that the commentator is not simply ignoring the Lord's proclamation to the woman, but Westermann provides no explanation as to what the "pains of pregnancy and birth" have to do with the proclamation by Eve. It is asserted without explanation or reasoning. Westermann's suggestion could easily be made without that phrase, and nothing changes.

While some see Eve's declaration connecting Cain's birth to the promise of a deliverer in Genesis 3.15,[10] most who assume the judgment on the first woman was physical pain in childbirth completely ignore any connection to the prior pericope. There is no mention of physical pain connected with the birth of Cain.

Cain's birth is followed by another birth, this time without any kind of declaration. Again, there is no mention of physical pain and no specific connection back to Genesis 3.16. If Genesis 4 is a continuation of Genesis 3, which I have previously argued that it is, then whatever עצבון is should be at the fore of the story concerning the very first birth; and I contest that it is.

The Greatest Grief

Though not a main character in the Cain and Abel narrative, Eve is in the background and experiences the grief she was told would come with conception. In Genesis 4, the worst-case scenario for a parent occurs. Not only does Eve experience the

---

[9] Westermann, 289.

[10] For example, Barnhouse explicitly connects these as he states, "Eve heard the promise concerning the seed of the woman (3:15) and had believed that her child would be the answer, and that they would soon be back in Eden. So she named the baby, "Here he is!' for that is the meaning of Cain—'acquisition'" (Donald Grey Barnhouse, *Genesis: A Devotional Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1970), 30).

loss of a child, but she does so knowing that he was murdered by her other child. For those who understand it as grief which comes with the bearing and raising of children, the promised עצבון is clearly seen and at the fore of the narrative.

Perhaps this connection is made clearer by the birth announcement with Eve's third child. This time, however, the announcement does not seem joyful. At Seth's birth, she announces, "God has appointed me another offspring instead of Abel, for Cain killed him" (Gen 4.25). As Kvam *et al*. point out, "these words…are the last words recorded in Eve's 'voice,'[11] words which haunt the dreams of any parent. Cassuto contrasts the first announcement with this second as he states, "This time Eve does not give voice to feelings of joy and pride such as she expressed when her eldest son was born. Her mood is one of mourning and sorrow for the family calamity, and her words are uttered meekly, with humility and modesty."[12]

Crislip aptly catches the emotional moment for the first mother as he states, "The tragedy of Cain and Abel further resonates with Eve's condemnation to bear and raise children in sorrow and groaning. What greater sorrow is there than to see one's child dead, at the hands of a sibling no less?"[13]

Van Ruiten adds, "It is striking that the word בעצב or עצבון is never used in connection with the actual begetting of Eve's children. Nevertheless, the adventures of Cain and Abel, described in Gen 4:3-16, show that their growing up was not unproblematic. Abel was murdered by Cain whereas Cain was cursed from the ground.

---

[11] Kvam *et al*., 37.

[12] Cassuto, 245-246.

[13] Crislip, 112.

When one reads the narrative of Gen 4:1-16 as a continuation of Gen 3, one might understand Gen 4:3-16 as an interpretation of בעצב in Gen 3:16a."[14]

Even Keil, who was not in the forefront of those treating עצבון as emotional suffering, makes a note concerning Eve's declaration that "her hopes had been sadly depressed by her painful experience in connection with her first-born."[15]

Eskanzi, commenting on Genesis 3.16, notes that "along with her joy in being a parent (4:1), the first woman will herself experience—and express—sorrow and the need for comfort after her first-born kills his brother (4:25)."[16]

In Genesis 3.16a, God informed the first woman that there would be עצבון associated with her conceptions. Undoubtedly, just like so many mothers since, Eve experienced physical pain in the process of birth only to have that pain replaced by joy. However, in this pericope, that joy is replaced by a deep sense of mourning and loss as shown through Eve's declaration. As Van Ruiten surmises, "the terms used for pain and toil are not used in relation to the actual begetting of children. One could perhaps suggest that the adventures of Cain and Abel (Gen 4:1-16) point to a painful and toilsome life after their birth."[17]

---

[14] Van Ruiten, 8.

[15] Keil, 1:119. Here Keil is discussing the reason Eve switches from *Jehovah* in the proclamation with Cain's birth and now *Elohim.* He suggests it is because what was taken away was taken by Cain and now *Elohim* is restoring it to her again. As he puts it, "Because of this antithesis she calls the giver *Elohim* instead of *Jehovah*, and not because her hopes had been sadly depressed by her painful experience in connection with the first born." So he is technically not suggesting that "her painful experience" is affecting her proclamation, but in so doing, he is subtly stating that she has had this "painful experience in connection with the first-born," unless Keil was simply being facetious.

[16] Eskanzi, 17.

[17] Van Ruiten, 25.

Perhaps Jacob best catches the full emotion as he says, "The mother cannot forget her murdered son or his killer for both had been her children. She mentions all her sons in one sentence."[18]

I am convinced that the Cain and Abel narrative is meant to demonstrate what God meant when he said he would make great the woman's עצבון. Even more, this understanding which constitutes emotional grief from conception through childrearing is not only borne out in Genesis 4, but through the rest of Genesis as well. For the remainder of this chapter, I will briefly note how my proposal fits other narratives in Genesis where the mother experiences עצבון.[19]

Other Examples in Genesis

Throughout the rest of Genesis, there are women who face grief due to conceptions, such as Dinah, who was raped by a prince of the land. Or perhaps the two daughters of Lot who, after fleeing Sodom, apparently had no male prospects for procreation and thus inebriated their father on subsequent nights to incestuously take his seed to conceive.[20] Maybe we feel sorry for Tamar who marries a wicked man and loses

---

[18] Benno Jacob, *The First Book of the Bible: Genesis*, trans. and ed. Ernest I. Jacob and Walter Jacob, augmented ed. (Jersey City, NJ: KTAV Publishing House, 2007), 38. Though only Cain and Abel are specifically mentioned, Jacob is allowing that Eve is purposefully using the form of the word in this sentence for "appointed," which is שָׁת, to bring to mind Seth, which is שֵׁת.

[19] Though the illustrations I will use are selective, they are not slanted towards my view over against a view of pain in childbirth. There is perhaps only one place in Genesis which proponents of the physical pain view could turn to champion their cause, and that will be addressed.

