

Back In The Day

Genesis 3:16-19

Dr. Pierre Cannings

I. Painful v. 16

a. Mother Pain -**anxious toil, hardship**

i. Mothering

1. The first part of her judgment is that maternity will be accompanied by suffering. “probably hendiadys for “your pains of pregnancy.” “To be a joyful mother of children” (Ps 113:9), preferably a large family, was a sure sign of God’s blessing (cf. Pss 127, 128). Yet the pain of childbirth, unrelieved by modern medicine, was the most bitter known then (cf. Mic 4:9–10; Isa 13:8; 21:3).
2. The woman’s penalty impacts her two primary roles: childbearing and her relationship with her husband. It is appropriate punishment since procreation was central to her divine commission and because she had been instrumental in her husband’s ruin (cf. 3:17a). Just as God initiates the enmity between the woman and serpent, he is responsible (“I will greatly increase”) for the pain she will experience in the birth of that “seed,” which will ultimately defeat her archenemy (cf. Gal 4:4; 1 Tim 2:15). The verse consists of two parallel lines (literally): “I will greatly increase your painful labor and your conception”// “in painful labor you will bear sons (v. 16a); and to your husband (will be) your desire”//“and he will rule over you” (v. 16b)
3. The pangs of childbirth are proverbial in OT for the extremity of human anguish (Is. 21:3; 13:8; Mic. 4:9; Ps. 48:6, and oft.: Ex. 1:19 cannot be cited to the contrary).

b. It’s Complicated

i. Wife

ii. Wife’s Desire- **longing**

1. Song of Solomon -The woman says of her beloved: “I am my beloved’s and his ‘desire’ is for me.” The two remaining references are Gen 3:16 and 4:7. In the latter passage God is speaking to Cain and says to him that sin is like a crouching beast “hungering, intent upon” Cain. There are two differences between the Gen passage (3:16) and that in the Song of Solomon.
2. To love and to cherish’ becomes ‘To desire and to dominate’ . Women often allow themselves to be exploited in this way

because of their urge toward their husband: their sexual appetite may sometimes make them submit to quite unreasonable male demands. Once again woman's life is blighted at the most profound level.

3. Susan Foh has, however, argued that the woman's urge is not a craving for her man whatever he demands but an urge for independence, indeed a desire to dominate her husband. Such an interpretation of "urge" is required in the very closely parallel passage in 4:7, where sin's urge is said to be for Cain, but he must master it. Here in 3:16 woman's desire for independence would be contrasted with an injunction to man to master her. There is a logical simplicity about Foh's interpretation that makes it attractive, but given the rarity of the term "urge" (תְּשׁוּקָה, apart from Gen 3:16 and 4:7 occurring only in Cant 7:11), certainty is impossible.
4. Second, her sin also tainted her relationship with her husband. "Desire" (*těšûqâ*) occurs but twice more (Gen 4:7; Song 7:10 [11]), and its meaning in our passage is highly disputed. It has been explained widely as sexual desire on the basis of Song 7:10 [11] and the reference to childbirth in 3:15. If so, the adversative rendering of the following clause, "yet he will rule", would mean that despite her painful experience in childbirth she will still have (sexual) desires for her husband. In other words, the promissory blessing of procreation will persist despite any possible reluctance on her part due to the attendant pain of delivery. Others view the woman's desire as broader, including an emotional or economic reliance on her husband. In other words, she acted independently of her husband in eating the fruit, and the consequent penalty is that she will become dependent on him. Her new desire is to be submissive to the man, and, quite naturally, he will oblige by ruling over her. Some have mitigated the idea of penalty by contending that Eve's submission is a penalty only when her husband takes advantage of his position and mistreats her. Others argue that 3:16 is no part of the judgment; it is a description of the inherent consequences of sin wherein the headship of the man has been corrupted by sin.
5. Although sexual "desire" conforms to v. 15, better is the explanation suggested by Gen 4:7b, where "desire" and "rule" [*māšal*] are found again in tandem: "It desires to have you, but you must master [*māšal*] it." In chap. 4 "sin" is like an animal that when stirred up will assault Cain; it "desires" to overcome Cain, but the challenge God puts to Cain is to exercise "rule" or "mastery" over that unruly desire. If we are to take the lexical and structural similarities as intentional, we must read the verses in

concert. This recommends that 3:16b also describes a struggle for mastery between the sexes. The “desire” of the woman is her attempt to control her husband, but she will fail because God has ordained that the man exercise his leadership function. The force of the defeat is obscured somewhat by the rendering “and he will rule”; the conjunction is better understood as “*but* he will rule.” The directive for “rule” is not given to the man, for that has already been given and is assumed (2:15, 18); rather, the issue of “rule” is found in God’s directive toward the woman, who must succumb by divine edict. Thus the Lord affirms in the oracles of judgment the creation order: the serpent is subjected to the woman, the woman to the man, and all to the Lord. “In those moments of life’s greatest blessing—marriage and children—the woman would serve most clearly the painful consequences of her rebellion from God.”

6. —*to thy husband ... desire*] It is quite unnecessary to give up the rare but expressive תְּשׁוּבָה of the Heb. for the weaker תְּשׁוּבָה of, etc. .It is not, however, implied that the woman’s sexual desire is stronger than the man’s the point rather is that by the instincts of her nature she shall be bound to the hard conditions of her lot, both the ever-recurring pains of child-bearing, and subjection to the man.—*while he* (on his part) *shall rule over thee*] The idea of tyrannous exercise of power does not lie in the vb.; but it means that the woman is wholly subject to the man, and so liable to the arbitrary treatment sanctioned by the marriage customs of the East. It is noteworthy that to the writer this is not the ideal relation of the sexes (cf. 2:18, 23). There is here certainly no trace of the matriarchate or of polyandry (see on 2:24).

iii. He Will Rule

1. Eve, standing for all wives, was given to understand that in the home the husband “shall rule over thee” (Gen 3:16). Such leadership as is appropriate—and it varies greatly—for a man to give his family is meant. Cain was told by God that he ought to master sin in his life, “Do thou rule over him” (Gen 4:7).
2. Evidently he does not regard female subordination to be a judgment on her sin. In that woman was made from man to be his helper and is twice named by man (2:23; 3:20) indicates his authority over her. It is therefore usually argued that “rule” here represents harsh exploitive subjugation, which so often characterizes woman’s lot in all sorts of societies.
3. What is the nature of the man’s “rule”? “Rule,” as verb or derivative, is found seven additional times in Genesis, where it may indicate governance (1:16 [twice], 18; cf. Ps 136:7–9) and refers to exercising jurisdiction (24:2; 37:8; 45:8, 26). The

temperament of “rule” in the Old Testament is dependent on the varying circumstances in which that power is exercised. The term is used too broadly to isolate its meaning in 3:16b lexically as either beneficent or tyrannical. Human jurisdiction over the lower orders, however, is expressed by the different verb “dominate” (*rādâ*; 1:28), suggesting that the man does not “rule” his wife in the sense that he subdues the animals. We cannot understand the divine word “he will rule over you” as a command to impose dominance any more than v. 16a is an exhortation for the woman to suffer as much as possible during childbirth. It is a distortion of the passage to find in it justification for male tyranny. On the contrary, ancient Israel provided safeguards for protecting women from unscrupulous men (e.g., Deut 24:1–4), and the New Testament takes steps to restrain domination. Paul admonished men and women to practice mutual submission (Eph 5:22–33) and cautioned husbands to exercise love and protection without harshness (Col 3:19). Because of the threat of harsh dominance, Paul commanded Christian charity toward women in the community of the home and the church.

II. On You...Husband v. 17

a. Voice of Your Wife

1. The sentence on the man is the longest and fullest, since he bore the greatest responsibility in following his wife’s advice instead of heeding God’s instructions personally given to him
2. Obeying his wife rather than God was man’s fundamental mistake. שָׁמַע לְקוֹל, literally, “listen to the voice of,” is an idiom meaning “obey” cf. 16:2; Exod 18:24; 2 Kgs 10:6

ii. Ate from the Tree

iii. Which I Commanded You not to

1. Command - to **give an order**
2. Emphasis on the second person “you” and “your” sharpens God’s focus on the man’s individual fault. There is no room for avoidance now; he is caught without a word to say. Moreover, the punishment reveals that the man’s sin is the cause for the “curse” against the ground, resulting in its harvest of thorns and thistles.

III. Work Harder vs. 18-19

a. Cursed is the Ground

i. Cursed –

1. It should be noted that neither the man nor the woman are cursed: only the snake (v 14) and the soil (v 17) are cursed because of man.

