



Script of Episode 6. Genesis 3:15-17 HIDDEN Word Patterns Uncovered, 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:

Surprised by the Word Patterns in Genesis 3:15-17

Let's get started.

Body:

In the days before GPS technology, a propeller-driven, six-seater single-engine missionary plane took off from a grass airstrip heading out across the raw African rainforest. The destination? Another isolated grass strip more than a hundred miles away. Some time after taking off into a clear blue sky, before it could get there, the ground below was covered by a thick layer of clouds that went on and on and on. Time passed. Where was the airstrip? An attempted landing any place other than that hand prepared airstrip would result in a terrible crash. The pilot asked the passengers to pray, then help look for a gap in the clouds so he could get oriented. Eventually they would have to descend into those clouds to set down.

Finally one of them spotted a gap in the clouds. The pilot looked, recognized a land mark and based on that insight immediately banked the plane down into a rapid descent. As the plane descended below the cloud layer the way to the airstrip was clear.

I've been in planes like that. And, I've felt like the six in that little plane who found that gap in the clouds.

The meaning of some verses in the Bible has been clouded as well. For me the greatest insight through confusing clouds came when my wife, Dr. Joy Fleming, told me she had found the key to unlocking the reading in Hebrew of God's words to the woman in the Garden of Eden in Genesis 3:16.

Using that key insight to navigate she opens up the meaning of God's words to the woman given to her after God addresses the serpent tempter in 3:14-15. Many people think God cursed the woman in some way and even perversely reordered relations between men and women in Genesis 3:16.

Some people reject a God who would say things like they think was said in this verse. Others, grit their teeth and hang on as they read through the words in their English translations

waiting till they get out of the clouded mess that seems to cover the verses at the end of Genesis chapter 3.

When that pilot took off from the grass airstrip part of the success of the pilot in finding a landing place came in knowing the lay of the land. Also, the pilot knew the landmarks and could navigate by them.

In her doctoral research my wife discovered a clear pattern written into Genesis 2-3. These two chapters are put together using a seven-part pattern that is a chiasm.

A chiasm can be pictured like a rainbow or as a bell curve. In a chiasm the theme or words used in a first line or section (let's call it A) are repeated in the corresponding section at the end (A'). Likewise with the second section from the beginning (B) and the next to the last section (B'). A chiasmic pattern works this way until the center section is arrived at. That section is often the key or turning point to the chiasm.

In Genesis chapter 2 God creates the man and puts him in the Garden of Eden. Then, God continues to create and relate until the summit is reached in 2:25. In chapter 3, Satan attacks and there is a sharp downward slope. The corresponding end sections of A and A' in Genesis 2 and 3 are that in A God places the man in the Garden of Eden and in A' God drives the man *out* from the Garden.

The discovery of the precise *parts* of the Genesis 2-3 passage provides the overview or the map of the terrain in Eden, so to speak. As my wife became convinced that these chapters were written in this pattern she discovered the sub-patterns that tie ideas together in the Hebrew text. She noticed that God's words to the serpent tempter and the man both contained the same key Hebrew words following a parallel pattern but that God's words addressed in between to the woman did not use that vocabulary or follow that pattern at all.

She noted however that God's words to the woman did connect in a particular way to God's words to the other two characters, addressed after and before her. This occurs in God's first four Hebrew words spoken to the woman in Line 1 of Genesis 3:16. The four Hebrew words take several more words to translate into English: Multiplying I-will-multiply your-sorrowful-toil and-your-conception.

Then one day while reading a journal article by Dr. Isaac Kikawada about a smaller word pattern way over in Genesis chapter 11, she had a gap-in-the-clouds moment. As Kikawada analyzed the structure of that passage he referred to a similar structure located in Genesis chapter 2.

Genesis 2? That drew her attention. That's my passage, she thought. If there was a recognizable special word pattern in Genesis chapter 2 in the first section of the upward curve of the passage, then we might expect to find a similar word pattern in the corresponding slope on the downhill side in Genesis chapter 3. And that's what she had been noticing for some time in her research. A noticeable word pattern, a linchpin pattern, centered in the four words of *Line 1* of Genesis 3:16 linked the words in this verse to the words in the verse after and the one before it. But she had never come across anyone commenting on that. And even here, Kikawada was only commenting on Genesis 2.

People who earn a master's degree are supposed to gain a mastery of what is known about something. People who become a doctor with a research degree are supposed to go beyond the master's level. They are supposed to reveal something new, something to add to our knowledge in their field of study. Had she found something new here? More importantly, were there revelations from God in the text of the Bible that had been overlooked, or that had somehow been obscured over the years?