[20] Curley and Peterson suggest this is an example of not only grief associated with the attempt to procreate, but they also show, tied to their understanding of Genesis 3.16b, that these "'barren' women go to great lengths to have children" (Curley and Peterson, 168). For Curley and Peterson, concerning Genesis 3.16a, they suggest "the text should be translated, 'I will greatly increase your sorrowful conceptions.' This…depicts the curse of emotional turmoil that accompanies problematic conceptions and barrenness in all its forms" (158-159), to which they add, "Included in this would be miscarriages and the general

her husband before she can conceive and, being rejected any other seed from her husband's family, disguised herself as a harlot to gain the promised seed from the line of Judah. Any of these stories, and more, demonstrate how much grief is associated with conception,[21] childbearing and childrearing in Genesis. I have selected a few other narratives which demonstrate that my proposal fits with the whole of Genesis.

Sarah and Hagar

Abraham is one of the most important figures in the entirety of the Christian Bible. Even so, as important as Abraham is, it is striking that, as Warner points out, "When Abram (Abraham) enters the story at the end of Genesis 11, almost the only thing that the reader is told about him is that his wife Sarai (Sarah) is barren."[22] Sarah's first

---

problems associated with conceiving a child" (159n5), as well as "the lack of a suitable male to aid in procreation/conception" (168). The illustrative women they provide for their view, after assuming as given the obvious examples of "Sarah, Rebekah, and Rachel" are "Eve, Leah, Tamar and Lot's daughters" who "faced, at some level, the issue of 'barrenness'" (168). Though I commend the effort, for some of these, such as Eve and Leah, it is a stretch to see an issue of barrenness, and the argumentation of reading between the lines is unconvincing considering that when the author of Genesis wishes to make known a woman's inability to conceive, he is never shy about it nor does he invite anyone to read between the lines. Barrenness in Genesis is a primary motif, but it seems Curley and Peterson are trying to force the motif onto those the author of Genesis has not invited us to see in that way. Concerning miscarriages, Hamilton informs that "there is no case in the OT of a woman conceiving but not carrying her child full term, for reasons of disease/injury to the fetus or abortion" (Hamilton, "הָרָה," in *NIDOTTE*, 1:1033-1034). If the attempt is to demonstrate how all of these are specifically demonstrated in Genesis, they have a difficult task. Curley and Peterson are helpful in their approach, but my contention is that the Genesis account does not stop with "conception" and if they were to broaden their scope to a more general concept which includes problems raising children as well, without requiring every example to fit a specific pattern, everything they try to communicate would slot in nicely. The examples used by Curley and Peterson are further support of my own proposal.

[21] Most of the narratives in Genesis which indicate grief from conceptions focus on the act of conception itself. As Curley and Peterson note, "the common malady that the matriarchs face is either barrenness or the lack of a suitable male to aid in procreation/conception" (Ibid.). But this does not represent all of them.

[22] Warner, 114. Though this might, as Warner suggests, bring "a degree of uncertainty to the promises" given to Abraham in Genesis 12, Collins does point out that, concerning these early narratives in Israel's history, "we should not overplay the factor of suspense in reading them" because the implied audience, those entering the land of promise under the leadership of Joshua "already know how things turn out," because that implied audience exists (C. John Collins, *Reading Genesis*, 126).

defining characteristic is her inability to conceive, a characteristic which continues to define her.[23] In fact, Clifton-Soderstrom sees in this statement an abrupt change from the flow of Genesis to this point. Following a prologue which is focused on moving forward with genealogies, "Genesis 11 opens powerfully with the genealogy of Abraham. It begins by building a bridge between Abraham and Shem, the favored son of Noah, naming the subsequent firstborn sons, and moving successively along over the course of some twenty-nine verses. However, this generative power ends abruptly with Scripture's first reference to a barren woman."[24] The fact that Sarah, as a wife, is unable to now become a mother is a major issue. Andriolo suggests the following concerning women in the ancient narratives:

> The role behavior of women is significantly different [from men in the biblical narratives]. They are represented as wife, mother, daughter, and sister. The general characteristics of their role behavior seem to be as follows: (1) there are women whose paramount problem is to become a wife; (2) women who are wooed and married with ease have to face a challenge in their role as mothers; and (3) women who are introduced as daughters or sisters invite misfortune…. The message redundantly represented in the role behavior of women seems to read: Being a woman is not enough, one has to become a wife. Being a wife is not enough, one has to become a mother. And being a daughter is a problem indeed, since successful role change has to take an unusual course. Daughters are in danger of getting trapped in their role.[25]

---

[23] The second time Sarai is introduced into the story in Genesis 16.1, she is introduced with, "Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children." This introduction prompts the Ishmael origin story which occurs because of Sarai's inability to conceive. In the next two narratives in chs. 17 and 18, Sarai's barrenness once again is the dominant consideration as her name is changed to Sarah and Abraham is told that she will have a child, to which Abraham laughs at the prospect. In ch. 18 when this promise is retold in Sarah's hearing, she laughs at the prospect. Again, the most important aspect of Sarah in the narrative is that she is barren.

[24] Michelle A. Clifton-Soderstrom, "Beyond the Blessed/Cursed Dichotomy: The Barren Matriarchs as Oracles of Hope," *The Covenant Quarterly* 69, no. 1-2 (Feb-May 2011): 51.

[25] Karin R. Andriolo, "Myth and History: A General Model and Its Application to the Bible," *American Anthropologist* 83, no. 2 (June 1981): 271-272. For Andriolo, the narratives in the Old Testament follow certain paradigms and as such, in the narratives there is the need to change roles as characters progress. In

For Andriolo, she would see Sarai's introduction as part of the group who faces "a challenge in their role as mothers." Her role as a wife was insufficient and she needed a child for her husband, and she was willing to go to whatever desperate means she needed to accomplish this. This leads to the Ishmael narrative.

The Ishmael narrative of Genesis 16 begins with a reminder that Sarai "had borne [Abraham] no children." Undoubtedly an issue for her, Kass points out that in Sarah's first recorded words, "she announces herself in terms of her barrenness."[26] So desperate to provide an heir for her husband, she sends in her maidservant, Hagar, to provide that child on her behalf.[27] This proposed solution to one demonstration of עצבון ultimately led to more problems. Sarai's relationship with her servant becomes strained to say the least. Matthews points out that "Sarai never speaks directly to Hagar or speaks her name; Hagar is a tool to relieve Sarai's embarrassment. Yet Sarai never claims Ishmael as her son (cp. Rachel, 30:6; Leah, 30:20)."[28] Hagar is a passive character in the beginning of this story. She is simply taken by Sarah and Abraham comes into her in a scenario in which "the modern reader sees a violation of her person, perhaps even a kind of rape."[29] After

---

this section she compares the progression of men with the progression of women. It is the latter part upon which I focus.

[26] Kass, 277.

[27] Though this practice may be repugnant to a product of twenty-first century western civilization founded on a Judeo-Christian ethic, Walton provides evidence that in ancient cultures "this was not only appropriate but at times contractually dictated" (Walton, 446-447).