2. "The land is cursed." אֲדָמָה, "land" one of the key words of the narrative (cf. 2:5–7, 19) is mentioned at the beginning and close of the curse "until you return to the land" (v 19), thereby forming an inclusion. Land blessed by God is well-watered and fertile (Deut 33:13–16; cf. Gen 2:8–14), so that when cursed it lacks such benefits (cf. v 18).

b. Toil Eat of It

i. Eat –

1. "Eaten." Five times in three verses is eating mentioned. Man's offense consisted of eating the forbidden fruit; therefore he is punished in what he eats. The toil that now lies behind the preparation of every meal is a reminder of the fall and is made the more painful by the memory of the ready supply of food within the garden (2:9).
2. "In pain [עֲצָבוֹן] you will eat." Note the similar terminology in v 16. As woman is doomed to suffer in her fundamental role as wife and mother, man will be similarly afflicted in his basic role as farmer and food-producer (cf. 2:15).
3. Ironically, the ground that was under the man's care in the garden as his source of joy and life (2:15) becomes the source of pain for the man's wearisome existence (v. 17). For the woman childbirth was marked with its attendant pain (v. 16), and in the cultivation of the wild and stubborn ground the man will know the toilsome pain of deriving food from the dust. The ground will now be his enemy rather than his servant. The same expression "all the days of your life"

ii. All the Days

1. "All the days of your life"; cf. v 14. These phrases link the sentence on the man to that pronounced on the snake and the woman. As the curse on the ground foreshadows the problems discussed in the next verse, so "all the days of your life" hints at their limited lifespan made explicit in v 19.

c. Thorns and Thistles

- i. The phrase "It will bring up thorns and thistles" stands in contrast to 2:5
- ii. Thorns and thistles" become the native product of the land (v. 18), but it was not always so (see 2:5–6 discussion). This new condition of the land, "producing" (שָׁמְחָה) its yield of thorns, stands in conspicuous contrast to God's beneficent creative act, where he brought forth (שָׁמְחָה) a gorgeous and nutritious orchard for the man's pleasure (2:9). Adam's sin has spoiled his environment, and it suffers along with him since both are of the "dust."

d. Sweat

i. To Eat

1. By the sweat of your brow.” Work itself is not a punishment for sin. Man was placed in the garden to cultivate it (2:15). Rather it was the hardship and frustration that attended work that constitutes the curse. “As for man, his punishment consists in the hardship and skimpiness of his livelihood, which he must now seek for himself. The woman’s punishment struck at the deepest root of her being as wife and mother; the man’s strikes at the innermost nerve of his life: his work, his activity, and provision for sustenance”

IV. Return to the Ground

- a. Man was “shaped from the *dust* of the land” (2:7); now he must return to *dust*. Woman was *taken* out of man (2:23) as man was *taken* from the ground (3:19). Man’s lifelong struggle for survival will eventually end in death.
- b. Here we come to the last word of judgment. Adam’s toil will be without relief until his final destiny of death. This explains Lamech’s later naming of “Noah,” in whom he expresses hope for relief from the drudgery of working the ground that travails under divine curse (see 5:29; 9:20 discussion).
- c. Adam’s death is portrayed by the dreadful wordplay on his creation and essential physical constitution as the “dust” (‘*āpār*) of the “ground” (‘*ādāmā*) (2:7; Eccl 3:20; Ps 103:14). His “return” will be from whence he came: ‘*ādām* will become once again ‘*ādāmā* (“ground”). Death is exactly what God had forewarned (2:17) and what the serpent had denied (3:4). Death comes by the reversal (“returns”) of the man’s God-given state, that is, a “living being” (2:7). This reversal is the deterioration of the body that will “return” to the dust from which it was made (cf. Job 10:9; Ps 104:29).

Word Studies

Pain - **anxious toil, hardship** Gn 3:16¹

Desire- **desire, longing**

This noun appears only three times in the OT, once in Song 7:10 [H 11]. The woman says of her beloved: “I am my beloved’s and his ‘desire’ is for me.” The two remaining references are Gen 3:16 and 4:7. In the latter passage God is speaking to Cain and says to him that sin is like a crouching beast “hungering, intent upon” Cain. In the former passage God says, “Your ‘desire’ shall be to your husband and he shall rule over you.” This is obviously neither an intensification nor a warping of a pre-existing hierarchy between the sexes for no such hierarchy is alluded to.

There are two differences between the Gen passage (3:16) and that in the Song of Solomon. In the former the reference is to the wife’s desire for her husband. In the latter it is the bride-groom’s desire for the bride. Second, in the Gen passage the reference to “desire” is in a context of sin and judgment. In the latter, the reference is in a context of joy and love.²

WANTING AND DESIRING. The expression “desire” or “inordinate longing” is reflected in the OT primarily by the roots *’wh* and *ḥmd*. The root *’wh* appears as a verb in the *Pi’el*, *Hitp’ael*, and *Nip’al* (30x) and as a noun in the forms *’awwâ*, *ta’ăwâ*, and *ma’ăwayîm*. The root *ḥmd* appears as a verb in the *Qal*, *Pi’el*, *Nip’al* (21x) and as a noun in the forms *ḥemed*, *ḥemdâ*, *ḥămudôt*, *ḥemdûn*, *maḥmăd*, and *maḥmôd* (TWA³T 1: 145–48; 2: 1020–32; THA⁴T 1: 74–76, 579–81).

The words *’wh* and *ḥmd* are synonymous and often appear in parallelism (Gen 3:6) or interchangeably in the same context (Exod 20:17 and Deut 5:21; Prov 6:25 and Ps 45:12; Ps 68:17 and Ps 132:13–14). Nevertheless, even the word *bḥr* (“choose”) can appear in parallelism with *’wh* (Ps 132:13–14; Job 23:13, conjecture following Fohrer, KA⁵T XVI, 362–63). Likewise, there is a thematic connection between the terms *’wh* and *ḥmd* and the semantic range of *ḥšb* (“think, consider”). Finally, even the noun *hawwâ*, “desire” (Mic 7:3; Prov 10:3; 11:6), is related in meaning and cannot be distinguished semantically from *’wh*.

In the *Pi’el* the verb *’wh* is always associated with *nepeš* as a subject (except in Ps 132:13–14). Likewise, the nouns *’awwâ* and *hawwâ* are always found in connection with *nepeš*,

¹ Ludwig Koehler et al., [*The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*](#) (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994–2000), 865.

² Victor P. Hamilton, [“2352 אַחַד,”](#) ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 913.

³ TWA³T *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament*, ed. G. J. Botterweck, H. Ringgren, and H. J. Fabry. Stuttgart, 1970–

⁴ THA⁴T *Theologisches Handwörterbuch zum Alten Testament*, 2 vols., ed. E. Jenni and C. Westermann. Munich, 1971–76

⁵ KAT *Kommentar zum Alten Testament*

while the noun *ta'ăwâ* is determined by *nepeš* (Isa 26:8; Ps 10:3), *leb* (Ps 21:3), or *'ādām* (Prov 19:22). That indicates clearly that the verb *'wh* (shades of meaning between its verbal roots cannot be distinguished) as well as the corresponding nouns understand “desiring,” “wishing,” and “wanting” as a natural expression of the human personality or ego. The intensity and the object of this desire can be quite diverse. It is noteworthy, however, that this desire is concerned primarily with the basic needs of human life such as drinking (2 Sam 23:15), eating (Deut 12:20; Mic 7:1; Job 33:20; Prov 23:3, 6), a partner of the opposite gender (Ps 45:12), or good fortune in general (Prov 10:24; 11:23; Ps 21:3), to which belongs even a correct relationship with God (Isa 26:8–9; Amos 5:18).

Human desire is viewed throughout as normal and good insofar as a reasonable and correct measure is not exceeded and it is not directed toward the wrong ends. For this reason, desire for the property of one's neighbor (Deut 5:21) and striving for the company of evil persons (Prov 24:1) is prohibited. Whoever strives for evil is a wicked person (Prov 21:10), and the wicked person's desire is just as fruitless as is that of the lazy person (Prov 13:4; 21:25–26; Ps 112:10), because it is an inappropriate desire that has no actual basis. That applies also especially to an unquenchable desire that is directed against God (Num 11:4; Pss 78:29–30; 106:14). This desire, which is an expression of human self-realization, represents guilty rebellion against God that must be punished. Eve's desire for the tree in the midst of God's garden and its fruits should also be understood from this perspective (Gen 3:6): in doing this, she abandoned a state of obedience, and this called for punishment.

