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Before the Serpent Became Satan # 7

By Jim Myers

Continued from Issue Number 55.

The last issue ended with Yahweh's punishment of the serpent. Professor U. Casuto makes some very interesting comments about it:

"The serpent is not, as the ancient tradition declares, the enemy of God; he is the foe of man. . . And of the two antagonists, the serpent is told, 'you shall not be the stronger. He (namely the woman's offspring) will easily be able to crush your head, but you will not be able to injure him except by biting his heel; and if he will beware of you and will quickly shatter your head before you bite his heel, he will be delivered from you.

"Possibly we have here also a parable concerning the principle of evil: it lies in wait for man and seeks to instill the venom by its bite, but if man takes heed of it and hastens to break its skull, he will be saved from it, even as it was said to Cain in regard to sin: *its desire is for you, but you will be able to master it* (iv 7)."

Next Yahweh turns his attention to the woman and makes the following declaration:

Unto the woman he said, "I will greatly multiply your pain and your conception; in pain you shall bring forth children; and your desire shall be to your man, and he shall rule over you" (Genesis 3:16).

Every woman should pay close attention to this section. It is steeped in centuries of authoritarian traditions, which have affected the lives of millions women and their role in their societies. The traditional teaching about this verse is that God placed a curse on the woman. Notice the difference in the opening words of Yahweh to the serpent and to the woman:

- (1) Serpent - "*cursed are you*"
- (2) Woman - "*I will greatly multiply your pain*"

The woman was not cursed by Yahweh. Let's return to Professor Casuto's discussion:

"The decrees pronounced by the Lord God mentioned here are not exclusively punishments; they are also, and chiefly, measures taken for the good of the human species in its new situation. . . Having lost the opportunity of achieving immortality, it was vital, in order to assure the survival of the human race, that man should be enabled to be fruitful and multiply. . ."

The man and woman would die at some point in the future. They had to produce children if the race was to continue. A point that is usually missed is that by increasing the woman's conception or pregnancies, Yahweh also increased the chances of survival for the race. Most readers focus on the increased pain, not the births. The obvious conclusion is that the more often one bears children, the more pain will be experienced.

A point that some authors make is that this pain isn't limited to just the actual birth itself. Every parent knows that children bring great joy into their lives; however, they also know how much pain can be caused by their words and actions. How do you think the woman would compare the pain of giving birth to Cain and Able, to the pain she experienced when Cain murdered Able or when Cain was forced to leave her presence forever?

Child birth and pain would now be part of their new world forever, but Yahweh wasn't finished with the woman yet. Yahweh continues:

“ . . . *your desire shall be to your man. . .* ”

Her desire had been for the forbidden fruit in Genesis 3:6. Yahweh commands her to redirect her desire to the man, not to the tree. This is probably a requisite for the next part of Yahweh's declaration. Let's see how it has been interpreted by most religious institutions:

“ . . . *he shall rule over you . . .* ”

This may reflect the translators' official beliefs more than his or her linguistic ability to accurately translate the Hebrew text.

The Hebrew word translated as “rule over you” begins with a “BET prepositional prefix.” Look it up in any Hebrew lexicon and you will find that it is usually translated as -- *in, beside, with, through* or *among*. Below are our options:

- (1) *he shall rule in you*
- (2) *he shall rule beside you*
- (3) *he shall rule with you*
- (4) *he shall rule through you*
- (5) *he shall rule among you*

Did you notice that the one option that was not part of the above list is – *he shall rule over you*. Based on the overall context of the account, my choice would be “*he shall rule with you*.” Do you recall the words of the blessing found in Genesis 1:28 –

“ . . . *you (pl.) shall have dominion . . .* ”

If they had exercised joint dominion over the serpent the story would have turned out very different. The effect of the traditional translation has touched the lives of women for many centuries. Karen Armstrong addresses this in her article “The Eve of Destruction”:

“Christianity found issues of sex and gender more difficult than any other faith. Some of the fathers of the church seemed totally unable to deal with women, and attacked them in vicious, immoderate and, indeed, unchristian language.

“ . . . Augustine told his priests to shun the company of women, even if they were sick or in trouble. Even mothers were not safe . . . Later St Thomas Aquinas saw women as biologically flawed, “defective and misbegotten”, and thus inherently inferior to the male sex, to whom it was their duty to submit. Even Luther, who left his monastery to marry, believed that, as a punishment for the sin of Eve, women must be driven from the world of men and confined in the home “as a nail is driven into the wall”.

One of the most savage voices was Tertullian:

Do you not realize that Eve is you? The curse God pronounced on your sex weighs still on the world. Guilty, you must bear its hardships. You are the devil's gateway, you desecrated that fatal tree, you first betrayed the law of God, you who softened up with your cajoling words the man against whom the devil could not prevail by force. The image of God, the man Adam, you broke him, it was child's play to you. You deserved death, and it was the son of God who had to die!

Do you still hear echoes of his words in your religious doctrines or institutions? Could it be that instead of inspired revelation Tertullian may have had significant emotional issues? **BHC**

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