[28] Matthews 184. Compare this with the Rachel and Leah narratives in which the children of the servants are considered as children of the respective women (Genesis 30.6-13).

[29] Frederick J. Gaiser, "Sarah, Hagar, Abraham--Hannah, Peninnah, Elkanah: Case Studies in Conflict," *Word & World* 34, no. 3 (Sum 2014): 275. Being accepted in the ancient world does not necessitate that a practice is morally condoned. Kass informs, "God neither interferes with nor approves the surrogate arrangement. But the text, in telling of this exchange, hints loudly at the difficulties" (278). There are many practices in Genesis, such as polygamy, which may have been normal for their time, but are not generally

conceiving, the already seemingly strained relationship between Sarai and Hagar becomes even more problematic when Hagar "looked with contempt upon her mistress."[30] This scenario only exacerbates the poor relationship between Sarai and Hagar to the extent that Sarai begins to mistreat Hagar, with Abram's allowance.

Hagar flees before her child is even born due to the harsh conditions placed upon her by Sarai, and she only returns when she is sent back to Sarai by an angel. Even after the child is born, though years and events go by, there is continued tension. As Fretheim suggests, "the relationship between Sarah and Hagar (16:3-9) was either not resolved amicably or has deteriorated in the three years since Isaac's birth."[31] At the point one might forget about Hagar and Ishmael in the narrative, "Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had born to Abraham, laughing" (Gen 21.9). It is not fully clear what the specific issue is with Ishmael's laughing, but what is clear is that Sarah sees Ishmael as a threat to her son as the rightful heir. Alter suggests, "we may also be invited to construe it as 'Isaacing-it"—that is, Sarah sees Ishmael presuming to play the role of Isaac, child of laughter, presuming to be the legitimate heir."[32] This rivalry leads to Hagar and Ishmael being sent away into the wilderness to the point that Hagar gives up. As

---

ideal. Yes, I would consider the ownership of slaves and forcing them into sexual situations with the owners "a violation of her person, perhaps even a kind of rape."

[30] The scope of this paper does not necessitate any discussion concerning this phrase. This is universally accepted as a statement that Hagar "had a boastful feeling, perhaps to the point of looking down on Sarai…she felt that her pregnancy exalted her to a position ahead of Sarai in the familial pecking order" (Ward, 180). However, Matthews shows that "this term echoes the related word *qallēl (piel)* 'curse' in 12:3" (186). It makes me wonder if it might carry the idea of Hagar not, necessarily, thinking highly of herself because of her pregnancy, but now that she is encumbered with a pregnancy that she did not want or ask for, if she has contempt for Sarai who brought this upon her.

[31] Fretheim, *Genesis*, 488.

[32] Alter, 103. This is based on Isaac's name meaning "he who laughs."

Pigott invites us to see, this text "shows how grief-stricken Hagar was."[33] In one of the most heart-rending moments in scripture, a mother places her child in a bush and walks away so that she might have some sense of respite, and, with the grief of a mother who is impotent to save her child, "she said, 'Let me not look on the death of the child.' And as she sat opposite him, she lifted up her voice and wept" (Gen 21.16). This entire narrative between Sarah and Hagar, from beginning to end, is filled with grief associated with conception. Nobody in this narrative escapes suffering.

Rebekah

Rebekah's narrative is much shorter than that of Sarah's. The barrenness motif was introduced with Sarah, and Rebekah slots in as the next in line. Here, however, the fact that she was barren is given just a brief mention before the narrative moves forward. As Walton points out, "Though the barrenness obstacle that we saw in Abraham's story recurs in this generation, the text does not dwell on it. Instead, the obstacle in immediate focus is that once Rebekah conceives, she is troubled by a problematic pregnancy."[34] For Rebekah, "the children struggled together within her" (Gen 25.22), which seems to be a premonition of what would continue between them after they are born.

The real problems for Rebekah come not from the time of her pregnancy, but through her children who are the cause of consternation. As a demonstration that עצבון extends well beyond the moment of childbirth, Esau is forty years old when his choice of

---

[33] Susan M. Pigott, "Hagar: The M/Other Patriarch," *Review & Expositor* 115, no. 4 (2018): 523. Pigott is valuable in exploring much of the grief and suffering Hagar experiences through these narratives.

[34] Walton, 548.

wives “made life bitter for Isaac and Rebekah” (Gen 26.35). Alter, considering his translation of “provocation” instead of “bitter,” says, “the morphology of the word points to a more likely derivation from *m-r-h*, ‘to rebel’ or ‘to defy,’ and thus an equivalent such as ‘provocation’ is more precise.”[35] Whether it is bitterness or rebellion in mind, Esau presents trouble for his parents.

Perhaps the greatest cause of sorrow comes from the most famous of the Jacob and Esau narratives, the moment in which one child, albeit following the directions of his mother, takes advantage of and deceives his elderly father to steal a blessing from his brother. This leads to a sibling rivalry which rivals Cain and Abel in Genesis 3, a rivalry that Matthews believes is the allusion in the phrase, “Why should I be bereft of you both in one day?” (Gen 27.45) like Eve was with Cain and Abel.[36] Rebekah is only spared Eve’s עצבון because she is able to have Jacob sent away “a while” (Gen 27.44). Unfortunately for this mother, “Rebekah’s plan for Jacob to reside ‘for a while’…became twenty years of hard labor in Haran (31:41).”[37] There is no indication that Rebekah ever laid eyes on her beloved son again, a grief close to the death of a child. As Clifton-Soderstrom puts it, Jacob is the “child whom she loves and eventually loses as he lives into the blessing of God by fleeing his home and living most of his adult life in an alien land.”[38] Due to the sinful choices made throughout the Jacob and Esau narrative, Rebekah experiences עצבון.

---

[35] Alter, 138.

[36] Matthews, 437.

[37] Ibid.

[38] Clifton-Soderstrom, 54.

Leah and Rachel

When Jacob made his way to Haran, he began to labor for his uncle, Laban, and fell in love with Laban's daughter, Rachel. Making a deal with Laban to work for seven years to marry Rachel, on the wedding night, Laban pulls a bait-and-switch and Jacob marries Leah. Laban allows Jacob to marry Rachel as well, as long as he agrees to work another seven years. During those seven years, conception becomes an important part of the story.