When God is the subject of *'wh* (Ps 132:13–14; Job 23:13), the word *'wh* expresses God's far-reaching freedom to make decisions, of which he makes full use.⁶

Listened -

Voice - expressions

Wife –

Rule - to rule, undertake something⁷ **rule, have dominion, reign**⁸

māšal occurs about eighty times in Qal, three times in Hiphil.

māšal usually receives the translation “to rule,” but the precise nature of the rule is as various as the real situations in which the action or state so designated occur. It seems to be the

⁶ K.-D. Schunck, [“Wanting and Desiring,”](#) ed. David Noel Freedman, trans. Phillip R. Callaway, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 866.

⁷ Ludwig Koehler et al., [The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament](#) (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994–2000), 647.

⁸ Francis Brown, Samuel Rolles Driver, and Charles Augustus Briggs, [Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon](#) (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 605.

situation in all languages and cultures that words for oversight, rule, government must be defined in relation to the situation out of which the function arises.

This will be illustrated by examining in order the first several appearances of *māšal* in the Bible. The sun and moon are said “to rule over the day and over the night” (Gen 1:18). They are merely the most prominent luminaries over day and night. Eve, standing for all wives, was given to understand that in the home the husband “shall rule over thee” (Gen 3:16). Such leadership as is appropriate—and it varies greatly—for a man to give his family is meant. Cain was told by God that he ought to master sin in his life, “Do thou rule over him” (Gen 4:7). Management over all the material goods of a master, as his steward, and management of all the personnel of the enterprise is indicated in the case of Abraham’s “servant” (Eliezer of Damascus? Gen 15:2): “his eldest servant of his house, that ruled over all that he had” (Gen 24:2). Direction of affairs of a large family as “firstborn-designate” is indicated by Joseph’s version of the sheaves—at least so his angry brothers interpreted the vision: “Shalt thou indeed reign over us” (Gen 37:8). *māšal* is used of Joseph’s administration of Egypt as Pharaoh’s prime minister. So Joseph claimed he had been made “a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt” (Gen 45:8); and his brothers agreed, “he is governor over all the land of Egypt” (Gen 45:26). The word occurs only once in Ex and there of the rule of law [very significant] over citizens of the Mosaic, Israelite civil commonwealth “to sell her he shall have no power” (Ex 21:8). The word is not in Lev or Num, but in Deut 15:6 Moses asserts that the nation Israel shall reign over other nations, under certain conditions—some sort of national subservience to a superior nation—and twice he uses *māšal*, once *Qal* perfect and once *Qal* imperfect. Context seems to mean that the rulership is in being the lending nation rather than the borrowing one.

Other instances, chosen somewhat at random, show that the supremacy of rich people over poor ones (Prov 22:7), of a fierce king over oppressed people (Isa 19:4), oppressive rule of one people over another (Jud 14:4; 15:11), leadership of a league or alliance of nations (I Kgs 4:4–21), the rule of God in providence (Ps 89:10 [H 9]), and even the power of self-control (Prov 16:32) are covered by the meaning of this word.

There is no specific theology to be drawn from the meaning of the word. Yet the passages cited and the seventy or so others not cited demonstrate the importance of the principle of authority, the absolute moral necessity of respect for proper authority, the value of it for orderly society and happy living and the origin of all authority in God, himself. Authority is of many degrees and kinds. It has various theoretical bases. It originates in God. Man has no authority at all as man but simply as God’s viceregent.⁹

Commanded – to **give an order, command**

Cursed Ground – **bind with a curse**

Toil- sorrow

⁹ Robert D. Culver, [“1259 מָשַׁל”](#), ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 534.

Commentary Studies

16 The sentence on the woman is traditionally scanned as a seven-beat line and a four-beat line. Alternatively it could be 4, 3, 2, 2.

I shall greatly multiply your pains and your pregnancies;
in pain you will bear children.

It should be noted that neither the man nor the woman are cursed: only the snake (v 14) and the soil (v 17) are cursed because of man. The sentences on the man and woman take the form of a disruption of their appointed roles. The woman was created to be man's helper and the mother of children (cf. 2:18, 23–24). The first part of her judgment is that maternity will be accompanied by suffering. "Your pains and your pregnancies" is probably hendiadys for "your pains of pregnancy." "To be a joyful mother of children" (Ps 113:9), preferably a large family, was a sure sign of God's blessing (cf. Pss 127, 128). Yet the pain of childbirth, unrelieved by modern medicine, was the most bitter known then (cf. Mic 4:9–10; Isa 13:8; 21:3). "In pain you will bear children." Neither the word used here for "pain," עֲצָב, nor the earlier one, עֲצָבוֹן, is the usual one for the pangs of childbirth. Cassuto plausibly suggests this term has been deliberately chosen by way of a pun on עֵץ "tree," as if to say the *tree* brought *trauma*.

Your urge will be to your husband,
but he shall rule over you.

Here it is more difficult to grasp the author's precise intention. Evidently he does not regard female subordination to be a judgment on her sin. In that woman was made from man to be his helper and is twice named by man (2:23; 3:20) indicates his authority over her. It is therefore usually argued that "rule" here represents harsh exploitive subjugation, which so often characterizes woman's lot in all sorts of societies. " 'To love and to cherish' becomes 'To desire and to dominate' " (Kidner, 71). Women often allow themselves to be exploited in this way because of their urge toward their husband: their sexual appetite may sometimes make them submit to quite unreasonable male demands. Once again, woman's life is blighted at the most profound level.

Susan Foh (*WTJ* 37 [1974/75] 376–83) has, however, argued that the woman's urge is not a craving for her man whatever he demands but an urge for independence, indeed a desire to dominate her husband. Such an interpretation of "urge" is required in the very closely parallel passage in 4:7, where sin's urge is said to be for Cain, but he must master it. Here in 3:16 woman's desire for independence would be contrasted with an injunction to man to master her. There is a logical simplicity about Foh's interpretation that makes it attractive, but given the rarity of the term "urge" (תְּשׁוּקָה, apart from Gen 3:16 and 4:7 occurring only in Cant 7:11), certainty is impossible.

¹⁰*WTJ Westminster Theological Journal*

17–19 The sentence on the man is the longest and fullest, since he bore the greatest responsibility in following his wife’s advice instead of heeding God’s instructions personally given to him. The length of the curses has led some commentators to suggest that two versions have been combined here, but Westermann’s view that one traditional curse formula, 17b–19b, has been expanded by prose additions in 17a and 18b and a proverb in 19c has fewer difficulties.

17 “To man” or “Adam.” Many commentators believe this is the first instance of “Adam” being used as a personal name; cf. *Comment* on 1:26.

“Because you have obeyed your wife.” Note that, as in v 14, the causal clause precedes the main clause, emphasizing the relative importance of the former (cf. n. 14.a¹¹). Obeying his wife rather than God was man’s fundamental mistake. שָׁמַע לְקוֹל, literally, “listen to the voice of,” is an idiom meaning “obey” cf. 16:2; Exod 18:24; 2 Kgs 10:6 (BD¹²B, 1034a).

“Eaten.” Five times in three verses is eating mentioned. Man’s offense consisted of eating the forbidden fruit; therefore he is punished in what he eats. The toil that now lies behind the preparation of every meal is a reminder of the fall and is made the more painful by the memory of the ready supply of food within the garden (2:9).

“The land is cursed.” אֲדָמָה, “land” one of the key words of the narrative (cf. 2:5–7, 19) is mentioned at the beginning and close of the curse “until you return to the land” (v 19), thereby forming an inclusion. Land blessed by God is well-watered and fertile (Deut 33:13–16; cf. Gen 2:8–14), so that when cursed it lacks such benefits (cf. v 18).

“In pain [עֲצָבוֹן] you will eat.” Note the similar terminology in v 16. As woman is doomed to suffer in her fundamental role as wife and mother, man will be similarly afflicted in his basic role as farmer and food-producer (cf. 2:15).

“All the days of your life”; cf. v 14. These phrases link the sentence on the man to that pronounced on the snake and the woman. As the curse on the ground foreshadows the problems discussed in the next verse, so “all the days of your life” hints at their limited lifespan made explicit in v 19.

18 The phrase “It will bring up thorns and thistles” stands in contrast to 2:5, 9, where the same root צָמַח “spring up, sprout” is used. The same combination of “thorns and thistles” growing up in desolate places is found in Hos 10:8. “Plants of the plain”; cf. 2:5 and 1:11–12. Here it probably covers both wild and cultivated plants in contrast to the fruit-bearing trees of the garden supplied by the LORD God for their sustenance, already giving a hint that they will soon be leaving the garden.

