

Does the Husband Rule - I

In Genesis 3:16, God says to Eve (NIV):

"I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you."

God's admonition comes as a result of Adam and Eve ignoring God's warning and eating the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge only to become sexually active. To many of us this verse can be confusing. In what context are we to understand that the pain pregnancy leads to (sexual¹) desire. Moreover, why does God remind the woman that this desire is somehow contingent on her husband's dominion? These two questions have bedeviled translators, scholars, theologians, and the poor layman for two thousand years.

This is surprising because more than a few scholars have known for some time that most English Bibles do not translate the Hebrew of this verse correctly. In fact, a more accurate (and contextually faithful) translation is something along the lines of,

To the woman He said, "I will greatly multiply your pain in childbirth, in pain you will bring forth children; but towards your husband you will turn and he will take care of you."

In this updated translation God conveys to Eve that she may no longer rely upon the providence of paradise, but must now rely upon [turn to] her husband. In this first of two reflections on this verse, we will deal with the questionable translation of the woman's desiring her husband while in pain. In the following article we'll explore an alternative interpretation of the Hebrew phrase normally translated as "*and he shall rule over you*". More specifically, we'll learn that the context suggests that a better translation would be, "*and he shall take care of you.*"

Let's begin with the problems raised by the word "desire". The NIV's translation is typical:

*"Yet your **desire** will be for your husband, and he will rule over you (NIV).*

The English word 'desire' is thought to have been² translated from the Hebrew

¹ A common Rabbinic Interpretation

² "is thought to have been" ... because the source of the Hebrew text was not known at the time of the translations.

word, תְּשׁוּקָתֶךָ (*təshuqatekh*), meaning “your-desire”. As it turns out, the Hebrew word *təshuqatekh* is not in the [older] source used by the translators who created the Septuagint. How do we know this? It turns out that most (all?) existing commercial Bibles can trace their translations to a combination of two sources:

1. The *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (BHS) which dates back to 1008 CE, about a thousand years ago.
2. The Septuagint – a Greek translation of the Hebrew text done about 200 BCE.

Now, the Hebrew source used by the Septuagint (LXX) – the Greek translation is approximately 1300 years older than the BHS used by most of our English Bibles. And one of the differences between the *BHS* Hebrew and the LXX’s Hebrew source is the word in question, *təshuqatekh*!

Here’s how the Greek Septuagint translators rendered the relevant part of this verse:

“...and you shall **turn** to your husband...”

Why did the authors of the Greek LXX translate the Hebrew as ‘turn’, not ‘desire’? Evidently, the author of the older Hebrew source of the LXX wrote *təshuvatekh*. However, the authors of the BHS wrote *təshuqatekh* – a difference in a single Hebrew letter. Examine the two words below:

Hebrew Source (English)
(1008 CE)

תְּשׁוּקָתֶךָ

TəSHUQATEKH

Hebrew Source (LXX)
(300 BCE)

תְּשׁוּבָתֶךָ

TəSHUVATEKH

What appears to have happened is that at some point during the transmission of the older Hebrew text used by the Septuagint translators, a copyist mistakenly copied a Qof instead of the Bet. Thus, *təshu**v**atekh* was replaced by *təshu**q**atekh* and all translations from then have Eve desiring her husband rather than turning to him. Such minor errors are not uncommon. In fact, professional translators call mistakes of this kind a parablepsis.

If we correct for this mistake by using *təshuvatekh*, Gen 3:16b can now be rewritten as follows:

... but towards your husband you will turn (təshuvatekh)...

Now the translation begins to make more sense (and has the virtue of being consistent with the same Hebrew source as the Septuagint). Here, the author depicts God as telling Eve that pregnancy will a painful process and she must now turn to (appeal to) her husband. This surely makes better sense. Heretofore, Eve would have known nothing about procreation, much less experienced it. Next month, we answer the question

– are husbands to rule over their wives?

Now, go and study