Curley and Peterson suggest that though only Rachel is specifically mentioned as being barren, both Leah and Rachel began the narrative as barren,[39] but the Lord opened Leah's womb first. In this narrative, both women now feel עצבון in their respective ways. For Leah, she is bearing children with the hope that she will "change Jacob's attitude toward her."[40] For Rachel, she wants desperately to have children and "envied her sister." Upon receiving that child, she declared, "God has taken away my reproach" and she prayed, "May the LORD add to me another son" (Genesis 30.22-24). As Walton concludes, "Tension festers into jealousy as each woman has something the other wants (Leah has sons, Rachel has love). Thus, a new generation is born into conflict as the obstacles mount."[41] Whereas Jacob was involved in a sibling rivalry, he has now inadvertently created another among his wives.

---

[39] According to Curley and Peterson, "Leah also endured the shame of delayed conceptions…. The fact that God opens (פתח) Leah's womb seems to indicate that beforehand it had been closed. Perhaps this is a clue that Leah struggled with barrenness, or at the very least, had trouble conceiving" (168). This is an inference from the text that is by no means necessary. This seems a case of Curley and Peterson attempting to show every major female of the patriarchs as an example of their proposal which focuses on barrenness.

[40] Ward, 356.

[41] Walton, 587.

One more piece of the narrative, at first glance, might appear as if there is an example of physical pain in childbirth:

> Then they journeyed from Bethel. When they were still some distance from Ephrath, Rachel went into labor, and she had hard labor. When her labor was at its hardest, the midwife said to her, "Do not fear, for you have another son." And as her soul was departing (for she was dying), she called his name Ben-oni; but his father called him Benjamin (Gen 35.16-18).

Here, the woman who was beloved but wanted a son and who, when given a son prayed for another, now finds her death with the answer to that very prayer.[42] As Matthews points out, "Rachel's naming of the child 'Ben-Oni' is her dying word. 'Ben-Oni,' meaning 'son of my sorrow.'"[43] Though the term, "sorrow," is not עצבון, the name of the child is still sufficient to see that not only was Rachel experiencing a physically painful labor, but she was under emotional suffering as she was dying due to the problematic delivery. In fact, the text focuses more on her emotional condition in the naming of her child than it focuses on her physical pain.

All of the issues involved in this narrative stem from problems concerning conceptions. The Rachel and Leah narrative provides yet more examples of women who suffer עצבון from conceptions.

---

[42] Alter, 197. He states, "The fulfillment of her uncompromising wish entails her death."

[43] Kenneth A. Matthews, *Genesis 11:27-50:26*, New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishers, 2005), 625. Alter suggests that "son of my sorrow" is a translation "on somewhat more tenuous philological grounds." He prefers, "son of my vigor" suggesting "in her death agony, she envisages the continuation of 'vigor' after her in the son she has born (the tribe of Benjamin will become famous for its martial prowess)" (197). Matthews also notes this as a possibility and that those who hold this idea believe it is "indicating that the child depletes Rachel of her vitality or that the child possesses Rachel's strength…. But the term און when applied to a parent's vigor refers to the father's 'strength, virility" (Matthews, *Genesis 11:27-50:26*, 625n589). As well, it seems there would have to be a very good reason for Jacob to break precedent and change a name given by his wife, considering previously "the wives of Jacob had always named his sons" (Ibid., 625). The most likely explanation is that Rachel, in her final grieving moments, endowed her child with a negative name to reflect her grief. Jacob refused to keep the name and instead provided a strong, positive name for him.

Jacob

Though the penalty was pronounced upon the woman, when it comes to emotional pain which is felt concerning children, *mutatis mutandis*, a father feels grief as well. Longman notes that "with one exception (childbirth), we should not understand the punishment of the man and the woman as unique to them. Men as well as women struggle in relationships, and women taste the futility of work as well as men."[44] The only reason childbirth is excepted is that he assumes the judgment is specific to parturition itself. Because a man is unable to birth a child, עצבון from conceptions must be the only one which cannot apply to both sexes. However, if my proposal is accurate, then following Longman's thought process, each of the judgments can, *mutatis mutandis*, affect each of the sexes. This being the case, Jacob is another who experiences emotional grief because of conceptions.

The part of Genesis which focuses on Jacob's children spans the final fourteen chapters of Genesis, as well as a few narratives before. To demonstrate ways in which Jacob's children brought him trouble, I could focus on the grief he must have felt when his daughter was raped[45] or when his sons took their revenge on Hamor and Shechem and the men of town and made Jacob "stink to the inhabitants of the land" (Gen 34). Perhaps my focus could be on the relationships of his sons together in which the majority of his sons "hated [his favorite son] and could not speak peacefully to him" (Gen 37.4). Instead, I will focus on the moment which caused Jacob the most intense עצבון, the moment he learned of his favored son's death.

---

[44] Longman, 68.

[45] Though, in all honesty, his reaction seems less than sorrowful.

After Joseph's brothers sold Joseph to the Ishmaelite traders, Jacob experiences great emotional grief when they come to him:

> Then [Joseph's brothers] slaughtered a goat and dipped the robe in the blood. And they sent the robe of many colors and brought it to their father and said, "This we have found; please identify whether it is your son's robe or not." And he identified it and said, "It is my son's robe. A fierce animal has devoured him. Joseph is without doubt torn to pieces." Then Jacob tore his garments and put sackcloth on his loins and mourned for his son many days. And all his sons and all his daughters rose up to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted and said, "No, I shall go down to Sheol to my son, mourning." Thus his father wept for him (Gen 37.31-35).

There are few moments in Scripture which convey this kind of abject emotional suffering. Throughout the rest of Genesis, Jacob remains a shell of what he was before. Later in the story, deciding whether to send his other son of his old age to Egypt, he refuses to send Benjamin, even though they needed the food and it would free Simeon. In fact, as he responds to his sons concerning Simeon, the grief is still evident as he says,

> You have bereaved me of my children: Joseph is no more, and Simeon is no more, and now you would take Benjamin. All this has come against me….My son shall not go down with you, for his brother is dead, and he is the only one left. If harm should happen to him on the journey that you are to make, you would bring down my gray hairs with sorrow to Sheol (Gen 42.35-36, 38).

Concerning this, commentators are not kind to Jacob. Fretheim says there are "tones of self-pity."[46] Alter is much more scathing as he believes "Jacob speaks as a prima donna of paternal grief" while "the extravagant insensitivity of Jacob's paternal favoritism continues to be breathtaking."[47] I think he speaks as a father frozen in grief.

---

[46] Fretheim, *Genesis*, 630.

[47] Alter, 244-245.

As Jacob works through his ongoing bereavement for Joseph, his עצבון is displayed. Yes, there is a sense of hyperbole with the manner in which Jacob continues to mourn, and, fearing "another dreadful accident like the one in which he believes Joseph was torn to pieces by a wild beast,"[48] the way he treats Benjamin like Buster Bluth from *Arrested Development*. But perhaps some of this is understandable considering the excessive grief he endured.