19 “By the sweat of your brow.” Work itself is not a punishment for sin. Man was placed in the garden to cultivate it (2:15). Rather it was the hardship and frustration that attended work that constitutes the curse. “As for man, his punishment consists in the hardship and skimpiness of his livelihood, which he must now seek for himself. The woman’s punishment struck at the

¹¹14.a. It is unusual for a כִּי (because) clause to precede main clause; cf. v 17. When the causal clause precedes the main clause, it underlines its importance. The more important clause comes first (Joüon, 170n).

¹²BDB F. Brown, S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs (eds.), *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*

deepest root of her being as wife and mother; the man's strikes at the innermost nerve of his life: his work, his activity, and provision for sustenance" (von Rad, 93–94).

"Until you return to the land from which you were taken for you are dust." Here much of the phraseology of man's creation is picked up. Man was "shaped from the *dust* of the land" (2:7); now he must return to *dust*. Woman was *taken* out of man (2:23) as man was *taken* from the ground (3:19). Man's lifelong struggle for survival will eventually end in death. Most commentators have taken this curse as confirmation of the death-threat announced in 2:17 on those who eat of the forbidden tree. However, some have disputed this (notably Skinner and Westermann, and more guardedly, Gunkel and Jacob). They argue that the parallels between this verse (3:19) and 2:7 suggest that death is "part of the natural order of things—the inevitable 'return' of man to the ground whence he was taken" (Skinner, 83). They point out that the story does not say man would have lived forever if he had not eaten. "Death is therefore not punishment for man's transgression; it is the limitation of the toil of human work" (Westermann, 1:363; cf. E¹³T 267).

While commentators must always seek to free themselves from their own dogmatic prejudices in recovering the original sense of the text, it is doubtful whether Skinner and Westermann are justified in this instance. Though there are close parallels between 2:7 and 3:19, the omissions are significant, most obviously the absence of any mention of the breath of life which had made man a living creature. Furthermore, the curse has already mentioned a change in man's feeding arrangements, suggesting that he would no longer enjoy access to the tree of life. Finally, and most decisively, the sentence on man is introduced in v 17 by an exact though incomplete quotation of the original prohibition not to eat of the tree of knowledge (2:17).

The narrator, who according to Westermann added 3:17a to the older curse formulae, must have expected the listener to complete the quotation of 2:17 and to be looking for a confirmation of the threat of death in the curses. But he holds this back to v 19, when at last man is explicitly told that he will return to the land: "for you are dust and to dust you must return," a remark that is echoed in many biblical passages, e.g., Job 10:9; 34:15; Ps 103:14; Eccl 12:7, etc. In this way the original threat is endorsed.

It is nevertheless striking that life and death are not mentioned in so many words in Gen 3:17–19; the return to dust is presented as inevitable, rather than as an immediate consequence in the death penalty which 2:17 led us to expect. Just as the remarks about toiling for food suggest that exclusion from the garden is imminent, so does the ultimacy of death, for obviously man could expect to live forever if he were free to eat of the tree of life. It may be then that the narrator avoids life-and-death language in this verse, because for him only life in the garden counts as life in the fullest sense. Outside the garden, man is distant from God and brought near to death. The warnings about returning to dust eventually hint that a drastic change will shortly overtake the man.¹⁴

¹³ET English translation

¹⁴ Gordon J. Wenham, [Genesis 1–15](#), vol. 1, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1987), 81–83.

3:16 Unlike the penalties announced against the serpent and the man (i.e., “the ground,” v. 17), there is no occurrence of “curse” related to the woman’s suffering. Moreover, there is no cause specified for her suffering, whereas the serpent is charged with deception (v. 14) and the man with eating disobediently (v. 17). This is due to the woman’s culpability through deception, in contrast with the willful rebellion of the serpent and man; also the oracle has a gentler word for the woman since her punishment entails the salvation of the human couple (v. 15). Whereas the man’s action condemned the human family, Eve will play the critical role in liberating them from sin’s consequences. This is realized in part immediately since the woman gives birth to new life (e.g., 4:1, 25), but v. 15 indicates that the final conflict will also be humanity’s victory by virtue of the woman’s role as childbearer.

Controversial opinion has arisen in recent times regarding the interpretation of the woman’s judgment since contemporary feminism has awakened a reconsideration of women’s roles in the home, society, and the church.²¹¹⁵⁴ Whereas traditionally the woman’s submission to her husband was accepted as an ordinance of creation²¹¹⁶⁵ that was corrupted by the fall and which can only be restored through the Christian gospel, new voices propose that Eve’s submission was an altogether new state resulting from sin.²¹¹⁷⁶ Alternatively, it has been proposed that the submissive role of the woman at 3:16b, whether or not viewed originally as a creation ordinance, is read as a “blessing” that insures that salvation will be accomplished by the seed of the woman.²¹¹⁸⁷

Confusion revolves around the extent to which the penalty in 3:14–19 altered the condition of the participants, many reasoning that the serpent’s anatomy was altered and the woman’s position as Adam’s peer changed. There is no anatomical alteration, however, and no change in the essential position of the serpent and the woman; rather there is added the burden of humiliation. The snake remains the crafty beast that he was, but now he is distinguished from the animals in humiliation as well (cp. vv. 1 and 14). Likewise the woman continues her ordained role as childbearer and, as we contended at 2:23, her followship function, but now she will

¹⁵²¹⁴ Five interpretations are noted in R. Davidson, “The Theology of Sexuality in the Beginning: Genesis 3,” *AUSS* 26 (1988): 121–31. The first two views agree that hierarchy is a creation ordinance, but (1) it was distorted by sin, or (2) judgment includes a blessing restoring it. The last three views agree that there was no subordination before the fall, but (3) 3:16 is a description, not a permanent prescription for the man-woman relationship, or (4) 3:16 prescribes a new pattern, or (5) “rule” means “like” in 3:16, affirming original equality.

¹⁶²¹⁵ For the traditional view see Calvin, *Comm.*, 172; G. C. Aalders, *Genesis*, BSC, trans. W. Heynen (Grand Rapids: Regency/Zondervan, 1981), 108; Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 81.

¹⁷²¹⁶ E.g., Spencer, *Beyond the Curse*, 39–42 and G. Bilezikian, *Beyond Sex Roles: A Guide for the Study of Female Roles in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), 56–58. Among commentators, e.g., Sarna, *Genesis*, 28 and Hamilton, *Genesis 1–17*, 175, 201–2.

¹⁸²¹⁷ This has its antecedents among the Reformers too, for Luther read the woman’s submission as a consequence of the fall, not a creation ordinance: “Hence it follows that if the woman had not been deceived by the serpent and had not sinned, she would have been the equal of Adam in all respects” (*LW* 1.115). At 3:16 he commented that her submission, however, was a “gladsome punishment,” for it insured her salvation (*LW* 1.203).

experience “painful labor” in childbirth, and her submission is insured. Also the man carries on his commission to lead in agricultural pursuits, but now his vocation will be marked by strenuous “labor,” and he will return to “dust” in humiliation.

The woman’s penalty impacts her two primary roles: childbearing and her relationship with her husband. It is appropriate punishment since procreation was central to her divine commission and because she had been instrumental in her husband’s ruin (cf. 3:17a). Just as God initiates the enmity between the woman and serpent, he is responsible (“I will greatly increase”) for the pain she will experience in the birth of that “seed,” which will ultimately defeat her archenemy (cf. Gal 4:4; 1 Tim 2:15). The verse consists of two parallel lines (literally): “I will greatly increase your painful labor and your conception”// “in painful labor you will bear sons (v. 16a); and to your husband (will be) your desire”//“and he will rule over you” (v. 16b)

First, her penalty stresses the “painful labor” she must endure in childbirth,²¹¹⁹⁸ but the punishment also nurtures hope since it assumes that she will live to bear children.²¹²⁰⁹ As parallel terms *‘iṣṣābôn* and *‘eṣeb* are rendered “painful-labor,” which reflects the customary meaning of *‘iṣṣābôn*, “toil.” It occurs just twice more (v. 17; 5:29) and indicates hard labor. Thus the penalty is the attendant labor or hard work that childbearing will now mean for Eve. This matches the “labor” that Adam will undergo as a consequence of the curse against the ground (3:17). By procreation the blessing for the human couple will be realized, and ironically the blessing is assured in the divine pronouncement of the penalty. By this unexpected twist the vehicle of her vindication (i.e., labor) trumpets her need for the deliverance she bears (cp. 1 Cor 11:12). Painful childbirth signals hope but also serves as a perpetual reminder of sin and the woman’s part in it.