If we peer into the cloud of Genesis 3 looking for two landmark linking words, the linchpin construction becomes clear. In Genesis 11 and Genesis 2, key words in the center section of a linchpin construction are linked to the same or similar words below and above the center section. As pointed out by Kikawada, in the Genesis 2 linchpin, in verse 8 in the middle, God brings together both plant life and *humanity*. Kikawada shows that this important “linking” takes place not only in *what* the words say but also in the *way* the words are arranged. The initial Hebrew word “planted” of verse 8 points down to verse 9 to the *similar* Hebrew word “made-grow.” The *last* Hebrew word in verse 8, “formed,” points back to the Hebrew word “formed” in verse 7.

When she read the remarks by Kikawada on Genesis chapter 2, my wife banked her plane, so to speak, and dove down for a closer look at the details of what she had found to verify that the patterns in Section A and Section A’ of Genesis 2 and 3 corresponded. Sure enough. Like Genesis 2:7-9, Genesis 3:15-17 is put together with a middle section having two key words linking it to the verses around it.

So, Genesis 3:16 is formed as a linchpin construction with two key words linked to 3:17 and 3:15!

As it turns out, recognizing *this* is very important when it comes to understanding these words and translating them into our modern languages. Missing the presence of this linchpin construction contributes to the mistranslation and misunderstanding of this very important verse. So it is necessary to think again and to nail down what is going on here in Hebrew.

As in the first linchpin, in Genesis 2, there are two words in 3:16 that link to the verses around it. The Hebrew word “sorrowful-toil” in verse 16 links down to the same Hebrew word, “sorrowful-toil,” in the verse after it. The Hebrew word, “conception,” in verse 16 links back to the similar Hebrew word “seed” or “offspring” in the verse before it. This precise way of arranging these words did not happen by accident. It is one of the ways Hebrew is written out to deliver information in a memorable way.

The first linking Hebrew word in 3:16 is *‘itsebon*. It means “sorrowful-toil” and points down to the same Hebrew word used in verse 17. There God tells the man that the curse on the ground made because of him will result for him in *‘itsebon* or “sorrowful-toil.” In fieldwork each one, the woman and the man, would have *‘itsebon* or “sorrowful-toil.”

And they weren’t to be the only ones. All humanity regardless of gender is subject to this *‘itsebon*, this “sorrowful-toil,” for we all have to deal in some way with the ground that God cursed because of the man.

The Hebrew word *‘itsebon* is used only three times in the Old Testament. The third and last time is instructive. In Genesis 5:29 a new child is born. He is named Noah. We’ve all heard of him. The name Noah means “relief,” “rest” or “comfort,” which means relief from *‘itsebon*, relief from sorrowful toil! Here is what the verse says where it uses the Hebrew word *‘itsebon*: “Now he called his name Noah, saying, “This one will give us rest from our work and from the sorrowful toil of our hands caused by the ground which the Lord has cursed.”

This “sorrowful toil of our hands” is true for the parents of Noah as well as for the first two humans in the Garden of Eden. It is not something that only applies to the woman in Eden, and it is not something to do with the act of childbirth as many modern versions would have us believe. It has to do with the sorrowful toil of our hands as we work the cursed ground.

At the end of Line 1 of 3:16, the *second* linking Hebrew word is used. It is *heron* which means “pregnancy” or “conception” and it points back to verse 15 to the Hebrew word *zera* ‘ which means “seed” or “offspring.”

A literal translation of the four Hebrew words of Line 1 of Genesis 3:16 in English would be as follows: (1) Multiplying (2) I-will-multiply (3) your-sorrowful-toil (4) *and*-your-conception. There is nothing in these words about the process of giving birth. *These* words are tied into the difficulty of fieldwork as in 3:17 *and* into the promise of the woman’s conception of multiplied offspring who would vanquish Satan.

But, have you noticed in the English translation of the Bible you typically refer to that you can’t make out the linking words of Line 1? Almost all modern translations don’t correctly translate the last two of these four words at all. They write out Line 1 of 3:16 as if it is talking about pain-in-childbirth! They incorrectly treat the Hebrew words of the linchpin as if they can be merged into just one idea, and a new and different idea at that. They could do this if they had grammatical justification to do this. They could do it if in these words there were an indication of the presence of what’s called a hendiadys. But there are no such grammatical indications and the structure of the linchpin forbids doing so.

Let’s restate this. Modern English versions have been confusing readers by attempting to squeeze into one idea the important two different and contrasting linking words and ideas in Line 1 of Genesis 3:16! They invent a single new idea that totally breaks the links that should be followed to the verses after and before it.

This is equivalent to covering over God’s inspired Hebrew with the repugnant word pollution of ideas God’s didn’t put there. And the different ideas contained in this word pollution have flowed downstream causing confusion and contradiction. This has created major damage in the translation and interpretation of a half dozen key passages elsewhere in the Bible.

Here is the wrong idea that gets plastered thickly over God’s words in Line 1 of 3:16. It is the wrong-headed idea that God in some way basically curses the woman at the very end of her 9-month-long pregnancy.