Conclusion

In Genesis, physical pain connected with childbirth is never an issue.[49] However, emotional grief is an issue that affects many throughout the narratives, beginning within the same תולדות section as the judgment against the woman. Given that Genesis 1-4 is a unit, then the emotional suffering experienced by Eve from the death of one child at the hands of another would have constituted the very עצבון that God had told her she would experience.

Throughout the rest of Genesis, women, including every major character and most minor characters, are experiencing emotional suffering due to conceptions at some point in their lives. Sometimes this was the result of barrenness. Sometimes it was the lack of a proper husband to provide necessary seed for conception. Sometimes, for those who conceived, it was the result of the sinfulness of their children. Sometimes it was the result of their own sinfulness surrounding their children.

---

[48] Ibid., 245.

[49] With the possible exception of Rachel in Genesis 35.16-18.

Though it is not the scope of this paper, a quick perusal of the rest of the Old Testament demonstrates that these issues do not end. In the beginning of Exodus, the children of Israel endure infanticide (Ex 1.15-21). Those who do bring children into the world bring them into a world of slavery. In other places, such as with Hannah, barrenness remains at the heart of suffering concerning conceptions (1 Sam 1.1-20). David and Bathsheba endure the anguish of losing a child (2 Sam 12.24). Perhaps the greatest example of this sorrow comes from the women in Lamentations who resort to eating their own children so they can live (Lam 4.10).

In this chapter I have demonstrated how my proposal, that Genesis 3.16a refers to emotional suffering, fits better with the rest of Genesis than the standard understanding of physical pain in childbirth. In the next chapter, I will provide my conclusion for this paper.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

My Thesis

In the beginning of this paper, I proposed that the best way to understand the phrase,

אל־האשה אמר הרבה ארבה עצבונך והרנך בעצב תלדי בנים

is to translate this referring not to physical pain, but to emotional sorrow or grief. This grief affects every aspect of childbearing: grief associated with conception, grief associated with pregnancy, grief associated with parturition, and grief associated with raising children. Through this paper, I have demonstrated that this proposal makes the most sense when the semantics, syntax and context are all taken into consideration.

My Translation of Genesis 3.16a

אל־האשה אמר הרבה ארבה עצבונך והרנך

To the woman he said, "I will make exceedingly great your grief from conception,

בעצב תלדי בנים

With grief you will have children."

Semantics

Given the length of the text under consideration, there were not many words which needed to be examined, but those chosen are important for understanding this passage correctly.

עצב / עצבון

Most of the discussion concerning translation of this passage hinges on how this word is translated. This is often translated “pain” where physical pain is meant. However, I have demonstrated that physical pain is not the typical way to understand this word and there is no need to amend the most common usage, emotional suffering, to translate Genesis 3.16a. I choose to treat this as “grief.”

הרון

This is a *hapax legomena* which is often translated as “childbirth.” However, every other use of the root from which it comes, הרה, deals not with “childbirth,” but “conception.” Again, there is no need to change the semantic range of this word from conception to childbirth for Genesis 3.16a in which the form is a *hapax legomena*. Therefore, I choose to treat this as “conception.”

תלדי

This is derived from ילד and is the typical word for a parent having a child. I choose to treat this as “have children.”

הרבה ארבה

This combination with a repetition of רבה, when used as it is, refers to increasing quantity. It would not typically be used as an intensifying word, such as to, say, increase pain, but it would be used to increase the number of something. I choose to treat this as “make exceedingly great.”

Hendiadys

Though not technically a semantic question, this syntactical issue is key to understanding the proper semantic choices for the words in question. Though some deny a hendiadys is meant to connect עצבון with הרון, it is the most likely syntactical connection. This is further evidenced in the context of Genesis 3, as well as the rest of Genesis. I choose to connect עצבונך with הרונך as a hendiadys which would mean, “your grief from conception.”

Exegetical Questions

Contextual Units

Genesis 3 is part of a larger section dealing with Israel’s primeval history which spans Genesis 1-11. Within that section, there are other subsections. As the first few sections begin with a תולדות, it is easy to mark the sections. The תולדות in Genesis 2.4 marks the beginning of the תולדות for “the heavens and the earth” while the תולדות in Genesis 5.1 marks the next section which is the תולדות for Adam. As part of a larger section, there should be literary continuity between Genesis 2-4 and any proposal should fit within that continuity. The view I have taken for Genesis 3.16a fits perfectly with connecting words to Genesis 1-2 as well as thematic connections to Genesis 4. Therefore, I see Genesis 1-4 as a specific section inside the larger section of Genesis 1-11.

The Trial

I have shown that my proposal makes sense of the trial scenario in which God comes to the garden and acts as a judge. The proclamations made by the judge are not,

necessarily, punitive prescriptions, but instead they are proclamatory descriptions. God is simply announcing to the first man and the first woman what will now be the new reality in a world where man has fallen into sin. Even so, this trial ends with a judgment that is full of more grace than it is condemnation, for the first man and the first woman live to have the opportunity to bear children. But they now know that, because of the sinfulness of man, conceiving children will cause great sorrow upon them in many ways.

The Etiological Purpose

I have shown that far from simply stating a woman will experience physical pain when she pushes a child through the birthing canal, there is an etiological reason for grief and sorrow. Though there is much in the beginning chapters of Genesis which is archetypical, the pronouncement on the woman should be considered prototypical which affects the world moving forward. Clearly, Genesis 2 and Genesis 4 denote two different realities. My proposal makes sense of much of the difference between those two passages, a difference which continues today; a difference which includes the inability to have children to the raising of children who cause grief due to their sinfulness, this grief is a universal principle.

Emotional Grief in Genesis

Genesis 4

If Genesis 3.16a is such a monumental moment full of etiological purpose, then one would expect that, at the very least, when the first birth happens it would be mentioned. This would be especially true if the first birth happens within the same

contextual section of Genesis just a few verses later. However, for those who understand this to refer to physical pain, when Eve bears three children, there is nary a mention of physical pain. However, when my proposal is understood in light of Genesis 4, it makes perfect sense. Eve experiences great עצבון as she mourns the loss of her sons, one who was killed by another.

The Rest of Genesis

Again, the idea of physical pain in childbirth is basically non-existent in Genesis.[1] However, when continuing throughout Genesis, עצבון as emotional suffering continues to dominate the narratives. Every major female patriarch deals with emotional suffering in some way connected to conception. Even, *mutatis mutandis*, the male patriarchs, especially Jacob, are affected by emotional grief.

