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CHAPTER TWO

“HE SHALL BE LIKE YOU”
GENESIS 3:16

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II

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GENESIS 3:16

אֶל-הָאִשָּׁה אָמַר ה'רַבָּה אֲרַבָּה עֲצָבוֹנֶךָ וְהִרְבִּי
בְּעֲצָב תֵּלְדֵי בָנִים
וְאֶל-אִישְׁךָ תִּשְׁוֶקְתֶּךָ וְהוּא יִמְשַׁלְּךָ:

Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply your sorrow
and your conception;
in sorrow you shall bring forth children;
and your desire shall be to your husband,
and he shall be just like you.
(McDaniel)

AN ALTERNATIVE READING OF A VERB

The verb **יִמְשַׁל** in Gen 3:16 is from **מָשַׁל** stem I, “to be like, to be similar,” rather than **מָשַׁל** stem II, “to rule, to reign,” as traditionally interpreted and translated. As noted in the Hebrew lexicons (BDB 605), **מָשַׁל** stem I, “to be like” is not attested in the simple *Qal* form. However, in light of the the Aramaic **מִתַּל** “to be comparable,”¹ which is well attested in the simple *Pē^cal* form and corresponds to the Hebrew *Qal* form (Jastrow 862), there is good reason to assume that the Hebrew verb **מָשַׁל** stem I was also used in the simple *Qal* form, meaning “to be like, to be comparable.” This would mean that lexicographers, along with translators and commentators, erred in assigning the *Qal* **יִמְשַׁל** in Gen 3:16 to stem II, rather than to stem I. Recognition of a *Qal* for **מָשַׁל** stem I would permit the retention of **יִמְשַׁל** as the correct

vocalization. But this would require giving *מָשַׁל* in 3:16 a different definition than the one found in Rabbinic and Christian tradition.

It is also possible that the scribes mis-vocalized *יִמְשַׁל* as *יִמְשֵׁל*, having wrongly assumed that the word was from *מָשַׁל* stem II “to rule” because it was so widely attested in the *Qal*. The *יִמְשַׁל* could actually be an intensive *Pi^cel* form of the verb to be vocalized *יִמְשֵׁל* meaning “he will be just like (you).”²

Were the original word *יִמְשַׁל* in Gen 3:16 an intensive *Pi^cel* verb, confusion would not have occurred in the oral tradition since the intensive *יִמְשֵׁל* and the simple form *יִמְשַׁל* are clearly dissimilar in speech. Confusion would have come only with a written text where *יִמְשַׁל* could have been read as either *יִמְשֵׁל* or *יִמְשֵׁל*.³

The widespread use of the suffixed preposition *בְּךָ* with *מָשַׁל* stem II, is not decisive in support of the traditional translation of Gen 3:16 as “he shall rule over you.” The Arabic cognate of *מָשַׁל* “to be like” also takes the preposition *בְּ* as, for example, *تمثل بكذا* (*tamaṭṭala bikadâ*) “he affected to be like such a thing” (Lane 1893: 3017c). Thus, *בְּ* was probably used in Hebrew with *מָשַׁל* stem I “to be like unto,” as well as *מָשַׁל* stem II “to rule over.”

SHARING THE SAME SORROW

The *עֲצֹבוֹן* “sorrow” and *עָצַב* “sorrow” in 3:16 are balanced by the repetition of *עֲצֹבוֹן* in 3:17, indicating that the curse for the man and the woman were similar, although not identical since the *עֲצֹבוֹן* was gender specific.⁴ The sorrow would come to the woman through the fruit of the womb when death could rob her of her joy over the new life. The sorrow of the man

would come through the fruit of the field which he would produce, for thorns and thistles could preclude adequate food to sustain the new life. The penalty for each was *essentially* the same. Consequently, it is not surprising that the woman was told **יִמְשַׁל בְּךָ** “he will be just like you!” rather than **יִמְשַׁל בְּךָ** “he will rule over you!”

The **עֲצָבוֹן** “sorrow” common to the man and the woman was explicitly spelled out; but the mutual **תְּשׁוּקָה** “sexual desire,” explicitly expressed in Song of Songs 7:11 (“for me is his desire”), was only implicitly addressed in Gen 3:16.

If the early Greek translation of the **הִרְיָנָה** “your conceiving” in Gen 3:16 as “your moaning”⁵ has any merit, it would well demonstrate another similarity in the gender specific curses. The women’s lamentation would be matched by the man’s grief evidenced by a “running nose” mentioned in 3:19. The **בְּזַעַת אִפְיֶךָ**, commonly translated “sweat of your brow,” is literally “the dripping of your nostrils.”⁶ The dripping nose could speak of crying due to the sorrow which comes when even hard work leaves one fruitless and one’s progeny starving.

The man and the woman would have their equal share of grief. This shared grief was not to rob them of the blessing of labor itself, i.e., the blessing of a progeny and produce. The **שַׁבָּת** “Sabbath rest” would provide relief for them both from the fatigue and pain of labor, but there would be no respite for their aching hearts in a struggle with nature, a struggle for survival, and a struggle for life. The **עֲצָבוֹן** “sorrow” was the reality of human mortality. (The opportunity to eat of the tree of life in Eden was forever gone.) Birth would be overshadowed by death and the sorrow it produces.

