



Script of Episode 1. Genesis 3:16 has been polluted! by Bruce C. E. Fleming

Intro:

Welcome to **The Eden Podcast** where we think again about the Bible on women and men and we start with a correct understanding of what happened in the Garden of Eden back in the beginning.

I'm Bruce C. E. Fleming, founder of the Tru316 Project and a former Academic Dean and Professor of Practical Theology.

The focus of this episode is:

Genesis 3:16 has been polluted!

Let's get started.

Body:

When I was a university student a major river in my home state caught fire. The flaming river was so engulfed that there were flames five-stories high coming off that river. So the fire department was called and they had to put out the river. How do you put out a body of water flowing through a city?

The problem of course wasn't just that the river itself was on fire. The problem had been that there was all kinds of pollution in the water. Hardly any fish were left alive in that river. And on top of the river there was all kinds of oily pollution flowing along.

A railroad ran alongside the river at points. A passing train had sent some sparks from its wheels down into the river. It started a huge fire. It was the big story at the time. We all wondered how could a river of water catch on fire?

As people looked into it they discovered it was an ongoing problem. There had been a dozen events in previous years when that river had caught fire. Public interest in that fire moved politicians to eventually pass the Clean Water Act.

As we know today, rivers don't catch on fire. It's the pollution in the river that causes the problem. Where did the pollution come from? They went upstream to look and there they found the source of the pollution. They had to stop the pollution at its source. Then they had to clean it up all the way downstream. It took a lot of work.

I would like us to focus on Genesis 3:16, early in the Bible, because it turns out that there's been a lot of pollution dumped into that verse by translations into the modern languages we use today. They mix new ideas into the verse and cover over the ideas God put there in the original Hebrew words of the verse.

The verse itself is great. God is speaking to the woman in the Garden of Eden. But the translation of that verse has been incorrect and it's important for us to ask Why aren't our translations doing better? And why would there be a problem translating this verse? What's going on?

Downstream from this pollution source in the Bible there have been many fires that have been lit. There are seven key passages in the Bible that talk about women and men in the home, in the church and in society that have caught on fire from this pollution. So I'd like us to think again about the Bible especially in relationship to women and men and the pollution that needs to be cleaned up in our translations to let us understand what the pure stream of inspiration from God is really saying. As of right now most major translations still contain, and transmit, that pollution.

There's been significant research done on this. During my wife's doctoral research years and afterwards she found the source of the pollution and also found that when the pollution is removed from Genesis 3:16 we see clearly what the message from God really is.

What's the pollution? Here it is. The pollution is the idea that somehow, in some way, God basically cursed the woman in the Garden of Eden.

Over the years, we have done informal surveys on this. We have simply asked, "How many curses did God make in the Garden of Eden? There's a lot of confusion out there. People say that there were three curses, maybe four curses, or maybe even a lot more.

They come up with: God cursed the serpent, and God cursed the woman, and God cursed the man, oh and God cursed the ground. And some find lots more curses. But they are incorrect. God only made two curses in Eden, not three, not four and certainly not more, and importantly God never cursed the woman.

This fact pollution of excess and misplaced curses is not new. One could say it is as old as the Serpent. In ancient Jewish teachings, not in the Bible, they came up with TEN curses on Eve! They blamed them on Eve saying Eve deserved all ten curses because she was supposedly the problem.

Influenced by the fires set by this polluting idea, people ask questions that add to the pollution. Here's one. If she was the first woman, can we learn more about all women by studying cursed Eve? Here's another. If the first woman deserved a curse then don't all women deserve her curse?

This sounds very much like the poisonous pagan myth of Pandora. The idea there was, it was all her fault. All things bad came about because of her.

Who would want the world to think this way about his enemy, the woman in the Garden of Eden? All kinds of fires are started by the polluting idea that God somehow cursed the woman in the Garden of Eden.

But, the truth right from the Hebrew text of the Bible is that God did not curse the woman, or the man. God cursed only two times in the Garden of Eden. God cursed neither the woman, nor the man.

The Hebrew word for "curse" is *'arar*. When God first uses the word *'arar*, in Genesis 3, God curses the body of the serpent. When God uses the word *'arar* the second time it is to curse the ground.

As the result of the serpent being cursed, it crawls on its belly in the dust – which is a fitting thing. The man had been made out of dust and the serpent attacked the man and the woman. Because of the curse on the serpent it would eat dust all the days of its life!