Here are just three translations that word Line 1 of 3:16 this way.

HCSB: I will intensify your labor pains

NIV: I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing

NASB: I will greatly multiply your pain in childbirth

Can they do this? They are doing this. But should they do this?

Let me take you back to an interesting meeting we had when we were thinking about whether or not a hendiadys might be located in Line 1 of 3:16.

One crisp autumn, Joy’s studies led us to New England. This area of the country is especially beautiful when the leaves change color. It is also the home of several renowned research schools and libraries. So she scheduled a visit with an Old Testament professor at a famous school and asked me to accompany her.

As we went down the half flight of stairs to his office entry, a few copper colored leaves swirled around our ankles in the autumn breeze. Inside, his office was crammed with books.

We found space to sit and talk about the “and” in Line 1 of Genesis 3:16. “Professor, would you look at this Hebrew ‘and’ and tell us what you see?”

His comments, punctuated by long pauses as he reflected deeply, ran something like this:

Here we have an example of a hendiadys – two things joined by ‘and’ to mean a different thing.

... Yes, an example of a hendiadys. ... Of course, *this* one doesn’t look like your ordinary hendiadys. The typical indicators are not present. ...

In fact, there is nothing in the grammar to indicate that the words in this verse should be combined as if there were a hendiadys present.

The words *‘itsebon* and *heron* could very well be read normally as two separate things with ‘and’ in between joining them. ...

But, even though *this doesn’t look anything like a hendiadys* and it could be correct to say there is no hendiadys here ... we know that it is a hendiadys.

“Thank you so very much, professor,” Joy said when the time came to a close. As we climbed up the stairs into the breeze and the leaves that greeted us, one thing was perfectly clear to us from our hour-long discussion on the word “and.” There *wasn’t any reason* to drop it out.

There wasn’t any reason to push the words together in Line 1 even though the professor had said, “We *know* it is a hendiadys.” Perhaps he was influenced by the writings of others who had passed along the incorrect assumption that this was a hendiadys. But, the professor’s observations, made in front of us, clearly showed that the widely held view wasn’t necessarily correct.

Without squeezing the words of Line 1 into a hendiadys, the math in Genesis 3:16, Line 1, is easy to calculate: *One* thing, plus *one more* thing, joined by the word “and” adds up to *two* different things – “sorrowful-toil *and* conception.” Line 1 does *not* add up to one *new* thing – “pain-in-childbearing”!

Joy likes to compare this to a math equation. To illustrate how the Hebrew grammar in Line 1 works, she refers to the *distributive property* in mathematics. In math language, the distributive property goes this way:

$$a(b+c) = ab + ac$$

The left side of the equation is equivalent to the right side of the equation. The “a” term is simply distributed to each of the other two terms, “b” and “c.” The result is that both the left and right sides of the equation are equivalent.

In the case of Line 1 of Genesis 3:16 the left side of the equation is “God will surely multiply.” The right side of the equation has two elements. The resulting meaning is that God will surely multiply “sorrowful-toil” and also that God will surely multiply the woman’s “conception.” As in the math equation, God is going to multiply, not one, but two things. That’s what a good translation should show us. But that’s not what’s out there in practically every translation.

Joy’s discovery uncovers *a major error* that modern translations are making in the way they are wording Genesis 3:16 for us into English. And the more we look at it the more it becomes clear that this is a **BIG PROBLEM!**

Have *you* ever wondered why God appears to be so harsh with the woman in 3:16? So have others. They have asked, “If she was treated this way by God then did she somehow deserve it? And if she deserved what was practically a curse imposed only on her just think of how bad she must have been.”

To treat her this way goes along the lines of the man's accusation that she had been his temptress. That was a false charge. The man had also blamed God. Both ideas were wildly incorrect! Neither the woman nor God tempted the man. Satan-in-the-serpent tempted the man.

Why would the man blame her, treating her as if she is his enemy? She is the enemy of the serpent. God has confirmed her as Satan's adversary.

Would this powerful adversary have anything to do with working behind the scenes to twist the translation of God's actual words to the woman? It would be a master stroke against her in public opinion. It would lead to serious mistreatment of women by those who thought her deserving of severe punishment.

God treated the woman with respect. God warned her that she would have sorrowful-toil in participating in field work just as would the man, her fellow farmer, when they worked the fields God had cursed because of the man.

God then built on his creation blessing to her. God promised that she would have multiplied pregnancy. And one of her offspring would be the Messiah.

In his defiant challenge to God, the man dared to accuse God of being his tempter. And then the man had also blamed the woman as being his tempter. Neither charge was correct. And modern translations that promote the idea that God changed the last hours of her conception and pregnancy into a special moment of punishment are incorrect as well.

We need to let Genesis 3:16 communicate its message to us clearly without the word pollution. And **we need to spread the true meaning of 3:16.**

Close:

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