GENDER EQUALITY

The equality of the man and the woman fashioned in creation survived the fall. Death and sorrow were not resisters of person or gender. Thus, it was well said to the woman concerning the man, “He will be just like you!” A hierarchy of men over women is not required by the Hebrew **יְמִשֵּׁל בְּךָ** of Gen 3:16, even though the pervasive patriarchal hierarchy insinuated itself into the translations of and traditions about this text. These traditions and translations added another dimension to the sorrow—the sorrow *of* the man and the woman became the grief *between* the man and the woman once a hierarchy was introduced when **יְמִשֵּׁל בְּךָ** was misunderstood to mean “he will rule over you” rather than “he will be like you.”

The Genesis creation accounts clearly affirm the equality of the man and the woman. The male **אָדָם** (Adam = “Earthling”), though created before the female **חַוָּה** (= Eve = “Life”), could not claim “first come, first served” since he was created from the feminine **אֲדָמָה** “earth” which was made before him and from which he received his name. As the *man* (**אָדָם** = “earthling”) came from the *earth* (**אֲדָמָה**), the *woman* (**חַוָּה**) came from the *man* (**אִישׁ / אָנוּשׁ**). The narrator carefully balanced (1) the priority of the feminine before the masculine and (2) the priority of the male before the female to make a clear the gender equality.

The translations of **עֵזֶר כְּנֹדֶרֶת** in Gen 2:18 as “an help meet for him” (KJV) or “a helper fit for him” (RSV) are misleading in that they suggest a subordinate role as a “helpmate.” Actually, both words indicate an elevated role for the woman. The word **עֵזֶר** means a “savior” or a “rescuer” and was used to describe God’s being the savior of Israel (Psa 20:3,

121:1–2, 124:8). When Adam was the lone human, he could not procreate by himself. He needed someone who could deliver him from his aloneness. The woman saved him not simply by her presence, but by their progeny—and in progeny there was a kind of immortality.

Moreover, the second word in the phrase, כַּנְגִידוֹ, is a composite of (1) the preposition כִּי “as,” (2) the substantive נִגְדָה “front,” and (3) the suffix י “his,” which together mean literally “as his front-one.” For the theologians of Genesis, the woman was not *beneath* or *behind* the man; she was designed to be *ahead* of him. The noun of the stem נִגְדָה is נִגְדָה meaning “the one in front” or “the leader,” which was used as a title for Saul, David, Solomon, and other rulers of Israel and other nations.

NOTES

1. The ת appears in place of the ש as expected since the original phoneme was the inter-dental fricative *t* which survives in the Arabic cognate مثل (*matāla / mitl*) “to resemble / a similar person or thing” (Lane 1893: 3017; Wehr 1979: 1046–1048). The *t* shifted to a ש in Hebrew and to a ת in Aramaic.
2. Since the *Hithpa^cel* (the reflexive of the intensive *Pi^cel*) or its equivalent is attested in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Arabic, the *Pi^cel* must also have been used in Hebrew, along with the other forms cited in the lexicons.
3. An original *Pi^cel* יִמְשֵׁל— which is not attested for מְשַׁל stem II— would have avoided the ambiguity of the *Qal* יִמְשַׁל which could have been from either stem I “to be like” or stem II “to rule.

4. It is important to note that עֲצָבוֹן is correctly translated by “sorrow” since it speaks of emotional rather than physical pain. See BDB 781–782 for all occurrences of עֲצָב in the Bible.

5. As noted by Katherine Bushnell (1923, ¶ 134–144) the majority of early Greek translations and other versions of Gen 3:16 have “turning” rather than “desire.” These translations reflect a *Vorlage* with תְּשׁוּבָה or תְּשׁוּגָה (= תְּסוּגָה) rather than תְּשׁוּקָה—an error in which there was an misreading of the ק of תְּשׁוּקָה as a ב or the dialectal interchange of the ק and ג (comparable to the Hebrew שָׁקֵד “almond” and the Aramaic שִׁיגְדָא “almond”). Thus, the difference between “your turning” and “your desire” was not a matter of different ways in which תְּשׁוּקָתְךָ was translated. It was simply a misreading of the תְּשׁוּקָתְךָ “your desire” as תְּשׁוּבָתְךָ “your turning” or equating the stems שׁוּק and שׁוּג. The Vulgate’s *potestate* “power” reflects the stem שׁוּק which was the cognate of the Arabic سوق (*sawwaq*) “he made such a one to have the ruling of his affair” (Lane, 1872: 1471). In Walton’s *London Polyglot* of 1657 the text has قِيَادُكَ (*qaya’duki*) “your submission,” which reflects a similar derivation (Lane, 1885: 2573). The feminine תְּאוּבָתָא “desire” in Targum Onkelos could be confused easily with the masculine תְּאוּבָתָא “returning” (Jastrow, 1903: 1641).

6. Reading perhaps וְהִגִּינְךָ “and your moaning” for וְהִרְנֶנְךָ “and your conceiving.”

7. Hebrew אָף “nose” and the dual אֲפִיִּם “nostrils” can also be used for “face,” as reflected in the Septuagintal ἐν ἰδρωτί τοῦ προσώπου σου “in the sweat of your face.” The Hebrew word for “brow” or “forehead” is מִצְחָה.