The ground also received a curse. This would change things for the woman and the man. It would cause *'itsebon* which means “sorrowful-toil.”

To start clearing up this pollution it is important to look at the way Genesis 2 through 3 is written out in Hebrew because the way this passage is carefully written tells us what the words themselves mean. The form of the passage itself conveys content.

The very complex structure of Genesis chapters 2 and 3 was revealed by my wife, Dr. Joy Fleming, in her research. She discovered that Genesis chapters 2 through 3 contains a literary chiasm.

In a chiasm, early and late sections mirror each other, or have a correspondence between the first and last section, the second and the next to the last and so on. The center point is often the key or turning point.

I find it helpful to think of a chiastic pattern kind of like a rainbow. When we see part of a rainbow going up, even though we may not see the complete rainbow coming down on the other side we know what a rainbow is like. We've seen them before. And because we know that rainbows have the same colors on the way up and on the way down we can predict where the colors will end up because we know how rainbows are structured.

We need to recognize that starting with verse 4, Genesis 2-3 is structured as a chiasm, like a type of rainbow. If we note what's in the sections of Genesis chapter 2 going up we can expect certain things coming down in the sections on the other side in Genesis chapter 3.

My wife found another pattern. It is an important smaller pattern in Genesis 3:15-17. It links God's words to the woman with God's words to the man, and God's words to the serpent. It is an interlocking crossover pattern, or a linchpin, centered in God's words to the woman quoted in Genesis 3:16.

In time, she came across an article by a scholar who pointed out a similar linchpin pattern in the first section of Genesis chapter 2. There three verses are linked together in a similar way. This is a crucial way the sections of the chiasm in chapters 2-3 correspond to each other. There's a linchpin in the first section and there's a linchpin in the last section.

The linchpin in Genesis 3:16 is centered in God's first words to the woman. The woman is told about two things God is going to do that will impact her life. The first thing God will do links down to verse 17 and what God will say next to the man. The second thing links back to verse 15 and what God has just said to the serpent.

In Genesis 3:16, God says to the woman, I will greatly multiply two things. The Hebrew words for each of these are *'itsebon* and *heron*.

'itsebon is linked to the man's actions. God tells the woman you will have *'itsebon*. *'itsebon* means “sorrowful-toil.” At this point, God doesn't tell her what will cause that to come to pass. He just says, You're going to have *'itsebon*.

But, as God talks to the man as quoted in verse 17, God tells the man, Cursed is the ground because of you and you are going to have *'itsebon*. As a result of God's cursing the ground, when the man works it with his hands he will have sorrowful-toil.

Ah! What *'itsebon* is and where it comes from becomes clear. The cause of what is prophetically spoken to the woman is revealed when God speaks to the man because this curse comes in judgment for what the man has done. *'itsebon* comes as the result of God's curse on the ground because of the man.

A lot of people think that *a really mean God* **cursed** both of the human beings he made. But God didn't curse either one of them. God didn't curse either the woman or the man.

God says to the man, Cursed is the ground! ... The ground? Not the man? Well, that was close! God cursed the serpent. God could've cursed the man. But God didn't do that.

Here we learn more about God. God was a wonderful Creator. God created the man from dust and then the woman. The two of them were together with God in the Garden of Eden. God walked with them in the Garden, spoke to them, they had fellowship together, friendship, love. They got along well in that Garden. And now after the terrible things that happened at the beginning of Genesis chapter 3, God comes along and doesn't curse either of them!

For whatever has gone on in your life in the past and in mine, look at how wonderful God wants to be to us! God was not out to *get* either the woman or the man. And, God wants be gracious to you and to me!

So, why did God utter a second curse after cursing the serpent? God said to the man, "Cursed is the ground *because of you*." Something the man did earned that curse. God didn't place that curse *on* the man. God *deflected* it and placed that curse on the ground.

The result of the curse for the man was to be *'itsebon*, "toil," or "sorrowful-toil" when he worked the soil with his hands.

This Hebrew word *'itsebon* is used only three times in the Bible. It is not a general word that can be taken in various ways. It is only used in regard to the ground the Lord God curses. It is not used any other time in any other place to mean anything else except the sorrowful toil that will come from working the cursed ground doing fieldwork.

The only other time *'itsebon* is used in the Bible, besides Genesis 3:16 and 3:17, is in Genesis 5:29. There, the father of Noah, there's a familiar name – we all know about Noah and the Flood, Noah's father gives us additional insight into this sorrowful toil and how it is affecting everyone. The child is named "Noah" which means "relief" or "comfort," and here is the verse: This one, Noah, will comfort us concerning our work and the sorrowful toil, *'itsebon*, of our hands, because of the ground which the LORD has cursed."

