

Script of Episode 7. Genesis 3:16 – The 11 TRUE Hebrew Words to the Woman, 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,
The true meaning of each Hebrew word in Genesis 3:16.**

Let's get started.

Body:

What comes to your mind when I say the words "natural childbirth?" In the months before we left our studies in France beside the Rhine River to head for the rainforests of the Congo, we learned that we were pregnant with our first child! Friends counseled us that it might be difficult to have to deliver our first little one on an isolated missionary station somewhere in the Ubangi.

So we set out to prepare ourselves as best we could. A few blocks from our student apartment we bought several books in French about natural childbirth. Nothing was available in English, but we were in France after all and this was in the days before the Internet.

Joy and I worked hard to understand the specialized vocabulary. The emphasis seemed to be concentrated on breathing exercises. That was no surprise This was the country of Dr. Lamaze. Joy was 6 months pregnant when we finally arrived in hot steamy Africa.

Right away we noticed the happiness in everyone's faces when they saw we were pregnant – well, that Joy was pregnant. In Europe and America having babies brings about a positive response from family and friends, but less so from strangers. This was surely not true where we lived in Africa. Having babies was considered to be wonderful!

We looked forward to the birth of our child as well. We didn't know if we were having a boy or a girl. We had tried to find out at the public hospital in France but results were inconclusive.

Finally, Joy gave birth to our first child in a mission hospital in the rain forests of northwestern Congo. Around sunset on a Sunday evening, after 36 hours of exhausting contractions, Joy was invited to ride in the cab of the doctor's pickup truck and he drove them over to the hospital. A flock of red-tailed gray African parrots flew by overhead. Palm trees stood sentinel duty and a ten-foot high termite hive was tinted pink by the setting sun. There was no ultramodern delivery room available. The setting was more like a field hospital during World War II.

On the short trip the doctor stopped at the small powerhouse to start the diesel-powered generator. At least we would have lights on and a rotating overhead fan during the delivery in that stifling room.

The medical staff was superb. The lead doctor was ably assisted by two other doctors. Both of them were Harvard Medical School graduates. Plus, there were several fine nurses in attendance.

A nurse and I were on either side of Joy as we timed her breathing. She received no medication of any kind. I admired her great effort, which was followed by exhaustion and exhilaration, as Joy gave birth to our wonderful baby girl, Christy!

Was it a cursed experience I asked Joy as we looked back on it the next morning? No. It wasn't. But it certainly required a lot of effort.

Conception, and pregnancy, was intended to be a good and natural process when God created woman. Even after Satan's attack, their disobedience and the beginning of living life in their now *mortal* bodies, the promise of future conception and pregnancy was a good and natural event. It remains a good and natural event.

God does not change the woman's body as he speaks to her in Eden. Yet modern translations make it appear that God somehow zaps the woman, changing childbirth into a bad thing.

To understand Genesis 3:16 we must recognize that in God's first words to the woman in Line 1 of Genesis 3:16, God didn't even touch on the subject of childbirth. (1) God spoke to her about shared sorrowful-toil (the Hebrew word is *'itsebon*) in field work and (2) God spoke to her about conception or pregnancy (the Hebrew word is *heron*) and especially of the offspring who would bruise Satan's head.

The way the words are put together in a chiasm in Genesis chapters 2 and 3 carries meaning. And the way verses 15-17 are linked together in a linchpin construction by the two key words in Line 1 of Genesis 3:16 brings meaning. But the meaning of *each word* itself is also important.

In the two words of the linchpin construction that link God's words to her with God's words to the man and to the serpent the woman learns two things. Neither of them is a curse on her. One thing is about bad news. One thing is about good news.

The bad news she learns is that when God curses the ground because of the man it will affect her too. They both will experience *'itsebon* or "sorrowful toil" as they do field work to raise food from the cursed ground outside of Eden. God knows they will be going there and what life there will be like. So God describes to her what her experience will be like with the cursed ground. She will have *'itsebon*. She will have sorrowful-toil. That is bad news.

But God immediately moves on to tell her of good news. How can the words of 3:16 be taken as good news right after God's stern judgment on the serpent tempter? Three of the four words in Line 1 ring of good news!

The first two Hebrew words in Line 1 of 3:16 (*harbah 'arbeh*) are the repetition of a single Hebrew verb "to multiply" or "multiplying, I will multiply." This same verb in this same verbal construction which is repeated for emphasis will be used in association with God's blessing on the "seed" or "offspring" (the Hebrew word is *zera'*) of Abraham later in Genesis.