Second, her sin also tainted her relationship with her husband. “Desire” (*tēšûqâ*) occurs but twice more (Gen 4:7; Song 7:10 [11]), and its meaning in our passage is highly disputed. It has been explained widely as sexual desire on the basis of Song 7:10 [11] and the reference to childbirth in 3:15. If so, the adversative rendering of the following clause, “yet he will rule” (as NAS²¹B, NRS²²V), would mean that despite her painful experience in childbirth she will still have (sexual) desires for her husband.²²²³⁰ In other words, the promissory blessing of procreation will

¹⁹²¹⁸ The rhyming Heb. couplet עֲצוֹבוֹךְ וְהִרְבָּה with the traditional rendering “thy sorrow and thy conception” (AV, NKJV) is better taken as a hendiadys, indicating one idea (cf. NIV, NASB, NRSV).

²⁰²¹⁹ The emphatic construction “I will greatly increase” (הִרְבָּה אֲרַבָּה) with the unusual form of the infinitive absolute, rather than the expected הִרְבָּה, underscores the intensity of the punishment (A. Reisner, *“Harbâ ‘arbeh,” Beth Mikra* 36 [1990–91]: 80–83 [Heb.]). This construction also anticipates the only other two passages where this unusual infinitival form occurs (16:10; 22:17). In both cases the context is God’s promise of blessing through the birth of many children. Therefore the verse includes the hint of blessing as well as the clear decree of pain.

²¹NASB New American Standard Bible

²²NRSV New Revised Standard Version

²³²²⁰ J. J. Schmitt (“Like Eve, Like Adam: *mšl* in Gen 3, 16,” *Bib* 72 [1991]: 1–22) proposes for “rule” a Hebrew homonym (מִשַּׁל) meaning “to be like,” thus “he will be like you.” The verse speaks of the mutual sexual desire of the man and woman, making all the more certain that the woman will undergo painful childbirth. This interpretation fits with v. 15 (“childbearing”), but

persist despite any possible reluctance on her part due to the attendant pain of delivery. Others view the woman's desire as broader, including an emotional or economic reliance on her husband. In other words, she acted independently of her husband in eating the fruit, and the consequent penalty is that she will become dependent on him. Her new desire is to be submissive to the man, and, quite naturally, he will oblige by ruling over her.²²²⁴¹ Some have mitigated the idea of penalty by contending that Eve's submission is a penalty only when her husband takes advantage of his position and mistreats her.²²²⁵² Others argue that 3:16 is no part of the judgment; it is a description of the inherent consequences of sin wherein the headship of the man has been corrupted by sin.²²²⁶³

Although sexual "desire" conforms to v. 15, better is the explanation suggested by Gen 4:7b, where "desire" and "rule" [*māšal*] are found again in tandem: "It desires to have you, but you must master [*māšal*] it."²²²⁷⁴ In chap. 4 "sin" is like an animal that when stirred up will assault Cain; it "desires" to overcome Cain, but the challenge God puts to Cain is to exercise "rule" or "mastery" over that unruly desire. If we are to take the lexical and structural similarities as intentional, we must read the verses in concert. This recommends that 3:16b also describes a struggle for mastery between the sexes. The "desire" of the woman is her attempt to control her husband, but she will fail because God has ordained that the man exercise his leadership function. The force of the defeat is obscured somewhat by the rendering "and he will rule"; the conjunction is better understood as "*but* he will rule." The directive for "rule" is not given to the man, for that has already been given and is assumed (2:15, 18); rather, the issue of "rule" is found in God's directive toward the woman, who must succumb by divine edict. Thus the Lord affirms in the oracles of judgment the creation order: the serpent is subjected to the woman, the woman to the man, and all to the Lord. "In those moments of life's greatest blessing—marriage and children—the woman would serve most clearly the painful consequences of her rebellion from God."²²²⁸⁵

What is the nature of the man's "rule"? "Rule," as verb or derivative, is found seven additional times in Genesis, where it may indicate governance (1:16 [twice], 18; cf. Ps 136:7–9)

the linguistic support is not strong. The claim that among the numerous usages of "rule" there is no parallel to the persons or context of 3:16 is not convincing since we can hardly expect one to match the unique setting of the garden oracles. לִשְׁמֹכֵהוּ with the meaning "like" is attested in derivative stems, but not in the *qal* as here in 3:16. Also, among the uses of "like," none correspond to 3:16 (cf. Job 30:19; Pss 28:1; 49:12 [13], 20 [21]; 143:7; Isa 14:10; 46:5). Moreover, the reference to marital disharmony in the traditional rendering of 3:16 ("rule") has its match in the subsequent clause, where the judgment against the man makes allusion to the ensuing gender struggle in the indictment, "because you listened to your wife" (3:17).

²⁴²²¹ H. G. Stigers, *A Commentary on Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), 80; for economic dependence see Sarna (*Genesis*, 28), who thinks both penalties in the verse perhaps are a "reflection of social reality" historically for women.

²⁵²²² M. Stitzinger, "Genesis 1–3 and the Male/Female Role Relationship," *GTJ* 2 (1981): 23–44.

²⁶²²³ I. A. Busenitz, "Woman's Desire for Man: Genesis 3:16 Reconsidered," *GTJ* 7 (1986) 203–12.

²⁷²²⁴ S. Foh, "What Is the Woman's Desire?" *WTJ* 37 (1975): 376–83; but 3:16b is more than description, as Foh contends; there is also the prescriptive tenor.

²⁸²²⁵ Sailhamer, "Genesis," 56.

and refers to exercising jurisdiction (24:2; 37:8; 45:8, 26). The temperament of “rule” in the Old Testament is dependent on the varying circumstances in which that power is exercised.²²²⁹⁶ The term is used too broadly to isolate its meaning in 3:16b lexically as either beneficent or tyrannical.²²³⁰⁷ Human jurisdiction over the lower orders, however, is expressed by the different verb “dominate” (*rādâ*; 1:28), suggesting that the man does not “rule” his wife in the sense that he subdues the animals. We cannot understand the divine word “he will rule over you” as a command to impose dominance any more than v. 16a is an exhortation for the woman to suffer as much as possible during childbirth. It is a distortion of the passage to find in it justification for male tyranny. On the contrary, ancient Israel provided safeguards for protecting women from unscrupulous men (e.g., Deut 24:1–4), and the New Testament takes steps to restrain domination. Paul admonished men and women to practice mutual submission (Eph 5:22–33) and cautioned husbands to exercise love and protection without harshness (Col 3:19). Because of the threat of harsh dominance, Paul commanded Christian charity toward women in the community of the home and the church.

3:17–18 The final word is directed against the man (vv. 17–19). Adam’s penalty also fit his crime since his appointed role was intimately related to the ground from which he was made and which he was charged to cultivate (2:7, 15). Now the “ground” is decreed under divine “curse” on his account (see 3:14 discussion). The man will suffer (1) lifelong, toilsome labor (vv. 17–18) and finally (2) death, which is described as the reversal of the creation process (v. 19 with 2:7). Although the woman will die too (2:17), the death oracle is not pronounced against her since she is the source of life and therefore living hope for the human couple. It is the man who bears the greater blame for his conduct and is the direct recipient of God’s death sentence.

As in the pronouncement against the serpent (v. 14), God pinpoints the reason for the ensuing penalty (v. 17). Adam listened to his wife and ate of the forbidden fruit. Repeating the original prohibition verbatim, “you must not eat of it” (2:17), reinforces the severity of the crime and reminds him of the dire consequences of his rebellion. Emphasis on the second person “you” and “your” sharpens God’s focus on the man’s individual fault. There is no room for avoidance now; he is caught without a word to say.

Moreover, the punishment reveals that the man’s sin is the cause for the “curse” against the ground, resulting in its harvest of thorns and thistles. Ironically, the ground that was under the man’s care in the garden as his source of joy and life (2:15) becomes the source of pain for the man’s wearisome existence (v. 17). For the woman childbirth was marked with its attendant pain (v. 16), and in the cultivation of the wild and stubborn ground the man will know the toilsome pain of deriving food from the dust. The ground will now be his enemy rather than his servant. The same expression “all the days of your life” occurred in God’s judgment against the serpent, where he will eat “dust” as his punishment (v. 14). This punishment also involves the “dust” of the ground, tying together the two crimes and their consequences.

²⁹²²⁶ See R. Culver, “מָשַׁל (*mashal*),” *TWOT* 1.534.