Two other Hebrew words that sound similar to *'itsebon* are used in the context of Genesis 3. They are *'ets* which is the word for tree and *'etsev* which means effort. Neither one has to do with the specific heartbreaking sorrowful-toil of *'itsebon* that is used only these three times in the Bible and only when talking about working the ground God curses because of the man. This sorrowful-toil God tells the woman about in Genesis 3:16 is not something that applies only to the woman. She will experience it at the same time the man will experience it when they work the fields.

We can now translate together what God says to the woman in Genesis 3:16: I'm going to greatly multiply your *'itsebon*, your sorrowful toil, in fieldwork.

In 3:16, the word “and” introduces the second thing that God will multiply. It is this: and, I’m going to multiply your *heron*. *Heron* is the Hebrew word for “pregnancy” or even “conception.” This is good news!

In Genesis chapter 1, at the end of the chapter, God *blesses* the man and the woman. And God tells them to “Be fruitful and multiply.” There’s that word – “multiply!” The woman hears it when God speaks to the woman and man at creation telling them to “multiply.” There the word is linked with blessing, with multiple children. It is a wonderful word.

If you look elsewhere in the Old Testament in addition to Genesis 3:16 you’ll find the word “multiply” used two more times in the same specific grammatical construction that is used in Genesis 3:16. Both refer to Abraham’s offspring. God would multiply his offspring so that they would be as numerous as the sands on the seashore, or as numerous as the stars of the heavens.

In Genesis 3:16 God says I’m going to multiply your toil, your sorrowful toil, your *‘itsebon*. Then God wonderfully adds a good thing, I’m going to multiply your *heron*. I’m going to greatly multiply your pregnancy.

Multiplied *heron*, pregnancy or conception, was good news. This is God confirming they would be carrying out their mandate to be fruitful and multiply. Also, this involved God’s announcing a coming Messiah.

To summarize, God tells the woman I will greatly multiply two things – a bad thing and a good thing. First, the bad thing is you will have sorrowful toil in cultivating with your hands the ground which is about to be cursed. Second, the good thing is you’re going to have heron, multiplied pregnancies.

But, if you look in your Bible you likely won’t read about these two things God tells the woman. Instead you’ll come across a very different thing, a single idea that sounds almost like a curse! And a lot of people take it that way.

Here’s the way three of the most widespread versions have put it (and most of the others sound the same note). The way they word their mistranslation of the verse alters the meaning and makes it sound very different from the actual Hebrew text. They say, you’re going to have one new very bad thing at the very end of your pregnancy.

HCSB - “I will intensify your labor pains;”

ESV - “I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing,”

NASB - “Surely I will multiply your pain in childbirth,”

Put this way they’ve completely covered over God’s word about her having “sorrowful toil” in field work just like the man will have! Put this way, they’ve changed God’s word to her about her promised “pregnancies” to focus on only the very end of the nine month process. They miss the point here that God will be the agent in giving her children.

According to the Hebrew words these versions are supposed to be translating, God clearly spoke two words to her and joined them together with an “and.” But these mistranslations have covered over these two words with word pollution!

The second word God promises to multiply is “pregnancy, or conception.” That word must be clearly stated in our translations because it is linked in the linchpin to the word “offspring” or “seed” (*zera’* in Hebrew) that God used in Genesis 3:15.

There God spoke to the serpent and told the serpent, You know, you've got problems coming! I heard what the woman just said. And her words were true. You lied to her and deceived her and she's just revealed your actions. I'm confirming her and you as combatants. You're going to strike at her offspring's heel. But her offspring is going to Crush. Your. Head.

We'll come back to this and go more in depth. We'll also look at why translations have gone astray. Right now, at this point, as we think again about the cosmic battle being waged by the serpent against the woman and against the meaning of God's words to her in our translations, we need to clear up the pollution related to Genesis 3:16. We need to restore a true 3:16.

Close:

I invite you to visit our website at Tru316.com for links to our books, blog posts and our YouTube Channel with more than a dozen in-depth Workshops on the 7 key Bible passages on women and men from Eden on.

You can also receive a study guide on this episode for use in small groups and more. You can find it in the blog posts on Tru316.com or write me at Bruce@Tru316.com. And thanks for listening to **The Eden Podcast!**