I Submit My Proposal for Consideration

In *Reading Genesis Well*, Collins provides "four criteria" a theory must satisfy to be a good theory.[2] They are:

1. It covers all the data without "fudging" (saving the phenomena).
2. Other things being equal, the theory that covers the data with the fewest possible complicating assumptions is preferable (Ockahm's razor).
3. The theory is coherent both internally and with other things we have a right to believe.

---

[1] With the potential exception of Rachel in Genesis 35.

[2] C. John Collins, *Reading Genesis*, 47.

4. The theory is fruitful, opening up fresh avenues in understanding.

As my conclusion, I will demonstrate how my theory concerning Genesis 3.16a meets all four criteria. Based on the overwhelming support from the grammatical and contextual discussions, I posit that the best way to understand Genesis 3.16a is to think in terms of emotional grief. I will now compare my proposal according to the test provided by Collins to determine if my theory is a good theory.

It Covers All the Data without "Fudging"

Yes, my proposal has covered all of the data at my disposal as thoroughly and fairly as I am able to cover it. If there was ever a point of doubt, I tried to include that in a footnote for further evaluation by the reader.

Other Things Being Equal, the Theory that Covers the Data with the Fewest Possible Complicating Assumptions Is Preferable

Unlike other theories which have been discussed in this paper, my theory requires no assumptions that go beyond normal semantic and syntactical ranges. As well, unlike the theory of physical pain, I do not have to read my view into the text to find it, if it can be found at all. My view is plainly seen through many narratives. When it comes to finding the theory that best explains what is under discussion in Genesis 3.16a, my proposal is the least complicated with the least necessary assumptions.

The Theory Is Coherent Both Internally and with Other Things We Have a Right to Believe

I have demonstrated throughout this paper that my proposal makes the most sense according to all of the internal evidence. As before, no major assumptions must be made

and there is nothing outside of normal semantic and syntactical ranges. It does not impinge on any other narratives or provide any glaring disassociation with any other narratives in Genesis. In fact, the proposal which focuses on physical pain in childbirth has more coherency issues as it is never actually confirmed by any texts outside of the theory itself. My proposal is clearly seen throughout the pericopes of Genesis.

The Theory Is Fruitful, Opening Fresh Avenues of Understanding

This is the greatest advantage of my proposal. Though there are others who follow much the same line of thinking, it is hardly mainstream and is certainly a minority view. However, it carries such a greater etiological purpose. The fact that, *mutatis mutandis*, the male patriarchs could also have made sense of their experiences by comparing them to Genesis 3.16a speaks volumes concerning how fruitful this theory is. It provides more avenues to place the grief in our own lives into a context that an understanding of physical pain in parturition could never provide.

Conclusion

Based on the answers to the four questions, I submit my proposal in full confidence believing that the theory is good. Understanding Genesis 3.16a as referring to physical pain not only fails to fully match the best semantical and syntactical options, but it does not comport with the rest of Genesis.

Therefore my translation and proposal is the best option:

אל־האשה אמר הרבה ארבה עצבונך והרנך

בעצב תלדי בנים

To the woman he said, “I will make exceedingly great your grief from conception,

With grief you will have children.”

Further Considerations

Unfortunately, the scope of my paper could not adequately cover every potential subject or question concerning my proposal. There are certainly areas which need further discussion.

The first area of consideration would be any potential connection of Genesis 3.16a with Genesis 3.16b. I had to limit my discussion to only the first of the pronouncements in Genesis 3.16, but one would wonder if, when understanding the phrase as “grief in conception,” there is a connection with the woman having a “desire” for her husband or that he would “rule over” her. Provan thinks so as he suggests the “‘pain envisaged is bound up with difficult circumstances into which the woman will now bring children as they are born” and “the context in Genesis 3 suggests that it is most immediately connected with the change that occurs in the woman’s relationship with the man.”[3] Whether or not Provan is correct, he at least is attempting to bring both parts of Genesis 3.16 together to understand some kind of contextual connection.

As well, as עצבון is specifically used again in Genesis 3.17 in the pronouncement to the man, exactly what is the relationship between the woman’s pronouncement and the

---

[3] Provan, *Discovering Genesis*, 87. Though for Provan, he does not assume a hendiadys construction and he sees עצבון as a more generalized pain which is not tied to conception. Even so, he introduces a proposal that is worth looking into for further consideration.

man’s pronouncement concerning his work in the field. Meyers, who assumes that עצבון in Genesis 3.16a refers to physical labor in the field naturally connects the usage with Genesis 3.17, as well as Genesis 5.29, to show “the most appropriate interpretation of the use of *‘iṣṣabon* in Genesis 3:16 is as physical labor rather than an abstract condition of distress.”[4] Her view is dependent upon a rejection of a hendiadys and seeing עצבון as referring to labor. Is there some way to make a connection when accepting my proposal, which I believe fits the conditions for Genesis 3.16a better?

Even more, given the descriptive and etiological nature of עצבונך והרנךת, how can woman be redeemed from this statement? Waltke is perhaps helpful here. Whereas there is no sort of redemption or hope available for women who experience pain in childbearing,[5] for Waltke, “Immortality is replaced by progeny, opening the door to redemptive history. The privilege of bearing and raising covenant children saves women from their loss of leadership (1 Tim. 2:15).” Once we understand how much grief and sorrow comes from our sinfulness and our children’s sinfulness, there is hope of mitigation that occurs when we live our lives faithful to the covenant. Along these lines, perhaps Waltke’s connection to 1 Timothy 2.15 is worthy of further probing.

Provan sees the etiological value not in describing what is, but in contrasting a negative “What could be?” from Genesis 3 with the positive “What could be?” from Genesis 2. Ultimately, he indicates that Genesis 2-3 reveal two choices. Choose obedience and a blessed Genesis 2 relationship is available. Choose disobedience and the

---

[4] Meyers, 104-105.

[5] Here I mean redemption in some spiritual sense. With pain mitigating measures, women can decrease the pain experienced in the physical process of childbirth.

cursed Genesis 3 relationship is the outcome. As Provan states, “There are two pathways upon which we can walk in life, Genesis claims. One involves obedience and blessing, the other disobedience (autonomy) and cursing (e.g. Deut. 30.15-20). We should choose life.”[6] Or, as the great philosophers of Led Zeppelin put it, “Yes there are two paths you can go by, but in the long run, there’s still time to change the road you’re on.” Understanding where our sorrow and grief come from, we are given a chance to move into a faithful relationship with the same God who provided this judgment upon Eve. This is an area which could be developed further with my proposal in mind.

[6] Provan, *Discovering Genesis*, 94.

Bibliography

Alter, Robert. *The Five Books of Moses: A Translation with Commentary.* New York, NY: W.W. Norton, 2004.

Andriolo, Karin R. “Myth and History: A General Model and Its Application to the Bible.” *American Anthropologist* 83, no. 2 (June 1981): 261-284.