³⁰²²⁷ It is used of royal rule (e.g., Josh 12:2), stewardship (e.g., Prov 17:2), master-slave relations (Exod 21:7–8), despotism (e.g., Prov 22:7; Isa 19:4), and oppression of a subservient people (Judg 14:4). Its metaphorical usage occurs in Gen 4:7b and Prov 16:32, where the context concerns self-control. Also it is used of God’s sovereign dominion (e.g., Ps 103:19; Isa 40:10).

“Thorns and thistles” become the native product of the land (v. 18), but it was not always so (see 2:5–6 discussion). This new condition of the land, “producing” (*šmḥ*) its yield of thorns, stands in conspicuous contrast to God’s beneficent creative act, where he brought forth (*šmḥ*) a gorgeous and nutritious orchard for the man’s pleasure (2:9). Adam’s sin has spoiled his environment, and it suffers along with him since both are of the “dust.” “You will eat the plants of the field” echoes 2:5 and anticipates his expulsion from the garden (3:23), outside where he must battle the elements as a toiling farmer. Now the conditions of land and life are those we are accustomed to, which at one time did not exist (2:5–7) but have come about by the man’s sin. The passage has brought us full circle from creation’s bliss to sin’s burden. Nevertheless, the sentencing itself contains God’s gracious provision since the man will still derive sustenance from the ground for survival.

Moreover, there remains hope for a final, full liberation for both Adam and the environment that will occur at the glorious consummation of the age. Paul’s commentary on vv. 17–18 in Rom 8:19–22 points to the future hope that the natural (nonrational) creation possesses.²²³¹⁸ The world experienced corruption, not of its own choosing but by the condemnation of God for the sin of Adam; however, creation looks to the prospects of redemption that will be realized by it and the saints at the advent of Christ’s glory. Both the creation and the “children of God” groan as with birth pangs (Gen 3:15–16) for the dawning of the new era. Paul’s point was that this very groaning confirms the hope of the children of God for their full future adoption and redemption, which presently is assured by the Spirit.

3:19 Here we come to the last word of judgment. Adam’s toil will be without relief until his final destiny of death. This explains Lamech’s later naming of “Noah,” in whom he expresses hope for relief from the drudgery of working the ground that travails under divine curse (see 5:29; 9:20 discussion). Adam is depicted as a broken farmer whose very meals, which are derived from the grain of his agrarian life, are spoiled by the fatigue of his striving. Like the woman’s painful childbirth, the man’s daily labors with their attendant woes are a perpetual reminder of sin’s rewards.

The chiasmus underscores the linkage between the man’s creation from “dust” (2:7) and the “return” to the man’s beginnings.²²³²⁹

A you return
 B to the ground
 C since (*kî*) from it you were taken
 C’ for (*kî*) dust you are
 B’ and to dust
 A’ you will return

Adam’s death is portrayed by the dreadful wordplay on his creation and essential physical constitution as the “dust” (*āpār*) of the “ground” (*’ādāmâ*) (2:7; Eccl 3:20; Ps 103:14). His “return” will be from whence he came: *’ādām* will become once again *’ādāmâ* (“ground”). Death is exactly what God had forewarned (2:17) and what the serpent had denied (3:4). Death comes by the reversal (“returns”) of the man’s God-given state, that is, a “living being” (2:7).

³¹²²⁸ Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 299–310.

³²²²⁹ See Kempf, “Genesis 3:14–19: Climax of the Discourse?” 366.

This reversal is the deterioration of the body that will “return” to the dust from which it was made (cf. Job 10:9; Ps 104:29). The inner elements of the structure are introduced by parallel conjunctions (*kî*), rendered as causal in most versions (NIV, NAS³³B, NA³⁴B, NJP³⁵S, NJ³⁶B), but the second occurrence has sometimes been taken as emphatic, “indeed dust you are” (RE³⁷B). “Dust you are” always overcomes the progress of medicine and the ingenuity of cosmetology; every opened casket proves it so.

God did not execute the penalty by taking Adam’s life but by banning him from the rejuvenating power of the tree of life (3:22). Though not excommunicated from the divine presence (4:1–2), Adam’s expulsion from the garden sealed his doom and that of all who followed. Resounding evidence of the divine penalty is found in Seth’s genealogy, where Adam’s death is related (5:5) and the unrelenting knell sounded for generation after generation, “and then he died.” Paul’s interpretation of this passage focuses on physical death brought into this world by the first man (Rom 5:12–21; cf. 6:23). Yet those who are living in the sphere of sin are deemed spiritually dead already (Eph 2:1). Unlike Adam, all his generations are born excluded from the garden; only through the last Adam, who insures the “life-giving spirit,” does human mortality take on the garments of immortality (1 Cor 15:35–58).³⁸

16. The doom of the woman: consisting 16. אל] Read וְאֵל־, with ⁴⁹𐤀𐤏𐤍⁵⁰ ⁵¹—הַרְבֵּה in the hardships incident to her sex, and אַרְבֵּה] So 16:10; 22:17. On the irreg. form of social position in the East. The pains of inf. abs., see G-K⁵². § 75ff.—;3:17) [עֲצוֹן עֲצוֹן] childbirth, and the desire which makes her 5:28⁵³† [⁵⁴J]. ⁵⁵ λῦτα (= [וְהָרַךְ]—). עֲצוֹן עֲצוֹן

³³NASB New American Standard Bible

³⁴NAB New American Bible

³⁵NJPS New Jewish Publication Society Version

³⁶NJB New Jerusalem Bible

³⁷REB Revised English Bible

³⁸K. A. Mathews, [Genesis 1-11:26](#), vol. 1A, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996), 248–254.

⁴⁹𐤀𐤏𐤍 The Samaritan Recension of the Pent. (Walton’s ‘London Polyglott’).

⁵⁰Ⲑ The Greek (Septuagint) Version of the OT (ed. A. E. Brooke and N. M’Lean, Cambridge, 1906).

⁵¹Ⲫ The Syriac Version (*Peshittā*).

⁵²G-K. Gesenius’ *Hebräische Grammatik*, völlig umgearbeitet von E. Kautzsch (26th ed. 1896) [Eng. tr. 1898].

⁵³† After OT references means that all occurrences of the word or usage in question are cited.

⁵⁴J Yahwist, or Jahwistic Narrative.

⁵⁵Ⲑ The Greek (Septuagint) Version of the OT (ed. A. E. Brooke and N. M’Lean, Cambridge, 1906).

‘the pain of thy conception’ (as in the and defended by Nestle ⁷²(*M⁷³M*, 6) as a explanatory clause which follows).—*in pain* technical expression for the relation here ... *children*] The pangs of childbirth are indicated, on the basis of ⁷⁴s text of 2 Sa. proverbial in O⁴⁴T for the extremity of 17:3. His parallel between the *return* of the human anguish (Is. 21:3; 13:8; Mic. 4:9; Ps. woman to her source (the man) and the 48:6, and oft.: Ex. 1:19 cannot be cited to return of the man to *his* source (the ground, the contrary).—*to thy husband ... desire*] Itv. 19) is perhaps fanciful.

is quite unnecessary to give up the rare but expressive תְּשׁוּקָה of the Heb. for the weaker תְּשׁוּבָה of ⁴⁵, etc. (*v.i.*⁴⁶). It is not, however, implied that the woman’s sexual desire is stronger than the man’s (Kn⁴⁷. Gu⁴⁸.); the point rather is that by the instincts of her nature she shall be bound to the hard conditions of her lot, both the ever-recurring pains of child-bearing, and subjection to the man.—*while he* (on his part) *shall rule over thee*] The idea of tyrannous exercise of power does not lie in the vb.; but it means that the woman is wholly subject to the man, and so liable to the arbitrary treatment sanctioned by the marriage customs of the East. It is noteworthy that to the writer this is not the ideal relation of the sexes (cf. 2:18, 23). There is here certainly no trace of the matriarchate or of polyandry (see on 2:24).

17–19. The man’s sentence.—The hard, unremitting toil of the husbandman, wringing a bare subsistence from the grudging and intractable ground, is the

⁴⁴OT Old Testament.

⁴⁵Ⲯ The Greek (Septuagint) Version of the OT (ed. A. E. Brooke and N. M’Lean, Cambridge, 1906).

⁴⁶*v.i. vide infra* Used in references from commentary to footnotes, and *vice versa*.

⁴⁷Kn. A. Knobel.

⁴⁸Gu. *Genesis übersetzt und erklärt*, von H. Gunkel (2nd ed. 1902).

⁷²Nestle (E. Nestle, *Marginalien und Materialien* (1893).

⁷³*MM* E. Nestle, *Marginalien und Materialien* (1893).

