

## **The First Prophecy (Part Two)**

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Because Genesis is a book of origins, God includes many foundational events and principles within its fifty chapters. Beginning with the vignettes in the Garden of Eden, He sets down the reasons for many of mankind's historical—and chronic—problems. As explained in Part One, the blame for them predominantly falls on the serpent's, Satan's, shoulders, for he is the ultimate cause of sin and its evil results in the world. God promises to "bruise [his] head" under the Messiah's heel (Genesis 3:15), a feat accomplished on Golgotha.

However, the first humans, Adam and Eve, in no way escape God's judgment for their actions under Satan's influence. Over four verses (Genesis 3:16-19), He hands down several very tough sentences, first to the woman and then to the man—conditions that are the direct results of choosing to follow the course of their own accumulated knowledge rather than the wisdom of God's revelation. Mankind, cut off from God, can only reap the consequences of its incomplete and often incorrect understanding. Sometimes men do things right and reap blessings, and sometimes men "sow the wind, and reap the whirlwind" (Hosea 8:7).

God's prophecy to our first parents affects all of us even today. As the conditions still apply, so do the curses. Yet, because God has called us into His church and ultimately into His Family, we have the means to counter these curses. Because we have God's Spirit, we are no longer cut off from Him. As Paul writes, "[W]e have the mind of Christ" (I Corinthians 2:16). We can begin to undo the damage, particularly in our relationships with each other, by following the revealed knowledge found in God's Word.

### **Women's Bane**

After foretelling Satan's destiny, God turns His attention upon Eve, the one whom Satan deceived:

To the woman He said: "I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception; in pain you shall bring forth children; your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you." (Genesis 3:16)

The curse is in two parts, each composed of two parallel clauses. The first part deals with childbearing and the second with marital relations. With two quick strokes God illustrates the bane of women throughout the ages.

On the surface, this verse seems fairly straightforward. However, the word-for-word translation obscures a great deal of its meaning. Because the Hebrew wording includes so much more than the words' literal meanings, both curses give translators fits. They do not want to stray too far from God's exact words, nor do they wish to leave out underlying ideas expounded by Paul in the New Testament. In the end, most choose to translate the passage word for word.

God's pronouncement on Eve stands in stark contrast to the positive tone He had given to childbearing and marriage in earlier chapters. He expresses His command in Genesis 1:28 in glowing terms: "Then God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it.'" Likewise, Genesis 2:18, 24 paints a positive picture of a woman's role in marriage:

And the Lord God said, "It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him." . . . Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.

When sin becomes a factor, however, childbearing and marriage lose their God-intended luster, and if human nature takes its course, pain, suffering and bitter subjection are inevitable.

### **No Pain, No Gain**

The first curse includes the whole processes of childbearing, from conception to birth. The Hebrew word rendered "conception" in the New King James version (NKJV) includes the entire pregnancy, while "bring forth" can mean both the beginning or end of the birth process. The Revised Standard Version translates these clauses as, "I will greatly multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children."

A human female is unique among mammalian creatures in this respect. Animal females generally bear their young without pain and rarely sicken and die during or from the experience. Women, on the other hand, always experience pain and grief throughout their pregnancies—from morning sickness to contractions—and have historically had a very high mortality rate from childbirth. Better nutrition and hygiene have cut the numbers of deaths dramatically, but the pain and grief remain.

Fortunately, God is a God of mercy. He put within the human female the ability to "forget" her pains in childbirth soon thereafter. Jesus Himself mentions this in John 16:21:

A woman, when she is in labor, has sorrow because her hour has come; but as soon as she has given birth to the child, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world.

This curse on Eve has a direct relationship with the end of the curse on the serpent, which involves the woman's "seed," both general and specific (Genesis 3:15; see Part One in the September 1998 issue). We can infer that God intends us to understand that, because of sin, producing "seed" to fight Satan and his seed will be made more difficult. In a spiritual sense, the church, "the mother of us all," endures great hardship in producing children of God.

Thus, the Bible testifies, "the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force" (Matthew 11:12), "We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22), and "all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution" (II Timothy 3:12). Even the sinless Christ, the promised Seed, was "a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief" (Isaiah 53:3), forced by sin—yet willing—to bear the agonies of human life and death to become the Son of God, the Firstborn among many brethren.

### **Battle of the Sexes**

The second of Eve's curses deals with her relationship with her husband. It explains why many marriages fail and why many of the rest are unhappy. As mentioned before, human relationships are just as likely to fail as to succeed when men and women rely on human knowledge rather than revealed, godly wisdom.

The NKJV's rendering of the latter half of Genesis 3:16 is typical of many translations: "Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you." From this we can see that the two clauses cannot be parallels. Instead, they form a statement of action and reaction. Because the woman "desires" her husband, he will "rule over" her.