When God blesses Abraham for being willing to sacrifice his son Isaac, God first repeats the word "to bless" for emphasis. Then God repeats the word "to multiply" for emphasis, as in Genesis 3:16. God also uses this verb and verbal construction of "multiplying, I will multiply your descendants" (*harbah 'arbeh zera'*) when he speaks to Hagar in Genesis 16.

God says to Abraham in Genesis 22:17, "... *blessing* I will *bless* you, and *multiplying* I will *multiply* your descendance (this is the Hebrew word *zera '*) as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which *is* on the seashore...."

Suppose, there had been someone who was familiar with God's blessing on Abraham who had somehow never come across the chapters on the Garden of Eden. When they came to God's repetition of the verb "to multiply" in Genesis 3:16 they would have expected the word "seed" or "offspring" (*zera '*) to come next.

In Genesis 3:16, we might expect God to say to the woman that he will greatly multiply her descendance (*zera '*)— *harbah 'arbeh zera '* , as God says to Abraham and to Hagar. We find this, but in the form of a linchpin. The word *zera '* is used just a few words earlier—in verse 15, as the words point back to the first mention of the Gospel. In 3:16, a similar Hebrew word that fits the sound pattern better in 3:16 – *heron* – is used. In words 1, 2 and 4 of Line 1 God says, "multiplying, I-will-multiply" "your-heron." *Heron* means "your-conception" or "your-pregnancy." *Harbah 'arbeh ... your-heron.*

It is wonderful to hear from God that she will assuredly have offspring. God had blessed her and the man on Day 6 of creation. "Be fruitful and *multiply*" God had said. And it is wonderful to hear from God that assuredly she will have offspring so that she can fulfill the promise that her offspring will defeat her attacker, Satan.

It is almost startling to recognize what God clearly says to the woman. We have become so used to thinking of her deserving special punishment as if she was the Temptress – which she was not, that it is hard for us to focus on what God actually says. God gently warns her, in advance, of the coming curse on the ground and then God completes the announcement of the *protevangelium* of the Good News and glorious gospel that she will yet bear offspring who will defeat Satan.

When God introduces her to the sorrowful toil or *'itsebon* she will experience outside of Eden, God is not telling her about something reserved for her and not the man. The man will experience this exact same sorrowful toil or *'itsebon* because it is something God will do to the ground because of him! They both will have sorrowful-toil because of the curse on the ground God will make because of the man.

Noah's father used this same word in Genesis 5:29. There *'itsebon* is described as something both he and his wife are experiencing. All these years after the Garden of Eden people are thinking of this specific sorrowful toil that is bothering them because of the curse on the soil. It is the sorrowful toil of **our** hands in working the cursed ground, he says.

With these first four Hebrew words in mind, *can* we concentrate on what God says next? Try to keep in mind the two actions God promised to take in Line 1 and then get ready for the next three lines God says to her in Hebrew. The two things God tells her about in Line 1 are (1) sorrowful-toil in fieldwork and (2) conception.

In Lines 2, 3 and 4 God tells the woman about how things have turned out as the result of Satan's attack on them and their disobedience. In these three Lines God *instructs* the woman. God looks at the various areas of her life and tells her things she needs to know.

God's words to the woman in verse 16, Lines 2-4 are words of description and of teaching. In them, God tells the woman what her physical experience will now be like.

God also knows that she is married to a dead man. Her husband was a willful participant in the Great Disobedience and clear signs are showing how badly his relationships with God and his wife have been corrupted.

Very soon they will find themselves outside of Eden with the way back barred by armed angel warriors. With supreme urgency and maximum use of every word, God instructs the woman in Lines 2, 3 and 4.

Two things have changed which will have a physical impact on the woman, her mortality and the curse on the ground. (1) There is now *death*, and she has a mortal body – this consequence of sin was foretold in Genesis 2:17. (2) There will be the *curse on the ground*. She will experience “sorrowful toil,” which will be the result of a separate act of God (Genesis 3:17).

Having disobeyed God’s prohibition, her body is now subject to difficulty and death. But God does not curse her body, as God just did the serpent. The changes she will experience come from these other two causes rather than a curse, or a “zap” from God. The changes will come about (1) because she is now mortal and (2) because the ground will be cursed.

In **Line 2 of Genesis 3:16**, the first thing God explains is the actual process of childbirth. It is important to notice, *Line 1* of 3:16 does not refer to *pain* in childbirth. It doesn’t refer to childbirth at all. But, *Line 2* does speak about the event of childbirth.

Translations have gotten so caught up in their inventions that they make God seem to stutter, saying once in Line 2 and somehow back in Line 1 something about childbirth. But that is not what God says. God acts in Line 1 in two ways (that we’ve noted). In Lines 2-4 God describes and teaches the woman what the entrance of sin and death will mean.