⁷⁴Ⲯ The Greek (Septuagint) Version of the OT (ed. A. E. Brooke and N. M’Lean, Cambridge, 1906).

standing evidence of a divine curse, resting, not, indeed, on man himself, but on the earth for his sake. Originally, it had provided him with all kinds of fruit good for food,—and this is the ideal state of things; now it yields nothing spontaneously but thorns and briars; bread to eat can only be extorted in the sweat of the brow,—and this is a curse: formerly man had been a gardener, now he is a *fellah*. It does not appear that death itself is part of the curse. The name death is avoided; and the fact is referred to as part of the natural order of things,—the inevitable ‘return’ of man to the ground whence he was taken. The question whether man would have lived for ever if he had not sinned is one to which the narrative furnishes no answer (Gu⁷⁵).—17. *And to the man*] v.i⁷⁶. The sentence is introduced by a formal recital of the offence.—*Cursed is the ground*] As exceptional fertility was ascribed to a divine blessing (27:28 etc.), and exceptional barrenness to a curse (Is. 24:6; Jer. 23:10), so the relative unproductiveness of the whole earth in comparison with man’s expectations and ideals is here regarded as the permanent effect of a curse.—*in suffering* (bodily fatigue and mental anxiety) *shalt thou eat* [of] *it*] See 5:29. The ‘laborious work’ of the husbandman is referred to in Sir. 7:15; but this is not the prevailing feeling of the O⁷⁷T; and the remark of Kno., that “agriculture was to the Hebrew a divine institution, but at the same time a heavy burden,” needs qualification. It is well to be reminded that “ancient Israel did not live constantly in the joy of the harvest festival” (Gu⁷⁸.); but none the less it

⁷⁵Gu. *Genesis übersetzt und erklärt*, von H. Gunkel (2nd ed. 1902).

⁷⁶v.i. *vide infra* Used in references from commentary to footnotes, and *vice versa*.

⁷⁷OT Old Testament.

⁷⁸Gu. *Genesis übersetzt und erklärt*, von H. Gunkel (2nd ed. 1902).

would be a mistake to suppose that it lived habitually in the mood of this passage.—18. *the herb of the field*] See on 1:11. The creation of this order of vegetation has not been recorded by ⁷⁹J. Are we to suppose that it comes into existence simply in consequence of the earth's diminished productivity caused by the curse? It seems implied at all events that the earth will not yield even this, except under the compulsion of human labour (see 2:5).—19. *in the sweat of thy brow, etc.*] A more expressive repetition of the thought of 17bβ. The phrase *eat bread* may mean 'earn a livelihood' (Am. 7:12), but here it must be understood literally as the immediate reward of man's toil.—*till thou return, etc.*] hardly means more than 'all the days of thy life' (in v. 17). It is not a threat of death as the punishment of sin, and we have no right to say (with Di⁸⁰.) that vv. 16–19 are simply an expansion of the sentence of 2:17. That man was by nature immortal is not taught in this passage; and since the Tree of Life in v. 22 belongs to another recension, there is no evidence that the main narrative regarded even endless life as within man's reach. The connexion of the closing words is rather with 2:7: man was taken from the ground, and in the natural course will return to it again.—*and to dust, etc.*] Cf. Jb. 10:9; 34:15; Ps. 90:3; 146:4; Ec. 3:20; 12:7 etc.: ἐκ γαίης βλαστῶν γαῖα πάλιν γέγονα.

The arrangement of the clauses in 17–19 is not very natural, and the repeated variations of the same idea have suggested the hypothesis of textual corruption or

⁷⁹J Yahwist, or Jahwistic Narrative.

⁸⁰Di. *Die Genesis. Von der dritten Auflage an erklärt von A. Dillmann* (6th ed. 1892). The work embodies frequent extracts from earlier edns. by Knobel: these are referred to below as "Kn.-Di."

fusion of sources. In *Jub*⁸¹. 3:25 the passage is quoted in an abridged form, the line 'Cursed ... sake' being immediately followed by 'Thorns ... to thee,' and 18b being omitted. This is, of course, a much smoother reading, and leaves out nothing essential; but 17b is guaranteed by 5:29. Ho⁸². rejects 18b, and to avoid the repetition of *אכל תעברנה* instead of *תאכלנה* in 17. Gu⁸³. is satisfied with v. 17f. as they stand, but assigns 19aα (to *לחם*) and 19b to another source (⁸⁴ינ), as doublets respectively of 17bβ and 19aβ. This is perhaps on the whole the most satisfactory analysis.—The poetic structure of the vv., which might be expected to clear up a question of this kind, is too obscure to afford any guidance, Siever⁸⁵s, *e.g.* (II. 10f.) finds nothing, except in v. 19, to distinguish the rhythm from that of the narrative in which it is embedded, and all attempts at strophic arrangement are only tentative.⁸⁶

16. The doom of the woman: consisting ⁹⁵16. אל Read ואֶל־, with ⁹⁶הרבה. — in the hardships incident to her sex, and ארבה So 16:10; 22:17. On the irreg. form of social position in the East. The pains of inf. abs., see G-K⁹⁷. § 75ff.—; 3:17) עצבון

⁸¹*Jub. The Book of Jubilees.*

⁸²Ho. *Genesis erklärt*, von H. Holzinger (1898).

⁸³Gu. *Genesis übersetzt und erklärt*, von H. Gunkel (2nd ed. 1902).

⁸⁴J Yahwist, or Jahwistic Narrative.

⁸⁵Sievers *Studien zur hebräischen Metrik*, i. (1901).

⁸⁶ John Skinner 1851-1925, [*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis*](#), International Critical Commentary (New York: Scribner, 1910), 82-85.

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⁹⁶ 000 The Samaritan Recension of the Pent. (Walton's 'London Polyglott').

⁹⁷G.-K. Gesenius' *Hebräische Grammatik*, völlig umgearbeitet von E. Kautzsch (26th ed. 1896) [Eng. tr. 1898].

§ The Syriac Version (*Peshittā*).

Ⓖ The Greek (Septuagint) Version of the OT (ed. A. E. Brooke and N. M'Lean, Cambridge, 1906).

childbirth, and the desire which makes her 5:28^{98†} [99]. ¹⁰⁰ λύπαζ (= the willing slave of the man, impressed the ¹⁰¹הרה [והרנך] (?עצבותך): ¹⁰²והריון (Ru. 4:13; Ho. 9:11). Ols¹⁰³. (*MB*¹⁰⁴A, 1870, unnatural; therefore to be accounted for by 380) conj. בְּהַרְיוֹן, to avoid the harsh use of a curse imposed on woman from the ¹⁰⁵τὸν δὲ στυγνὸν σου probably = הגיון; beginning.—*I will multiply, etc.*] More יְגוֹן, ('sorrow') has also been suggested strictly, 'I will cause thee to have much (Gu¹⁰⁶.); and צָרְתָּךְ (Di¹⁰⁷. Ho¹⁰⁸. al.). The suffering and pregnancy' (see Dav⁸⁷. § 3, R. other Vns. follow M¹⁰⁹ד. — בעצב (2)). It is, of course, not an intensification of בעצב; ¹¹¹ likewise repeats ἐν pain to which she is already subject that is λύπαζ. — [תשוקה] Probably connected with meant.—For הִרְנָה, read some word Ar. *šauk*, 'ardent desire' (Rahlf's "עֲנִי und meaning 'groaning' (v.i.⁸⁸.); but to prefer this עֲנִי," p. 71); cf. שִׁקָּק, Is. 29:8; Ps. 107:9. Aq¹¹². reading on the ground that Hebrew women συστάφεια, ¹¹³Σ. ὀρμή. Although it recurs esteemed frequent pregnancy a blessing only 4:7 and Ca. 7:11, it is found in N¹¹⁴H

⁸⁷Dav. A. B. Davidson, *Hebrew Syntax*.

⁸⁸v.i. vide *infra* Used in references from commentary to footnotes, and *vice versa*.

☞ The Greek (Septuagint) Version of the OT (ed. A. E. Brooke and N. M'Lean, Cambridge, 1906).

⁹⁸† After OT references means that all occurrences of the word or usage in question are cited.

⁹⁹J Yahwist, or Jahwistic Narrative.

¹⁰⁰☞ The Greek (Septuagint) Version of the OT (ed. A. E. Brooke and N. M'Lean, Cambridge, 1906).

¹⁰¹√ Root or stem.

¹⁰²Ⓜ The Samaritan Recension of the Pent. (Walton's 'London Polyglott').

¹⁰³Ols. J. Olshausen.