Arnold, Bill T. *Genesis.* New Cambridge Bible Commentary. Cambridge, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

__________. “Genesis and the Challenges of a 21st-Century Reading.” *Pro Ecclesia* 29, no. 4 (November 2020): 387-406.

Augustine. *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: Genesis 1-11*. Edited by Andrew Louth. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001.

Austen, Jane. *Pride and Prejudice*. 1813. Reprint, New York: Barnes and Noble, 1993.

Barnhouse, Donald Grey. *Genesis: A Devotional Commentary.* Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1970.

Boice, James Montgomery. *Genesis: An Expositional Commentary. Vol. 1, Genesis 1:1-11:32.* Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1982.

Briscoe, D. Stuart. *Genesis.* The Communicator’s Commentary. Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987.

Brown, Judith M. “Recurring Grief in Mothering a Child with an Intellectual Disability to Adulthood: Grieving Is the Healing.” *Child & Family Social Work* 21, no. 1 (February 2016): 113-122.

Brueggemann, Walter. *Genesis.* Interpretation. Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1982.

Calvin, John. *Calvin’s Commentaries*. Translated by John King. Accordance electronic ed. Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1847.

Cassuto, U. *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis.* Translated by Israel Abrahams. Skokie, IL: Varda Books, 1961.

Chisholm, Robert. Study Notes on Genesis. In *NET Bible* 2nd Ed. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2019.

Chrysostom, John. *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: Genesis 1-11*. Edited by Andrew Louth. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001.

Clifton-Soderstrom, Michelle A. “Beyond the Blessed/Cursed Dichotomy: The Barren Matriarchs as Oracles of Hope.” *The Covenant Quarterly* 69, no. 1-2 (Feb-May 2011): 47-64.

Collins, C. John. *Did Adam and Eve Really Exist?* Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011.

__________. *Genesis 1-4: A Linguistic, Literary, and Theological Commentary.* Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2006.

__________. *Reading Genesis Well: Navigating History, Poetry, Science, and Truth in Genesis 1-11.* Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2018.

Collins, John J. *The Bible After Babel: Historical Criticism in a Postmodern Age.* Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005.

Cozens, Simon and Christoph Ochs. "'Have You No Shame?' An Overlooked Theological Category as Interpretive Key in Genesis 3." *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 13, no. 2 (2019): 186-199.

Crislip, Andrew. "Emotions in Eden and After: Ancient Jewish and Christian Perspectives on Genesis 2-4." *Journal of the Bible and its Reception* 6, no. 1 (2019): 97-133.

Cullinan, Colleen Carpenter. "In Pain and Sorrow: Childbirth, Incarnation, and the Suffering of Women." *Cross Currents* 58, no. 1 (Spring 2008): 95-107.

Curley, Christine and Brian Peterson. "Eve's Curse Revisited: An Increase of 'Sorrowful Conceptions.'" *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 26, no. 2 (2016): 157-172.

Davis, John J. *Paradise to Prison: Studies in Genesis.* Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1975.

DeRouchie, Jason S. "The Blessing-Commission, the Promised Offspring, and the Toledot Structure of Genesis." *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 56, no. 2 (June 2013): 219-247.

Delitzch, Franz. *A New Commentary on Genesis.* Translated by Sophia Taylor. Vol. 1. 1888. Reprint Minneapolis, MN: Klock and Klock, 1978.

Elder, Nicholas. "'Wretch I Am!' Eve's Tragic Speech-in-Character in Romans 7:7-25." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 137, no. 3 (2018): 743-763.

Eskenazi, Tamara, ed. *The Torah: A Woman's Commentary.* New York, NY: Women of Reform Judaism, 2008.

Freeborn, Donna, Heather Trevino and Liora C. Adler. "Newborn Measurements." University of Rochester Medical Center. Accessed January 27, 2022. https://www.urmc.rochester.edu/encyclopedia/content.aspx?contenttypeid=90&contentid=P02673).

Fretheim, Terrence E. *Creation, Fall, and Flood: Studies in Genesis 1-11.* Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1969.

__________. “Genesis.” In *New Interpreter’s Bible Vol. 1,* edited by Leander E. Keck, 319-674. Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1994.

Gaiser, Frederick J. “Sarah, Hagar, Abraham--Hannah, Peninnah, Elkanah: Case Studies in Conflict.” *Word & World* 34, no. 3 (Summer 2014): 273-284.

Garrett, Duane. *A Commentary on Exodus*. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2014.

Griffiths, Sarah. “The Effect of Childbirth No-One Talks About.” BBC. April 24, 2019. Accessed August 27, 2021. https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20190424-the-hidden-trauma-of-childbirth.

Hamilton, Victor P. *The Book of Genesis Chapters 1-17.* Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990.

__________. *Handbook on the Pentateuch.* Grand Rapids, MI: 1982.

Hartley, John E. *Genesis.* New International Biblical Commentary. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2000.

Hood, Jared C. “The Decalogue of Genesis 1-3.” *The Reformed Theological Review* 75, no. 1 (April 2016): 35-59.

Jacob, Benno. *The First Book of the Bible: Genesis*. Translated by Ernest I. Jacob and Walter Jacob. Augmented ed. Jersey City, NJ: KTAV Publishing House, 2007.

Joseph, Daniel Isaiah. “How Many Bible Commentaries Are There? Get the Facts.” Best Bible Commentaries. Accessed February 15, 2022. https://www.bestbiblecommentaries.com/how-many-bible-commentaries-are-there/.

Kalmanofsky, Amy. “Israel’s Baby: The Horror of Childbirth in the Biblical Prophets.” *Biblical Interpretation* 16, no. 1 (2008): 60-82.

Kass, Leon R. *The Beginning of Wisdom: Reading Genesis.* Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2003.

Keil, C. F. *The Penteteuch.* Translated by James Martin. Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes, by C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, Vol. 1. 1875. Reprint, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978.

Kidner, Derek. *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary.* Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1967.

Kvam, Kristen E., Linda S. Schearing and Valerie H. Ziegler. *Eve & Adam: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Readings on Genesis and Gender.* Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999.

Labor, Simona and Simon Maguire. “The Pain of Labour,” *Reviews in Pain* 2, no. 2 (December 2008): 15-19.

Levine, Nachman. “The Curse and the Blessing: Narrative Discourse Syntax and Literary Form.” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 27, no. 2 (2002): 189-199.

Lohr, Joel N. “Sexual Desire? Eve, Genesis 3:16; and תשוקה.” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 130, no. 2 (2011): 227-246.

Longmann III, Tremper. *Genesis.* The Story of God Bible Commentary. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016.