The first Hebrew word in Line 2 is *b’etsev*. It means “with effort” or “with work.” This word is used elsewhere in the Old Testament. Elsewhere *’etsev* never describes anything to do with childbirth, although it does here.

Let me illustrate. Deep winter in Minnesota where we live now brings snowdrifts in one’s driveway, or even across the road. It is not too unusual for someone to get stuck in a snowdrift several feet high. When that happens, it’s sometimes necessary to get help getting pushed out.

Those who do the pushing have to strive mightily to help the driver get enough traction and momentum to move the car out of the drift. The work can be painful as it takes great effort to push the car out.

This is what is meant by Hebrew word #5 in Genesis 3:16 – “**with-effort.**” In *this* way, “with effort,” the woman will bring children into the world.

God is telling the woman that now that she has a mortal body she should not think that she is dying when she feels the contractions of labor. When she pushes out her precious offspring it will require the use of muscles that will involve effort.

Only after conception and nine months of pregnancy (Hebrew word #4 of Line 1) comes childbirth. In the environment outside of Eden (where God knows she and the man will soon find themselves), childbirth will be different for the woman. She will give birth with a mortal body subject to difficulty and even death.

We had one more childbirth in our little family unit. Seven years after Christy’s birth, we had just returned from Africa and were in Minnesota when it came time for Mark to be born. This time Joy asked in advance if she might have an anesthetic, only if and when she needed it. The staff assured her that would be just fine.

She waited until that moment did arrive, and asked for an anesthetic. “Oh, it’s too late to ask for that now,” she was told. “You should have asked *earlier* in the process. Taking anything this close to the delivery is not possible now.”

And so, once in a jungle hospital, and once in a western hospital, she experienced very “natural” childbirth. She gave birth through her own intense *effort* (and with God’s help).

When God explains this sort of childbirth to the first mother-to-be in Line 2, God describes it to her in such a way that she will understand what is happening without the benefit of having watched any other human mother give birth before. Line 2, in Genesis 3:16, is extraordinarily sensitive, clinical and respectful. “*Effort*” – hard physical work requiring endurance – is going to be her experience in childbirth. She will bring life into the world with *’etsev*.

This description of how the first woman will experience *birth* with her mortal body, contrasts greatly with what God tells the man when God addresses him. God tells him about *death*. His mortal body will die. It will return to the dust from which God made it. In both cases, God teaches the first couple what to expect, giving them insight into the implications of their mortality as mortal human beings.

The rest of Line 2 rushes to an additional piece of information that God reveals to the woman. She can still fulfill God’s creation mandate from Day Six recorded in Genesis 1 to be fruitful and multiply. She will bear *more* than one child. The plural word is used. She will have children!

Thus far God has used a collective singular word in Line 1 of 3:16 and in 3:15 that can mean “just one” or possibly “a number of.” The “offspring” (*zera*’) and “the pregnancy” (*heron*) referred to in 3:15 and Line 1 of 3:16 might have meant she would have just one child. But at the end of Line 2 in 3:16 God uses the word *banim*. It is the plural word for “children.” After her first born child she will bear more. She’ll have at least two children for sure. And likely more as God’s blessing is worked out and she bears children who will fill the earth!

In Line 3 God looks into her heart. God instructs her on the state of her heart and contrasts it with the state of her husband’s heart. How much has changed for her in the paradise she lives in? Patiently, lovingly God instructs her on the state of her heart. (1)

Her affection is still for her husband. This is implied in just two Hebrew words. One is: “Your-desire” (the Hebrew word is *teshuqah*). And the other Hebrew word is: “to-your-husband.”

No verb is used here. When this happens in Hebrew, the verb “to be” or “is” is typically inserted in English. Her-desire “is.”

What kind of “desire” is this? There is every reason to assume this is a healthy desire, as she had before the attack. And God says her desire “is” still the same.

Some have attempted to compare her “desire” in 3:16 to another desire depicted in the word picture in Genesis 4:7. But the verse in 4:7 is outside of the tightly constructed chiasm of which 3:16 is a part. It is outside of the passage of 2:4-3:24.

The “desire” mentioned in Genesis 4 is only part of the next passage. What we learn from that occurrence is that the word “desire” (*teshuqah*) is not necessarily a term reserved for human affection because it is used in a non-sexual way in the account of Cain and Abel.

The word *teshuqah* is used only one other time in the Old Testament. It is helpful to our understanding because it describes another human. In Song of Solomon 7:10, *teshuqah* is used to

describe Solomon. His lover refers to Solomon's "desire" in these words – "I am my beloved's and his *desire* is toward me." There is no negative connotation to desire for his lover.