Yet this does not make much sense as a curse. Why should a woman's desire for her husband cause him to dominate her? Most men would gladly accept his wife's desires for him, causing him to treat her more gently rather than roughly, as is implied in this verse. How are we to understand this?

The key is in the word "desire," translated from the Hebrew *tesuqah*, which the Brown, Driver and Briggs lexicon calls "unusual and striking" (p. 1003). It occurs only three times in the Old Testament: here, Genesis 4:7 and Song of Songs 7:10. It can carry the sense of sexual longing (as in the Song of Songs), but its usage in Genesis 4:7 shows another side, that of a desire to overcome or defeat another: "[Sin's] desire is for you, but you should rule over it." This latter meaning fits Genesis 3:16 better than the former.

Thus, God is saying that a woman's desire will be to gain the upper hand over her husband, but because she is the weaker vessel, her husband will put her down by force, if need be. The curse is that, in the main, women will lose the battle of the sexes. History bears this out. Until the advent of women's rights movements, women were virtually their husband's property, treated as heir-producing machines, given little freedom and forced to serve their husband's every whim. In many cultures, men bought and sold women like cattle. Some cultures maintain this custom even today.

Only where true Christianity flourishes is there any real easing of this curse. Ephesians 5:22-33 teaches how we can decrease its effects within our marriages—by emulating the virtues of Christ's relationship with the church. Thus, wives are told to submit rather than contend, and husbands are commanded to love rather than dominate. It takes conscious effort to overcome the evil, ingrained habits of 6,000 years of misguided practice.

### **New Testament Commentary**

Paul comments on the woman's curse in I Timothy 2:12-15, a section of Scripture that has come under a great deal of scrutiny in recent years:

And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression. Nevertheless she will be saved in childbearing if they continue in faith, love, and holiness, with self-control.

What is immediately striking about Paul's reasoning and conclusion on Genesis 3:16 regarding the church is that he upholds it! Modern theological thought would reason that the effects of "the Fall" are nullified under Christ's blood, but Paul says, "Not so!" They may be diminished, but not eradicated.

Paul sites the fact that God created Adam before Eve as his proof that God intended the man to lead. He backs this up by showing that while Eve proved subject to deception—thus, she was the "weaker" of the two—Adam, whose sin was sheer disobedience, did not. Thus, Eve's sin establishes that woman should not take the lead from man; that route, by the biblical example of our first parents, generally leads to problems. The apostle concludes that a woman, formed by God as a helper to Adam and more inclined to being deceived, should not teach or lead men in the church.

On the other hand, as Ephesians 5:25-29, 33 plainly shows, Christian men must no longer "rule over" their wives. Loving authority is not domineering or despotic, but humble, caring, gentle, kind and patient. In the same vein, Christian women should submit to and respect their husbands (verses 22-24, 33). Submission is not manipulative or grudging, but done in faith, respect and humility.

How, though, is a woman "saved in childbearing"? The word Paul uses for "saved" (*sozo*) can be used for both physical deliverance from danger and spiritual salvation. How does faith, love, holiness and self-control prevent or nullify the physical dangers of pregnancy? Conversely, is not salvation by grace? Which salvation does the apostle mean here?

Neither. A third explanation fits the context better. Paul's main concern in this section is proper order within the church. Men, he writes, should pray and teach. Women should adorn themselves modestly and do good works, but they should not be teaching publicly or leading men. Verse 15 explains what their primary concern should be: "childbearing." Thus, it means that much of God's judgment of women will be based on how well they perform their God-given role in bearing children.

To us, this sounds quite misogynistic, but to the Greek speaker "childbearing" (*teknogonia*) covers a great deal more ground than just "popping out babies." The *Strong's Concordance* definition shows that the extended meaning is "maternity (the performance of maternal duties)." W. E. Vine, in his *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, agrees, writing that it "impl[ies] the duties of motherhood" (p. 190). The *Twentieth Century New Testament* translates this clause, "But women will find their salvation in motherhood."

Paul's exhortation aims to bring marriage and family back to what God intended of men and women before Adam and Eve's sin. Just as God will judge men according to how well they fulfill their roles as husbands (leaders) and teachers, so He will judge women by their performance as wives and mothers. Since salvation, particularly the period of sanctification, is a process that covers our entire converted lifetimes, how well we fulfill our God-given responsibilities within our families will make a difference in God's judgment. Paul says we must perform these duties in faith, love, holiness and self-control—just as we must do everything else in our Christian lives.

To summarize, then, the apostle simply states that God will judge and reward a woman according to her growth as a Christian within her appointed sphere of influence: her family. God Himself has drawn the lines between the sexes, and we should do our best to fulfill our roles with excellence, not rebellion or complaint. In this way, we will make progress in reversing the effects of the curses in the Garden of Eden.