Martínez-Burnes, Julio, Ramon Muns, Hugo B. Barrios-García, Dina Villanueva-García, Adriana Domínguez-Oliva and Daniel Mota-Rojas. “Parturition in Mammals: Animal Models, Pain and Distress.” *Animals: An Open Access Journal from MDPI* 11 (2021): 1-26.

Matthews, Kenneth A. *Genesis 1-11:26.* New American Commentary. Nashville, TN: B&H Publishers, 1996.

__________. *Genesis 11:27-50:26.* New American Commentary. Nashville, TN: B&H Publishers, 2005.

Meyers, Carol. *Discovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context.* Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1988.

Miranda, Lin Manuel. “It’s Quiet Uptown.” In *Hamilton: An American Musical*. Atlantic Records, 2015, MP3.

Mitchell, Mike, dir. *The Lego Movie 2: The Second Part.* Warner Bros. Pictures, 2019.

Moyers, Bill. *Genesis: A Living Conversation.* New York, NY: Doubleday, 1996.

Newman, Mindy. “Healing from Miscarriage.” Tricycle. Accessed August 27, 2021.

Niehaus, Jeffrey. “*In the Wind of the Storm: Another Look at Genesis III 8*.” *Vetus Testamentum* 44, no. 2 (April 1994): 263-267.

Novick, Tzvi. “Pain and Production in Eden: Some Philological Reflections on Genesis iii 16.” *Vetus Testamentum* 58, no. 2 (2008): 235-244.

Philemon, Ibrahim. “Pentateuchal Authorship: A Critical Analysis of Existing Imaginations.” *Journal of Biblical Theology* 3, no. 2 (April-June 2020): 177-195.

Pigott, Susan M. “Hagar: The M/Other Patriarch.” *Review & Expositor* 115, no. 4 (2018): 513-528.

Potts, Malcolm and Martha Campbell. “History of Contraception.” The Global Library of Women’s Medicine. Accessed April 12, 2022. https://www.glowm.com/section-view/heading/History%20of%20Contraception/item/375#.YlR-79PMKUk.

Provan, Iain. *Discovering Genesis: Content, Interpretation, Reception*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015.

__________. "Pain in Childbirth? Further Thoughts on 'An Attractive Fragment' (1 Chronicles 4:9-10)." In *Let Us Go Up to Zion: Essays in Honour of H. G. M. Williamson on the Occasion of His Sixty-Fifth Birthday,* edited by Iain Provan and Mark J. Boda, 285-296. Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2012.

Reuling, Hanneke. "The Christian and the Rabbinic Adam: Genesis Rabah and Patristic Exegesis of Gen 3:17-19." In *The Exegetical Encounter between Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity,* edited by Emmanouela Grypeou and Helen Spurling, 63-74. Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2009.

Ross, Allen P. *Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of the Book of Genesis*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1988.

Ryle, Herbert Edward. *The Book of Genesis.* Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1921.

Sailhamer, John H. *The Meaning of the Pentateuch: Revelation, Composition and Interpretation.* Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009.

Sanders, Theresa. *Approaching Eden: Adam and Eve in Popular Culture.* Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009.

Sarna, Nahum M. *Genesis*. Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society, 1989.

Schaser, Nicholas J. "Inverting Eden: The Reversal of Genesis 1-3 in John's Passion." *Word & World* 40, no. 3 (Summer 2020): 263-270.

Seufert, Matthew. "The Presence of Genesis in Ecclesiastes." *Westminster Theological Journal* 78, no. 1 (Spring 2016): 75-92.

Sharma, Uma and Shira Polan. "The Most Extreme Births in the Animal Kingdom." Business Insider. July 27, 2018. Accessed March 8, 2022. https://www.businessinsider.com/most-extreme-births-in-animal-kingdom-2018-7.

Shipman, Pat Lee. "Why Is Human Childbirth So Painful?" *American Scientist* 101, no. 6 (November -December 2013): 426-429.

Skinner, John. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis.* 2nd ed. International Critical Commentary. Edinburgh, England: T. & T. Clark, 1930.

Skowronski, G.A. "Pain Relief in Childbirth: Changing Historical and Feminist Perspectives." *Anesthesia and Intensive Care* 43, no. 1 (Suppl, 2015): 25-28.

Speiser, E.A. *Genesis: Introduction, Translation and Notes.* Anchor Bible Commentary. Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1964.

Stuart, Douglas. "'The Cool of the Day' (Gen 3:8) and 'The Way He Should Go' (Prov 22:6)." *Bibliotheca Sacra* 171, no. 683 (Jul - Sep 2014): 259-273.

Tsumura, David T. "A Note on הרון (Gen 3,16)." *Biblica* 75, no. 3 (1994): 398-400.

Van Ruiten, Jacques. "Eve's Pain in Childbearing?: Interpretations of Gen 3 in Biblical and Early Jewish Texts." In *Eve's Children: The Biblical Stories Retold and Interpreted in Jewish and Christian Traditions*, edited by Gerard P. Luttikhuizen, 3-26. Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2003.

Vawter, Bruce. *On Genesis: A New Reading.* Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1977.

Von Rad, Gerhard. *Genesis: A Commentary.* Rev. ed. Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1972.

Walsh, Jerome T. "Genesis 2:4b-3:24: A Synchronic Approach." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 96, no. 2 (June 1977): 161-177.

Waltke, Bruce. *Genesis: A Commentary.* Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001.

Walton, John H. *Genesis.* The NIV Application Commentary. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001.

__________. *The Lost World of Adam and Eve.* Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2015.

Ward, Nathan. *The Growth of the Seed: Notes on the Book of Genesis.* Chillicothe, OH: DeWard, 2007.

Warner, Meg. "'Sing, O Barren One Who Did Not Bear': Childlessness, Blessing and Vocation in the Old Testament. *Modern Believing* 60, no. 2 (2019): 111-121.

Wenham, Gordon. *Genesis 1-15.* Word Biblical Commentary. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1987.

Westsermann, Claus. *Genesis 1-11: A Commentary.* Translated by John J. Scullion. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1974.

Wevers, John William. *Notes on the Greek Text of Genesis.* Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1993.

Wickman, Forrest. "Is Giving Birth Easier for Other Animals?: Dolphins Have it Easy, but Hyenas Sure Don't." Slate. September 27, 2012. Accessed March 8, 2022. https://slate.com/technology/2012/09/animals-giving-birth-dolphins-bear-newborns-easily-but-hyenas-risk-death.html.

Zlotowitz, Rabbi Meir. *Genesis: A New Translation with a Commentary Anthologized from Talmudic, Midrashic and Rabbinic Sources.* 2nd ed. Brooklyn, NY: Mesorah Publications, Ltd, 1988.