¹⁰⁴*MBA Monatsberichte der königl. preuss. Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin*. Continued in *Sitzungs-berichte der k. p. Ak. ...* (1881–).

¹⁰⁵☞ The Greek (Septuagint) Version of the OT (ed. A. E. Brooke and N. M'Lean, Cambridge, 1906).

¹⁰⁶Gu. *Genesis übersetzt und erklärt*, von H. Gunkel (2nd ed. 1902).

¹⁰⁷Di. *Die Genesis. Von der dritten Auflage an erklärt von A. Dillmann* (6th ed. 1892). The work embodies frequent extracts from earlier edns. by Knobel: these are referred to below as "Kn.-Di."

¹⁰⁸Ho. *Genesis erklärt*, von H. Holzinger (1898).

¹⁰⁹MT Massoretic Text.

¹¹⁰Ⓜ The Samaritan Recension of the Pent. (Walton's 'London Polyglott').

¹¹¹☞ The Greek (Septuagint) Version of the OT (ed. A. E. Brooke and N. M'Lean, Cambridge, 1906).

¹¹²Aq. Greek Translation of Aquila.

¹¹³Σ Greek Translation of Symmachus.

¹¹⁴NH 'New Hebrew'; the language of the Mishnah, Midrashim, and parts of the Talmud.

(Gu⁸⁹.) makes a too general statement. It is and should not be suspected. ¹¹⁵ ἡ better (with Ho⁹⁰.) to assume a *hendiadys*: ἀποστροφή σου and ¹¹⁶ תַּשׁוּבָה point to 'the pain of thy conception' (as in the reading תַּשׁוּבָה, preferred by many, explanatory clause which follows).—*in pain* and defended by Nestle ¹¹⁷(*M*¹¹⁸*M*, 6) as a ... *children*] The pangs of childbirth are a technical expression for the relation here proverbial in O⁹¹T for the extremity of indicated, on the basis of ¹¹⁹'s text of 2 Sa. human anguish (Is. 21:3; 13:8; Mic. 4:9; Ps. 17:3. His parallel between the *return* of the 48:6, and oft.: Ex. 1:19 cannot be cited to woman to her source (the man) and the the contrary).—*to thy husband ... desire*] Its return of the man to *his* source (the ground, is quite unnecessary to give up the rare but v. 19) is perhaps fanciful.

expressive תַּשׁוּבָה of the Heb. for the weaker תַּשׁוּבָה. of , etc. (v.⁹²). It is not, however, implied that the woman's sexual desire is stronger than the man's (Kn⁹³. Gu⁹⁴.); the point rather is that by the instincts of her nature she shall be bound to the hard conditions of her lot, both the ever-recurring pains of child-bearing, and subjection to the man.—*while he* (on his part) *shall rule over thee*] The idea of tyrannous exercise of power does not lie in the vb.; but it means that the woman is wholly subject to the man, and so liable to the arbitrary treatment sanctioned by the marriage customs of the East. It is noteworthy that to the writer this is not the ideal relation of the sexes (cf. 2:18, 23). There is here certainly no trace of the matriarchate or of polyandry (see on 2:24).

⁸⁹Gu. *Genesis übersetzt und erklärt*, von H. Gunkel (2nd ed. 1902).

⁹⁰Ho. *Genesis erklärt*, von H. Holzinger (1898).

⁹¹OT Old Testament.

⁹²v.i. *vide infra* Used in references from commentary to footnotes, and *vice versa*.

☞ The Greek (Septuagint) Version of the OT (ed. A. E. Brooke and N. M'Lean, Cambridge, 1906).

⁹³Kn. A. Knobel.

⁹⁴Gu. *Genesis übersetzt und erklärt*, von H. Gunkel (2nd ed. 1902).

¹¹⁵☞ The Greek (Septuagint) Version of the OT (ed. A. E. Brooke and N. M'Lean, Cambridge, 1906).

¹¹⁶☞ The Syriac Version (*Peshittā*).

¹¹⁷Nestle (E. Nestle, *Marginalien und Materialien* (1893).

¹¹⁸MM E. Nestle, *Marginalien und Materialien* (1893).

¹¹⁹☞ The Greek (Septuagint) Version of the OT (ed. A. E. Brooke and N. M'Lean, Cambridge, 1906).

¹²⁰**17–19. The man's sentence.**—The hard, unremitting toil of the husbandman, wringing a bare subsistence from the grudging and intractable ground, is the standing evidence of a divine curse, resting, not, indeed, on man himself, but on the earth for his sake. Originally, it had provided him with all kinds of fruit good for food,—and this is the ideal state of things; now it yields nothing spontaneously but thorns and briars; bread to eat can only be extorted in the sweat of the brow,—and this is a curse: formerly man had been a gardener, now he is a *fellah*. It does not appear that death itself is part of the curse. The name death is avoided; and the fact is referred to as part of the natural order of things,—the inevitable 'return' of man to the ground whence he was taken. The question whether man would have lived forever if he had not sinned is one to which the narrative furnishes no answer (Gu¹²¹).—17. *And to the man*] v.i.¹²². The sentence is introduced by a formal recital of the offence.—*Cursed is the ground*] As exceptional fertility was ascribed to a divine blessing (27:28 etc.), and exceptional barrenness to a curse (Is. 24:6; Jer. 23:10), so the relative unproductiveness of the whole earth in comparison with man's expectations and ideals is here regarded as the permanent effect of a curse.—*in suffering* (bodily fatigue and mental anxiety) *shalt thou eat* [of] *it*] See 5:29. The 'laborious work' of the husbandman is referred to in Sir. 7:15; but this is not the prevailing feeling of the O¹²³T; and the

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¹²¹Gu. *Genesis übersetzt und erklärt*, von H. Gunkel (2nd ed. 1902).

¹²²v.i. *vide infra* Used in references from commentary to footnotes, and *vice versa*.

¹²³OT Old Testament.

remark of Kno., that “agriculture was to the Hebrew a divine institution, but at the same time a heavy burden,” needs qualification. It is well to be reminded that “ancient Israel did not live constantly in the joy of the harvest festival” (Gu¹²⁴.); but nonetheless it would be a mistake to suppose that it lived habitually in the mood of this passage.—18. *the herb of the field*] See on 1:11. The creation of this order of vegetation has not been recorded by ¹²⁵J. Are we to suppose that it comes into existence simply in consequence of the earth’s diminished productivity caused by the curse? It seems implied at all events that the earth will not yield even this, except under the compulsion of human labour (see 2:5).—19. *in the sweat of thy brow, etc.*] A more expressive repetition of the thought of 17bβ. The phrase *eat bread* may mean ‘earn a livelihood’ (Am. 7:12), but here it must be understood literally as the immediate reward of man’s toil.—*till thou return, etc.*] hardly means more than ‘all the days of thy life’ (in v. 17). It is not a threat of death as the punishment of sin, and we have no right to say (with Di¹²⁶.) that vv. 16–19 are simply an expansion of the sentence of 2:17. That man was by nature immortal is not taught in this passage; and since the Tree of Life in v. 22 belongs to another recension, there is no evidence that the main narrative regarded even endless life as within man’s reach. The connexion of the closing words is rather with 2:7: man was taken from the ground, and in the natural course will return to it again.—*and to dust, etc.*] Cf. Jb. 10:9; 34:15;

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The arrangement of the clauses in 17–19 is not very natural, and the repeated variations of the same idea have suggested the hypothesis of textual corruption or fusion of sources. In *Jub*¹²⁷. 3:25 the passage is quoted in an abridged form, the line ‘Cursed ... sake’ being immediately followed by ‘Thorns ... to thee,’ and 18b being omitted. This is, of course, a much smoother reading, and leaves out nothing essential; but 17b is guaranteed by 5:29. Ho¹²⁸. rejects 18b, and to avoid the repetition of *אכל* proposes *תעברנה* instead of *תאכלנה* in 17. Gu¹²⁹. is satisfied with v. 17f. as they stand, but assigns 19aα (to *לחם*) and 19b to another source (¹³⁰J), as doublets respectively of 17bβ and 19aβ. This is perhaps on the whole the most satisfactory analysis.—The poetic structure of the vv., which might be expected to clear up a question of this kind, is too obscure to afford any guidance, Siever¹³¹s, *e.g.* (II. 10f.) finds nothing, except in v. 19, to distinguish the rhythm from that of the narrative in which it is embedded, and all attempts at strophic arrangement are only tentative.¹³²

¹²⁷*Jub. The Book of Jubilees.*

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¹³²John Skinner 1851-1925, [*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis*](#), International Critical Commentary (New York: Scribner, 1910), 82–85.