The word "desire" is *not* used for the man when God refers to him in Line 4 of Genesis 3:16. God's evaluation of the woman's heart will serve as a measuring point when the state of the man's heart is compared to the loving *desire* of his wife.

It is not so easy for modern readers to simply recognize her desire as her affection. This is because many, many, people for 700 years and more have identified her as a shameless Temptress, a ravaging beast who led the man to his death and deserved a curse. If that were truly the case, then in Line 3 of 3:16 we could expect God to talk about how terrible her heart has become.

Theologians have actually taught this. H. C. Leupold said the woman had a morbid yearning. He and others have even said that she was a nymphomaniac!

Listen to the confusion that the following translations reveal when it comes to Line 3 in 3:16. Many translations assume her desire was somehow bad. They can't agree on what way her desire was bad but they freely invent interpretations of the meaning of desire.

English Standard Version. "Your desire shall be *contrary* to your husband...."

New Living Translation. "you will desire to *control* your husband...."

International Standard Version. "since your *trust* is turning toward your husband...."

NET Bible. "You *will want* to control your husband...."

God's WORD® Translation. "Yet, you *will long* for your husband...."

Brenton Septuagint Translation. "and thy *submission shall be* to thy husband...."

Douay Bible. "and thou *shalt be* under thy husband's power...."

Where did all these ideas come from! Remember, the two Hebrew words in Line 3 say simply: your-desire (is) to-your-husband. And the meaning is simple and straightforward. She has not turned against her husband. She still desires him.

What about Line 4 of 3:16? In Line 4 God describes the state of the man's heart. The Hebrew words in Lines 3 and 4 practically vibrate with tension as the man's heart is contrasted with the woman's heart. The man's heart is very different.

God tells the woman, "He will rule (the verb is *mashal*) over you." Unlike Line 3 where God described the woman using a noun and the preposition "to" or "toward" here we encounter adversarial words. In Line 4 a preposition and a verb (not a noun) are used to describe the man. The verb is *mashal* or "rule." The preposition is "over."

In Line 3 the preposition used for the woman is 'to' or 'toward'—suggesting a relationship of equal partners. In Line 4 an aggressive adversarial verb is used along with the preposition "over." The words "rule" and "over" stand in marked contrast to the affection of the noun and preposition attributed to the woman in the preceding line.

This verb for "rule" in Line 4 is not the same Hebrew verb that was used in Genesis 1, even though it looks the same for English readers because translations use the same English word for the two different Hebrew verbs.

When God commanded the woman and man to *rule* over the rest of creation in Genesis 1:28, the verb *radah* was used. This was a legitimate ruling, sometimes called the Creation Mandate. The humans were to be in charge of all creation.

When the man's prospective action in 3:16 is described, however, the Hebrew verb *mashal* is used. This is the same verb that is used to describe the ugly *ruling over* perpetrated by the Philistines in Judges 14:4.

Line 4 describes a relationship that is not the equal partnership God instituted in Genesis 2. This is one person "lording it over" the other. God describes this as what will go on. He does not say it is his will for it to happen. These words are descriptive, not prescriptive.

God does not give a command to the man to go and rule over the woman in Line 4 of 3:16. God is not even speaking to the man in 3:16!

In Lines 2-4 God has been telling the woman about life after the attack. With effort she will bring forth children. Her desire is to her husband. On that she has not changed. BUT the man has changed. "But, he will rule over you" (!).

The man has aligned himself with the murderous liar who spoke to them through the serpent. He has hidden the tempter's part in their eating the fruit of the Tree. He has accused God and blamed her of being the cause of his rebellion. And now God warns her that she is married to the most sinful man in the world. That sinner rejected God's rule and started ruling over himself, going his own way. And he was going to continue to reject God's rule over him and over her. The man was going to usurp God's place in ruling over her and he was going to rule over her himself!

Have you known the Bible says these things in 3:16? It does. But most people aren't getting its message because of the mistranslations and misinterpretations of it. That's why I founded the Tru316 Project and pray for people to be raised up to correct our translations of 3:16 and more.

God's word is a pure source of life to people worldwide. But we need to remove the word pollution that is harming those who come to the Bible expecting to be refreshed and instead are repulsed by the pollution they find. We need the true message of Genesis 3:16.

Close:

I invite you to visit our website at Tru316.com for links to books, blog posts and our YouTube Channel with more than a dozen in-depth Workshops on the Seven Key Bible Passages on Women and Men from Eden on.

You can also receive a free 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!**

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(1) Follow this link to [Dr. Joy Fleming's Dissertation](#) to her study of Lines 3 and 4 of 3:16 on pages 267-273 and 350-355.