



Antithetical Parallelism in Genesis 3:16b: The Wife Has Power Lust for Her Husband's Authority; He Strives to Retain It at All Costs; Example: Abram & Sarai

- 24) Let's first note the key word in each line. In line three we have the noun תְּשׁוּקָה *teshuqah* which in all the major English Bibles is translated "desire." We will translate the line:

"Yet you will lust to usurp power from your husband."

- 25) The key word in line four is the verb מָשַׁל *mashal* and it too is translated the same way by the three major English Bibles as "rule." This is fine but it demands qualification.
- 26) When the woman seeks to dominate her husband, if he is without doctrine he will react in an effort to maintain his control and this often results in tyrannical applications rather than responsible leadership motivated by unconditional love and the application of biblical problem-solving devices. We will translate the line:

"And he will rule, either justly or unjustly, over you."

- 27) Documentation for this translation is required so we reference two sources:

The Net Bible. 1st Beta Edition. (Dallas: Biblical Studies Press, 2001), 33:

GENESIS 3:16 (b) You will want to control your husband,⁵ but he will dominate⁶ you.

⁵ **Translator's notes.** *Hebrew text.* "and toward your husband [will be] your desire." The nominal sentence does not have a verb; a future verb must be supplied, because the focus of the oracle is on the future struggle. The precise meaning of the noun תְּשׁוּקָה (*teshuqah*, "desire") is debated. Many interpreters conclude that it refers to sexual desire here, because the subject of the passage is the relationship between a wife and her husband However, this interpretation makes little sense in Gen 3:16. First, it does not fit well with the assertion "he will dominate you." Second, it implies that sexual desire was not part of the original creation, even though the man and the woman were told to multiply. And third, it ignores the usage of the word in [Gen 4:7](#) where it refers to sin's desire to control and dominate Cain.

Genesis 4:6 - Then the Lord said to Cain, "Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen?"

v. 7 - "If you do well, will not your countenance be lifted up? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door; and its desire [תְּשׁוּקָה (*teshuqah*)] is for you, but you must master it."

In Gen 3:16 the Lord announces a struggle, a conflict between the man and the woman. She will desire to control him, but he will dominate her instead. This interpretation also fits the tone of the passage, which is a judgment oracle.

⁶ **Translator's notes.** The Hebrew verb מָשַׁל (*mashal*) means "to rule over," but in a way that emphasizes powerful control, domination, or mastery. This also is part of the baser human nature.

Study notes. This passage is a judgment oracle. It announces that conflict between man and woman will become the norm in human society. It does not depict the New Testament ideal, where the husband sacrificially loves his wife, as Christ loved the church, and where the wife recognizes the husband's loving leadership in the family and voluntarily submits to it. Sin produces a conflict or power struggle between the man and the woman, but in Christ man and woman call a truce and live harmoniously (Eph 5:18-32).

Radmacher, Earl D. (ed.). The Nelson Study Bible. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1997), 10-11:



(Genesis) 3:16. The word **desire** can also mean “an attempt to usurp or control” as in (Genesis 4:7). We can paraphrase the last two lines of this verse this way: “You will now have a tendency to dominate your husband, and he will have a tendency to act as a tyrant over you.” The battle of the sexes has begun. Each strives for control and neither lives in the best interest of the other. The antidote is in the restoration of mutual respect and dignity through Jesus Christ (see Eph. 5:21-33).

PRINCIPLE: You cannot solve a problem until you find out what the problem is. Marital conflicts are the result of either the wife trying to control the husband through power lust or the husband trying to dominate the wife through power lust. The only antidote is Bible doctrine found in Ephesians 5.

- 28) The stark reality that is presented by this judgment against the woman is that even though the divine design for marriage is the incorporation of a right man with his right woman, because of original sin the harmony of this union is problematic.
- 29) The biblical structure of the marriage has been established by divine decree: the husband is the one who has been placed in authority and the woman is mandated to be subservient to him.
- 30) This is a status that the woman is prophesied to systematically reject because her lust pattern has a tendency to reject all authority structures.
- 31) The man on the other hand not only has been delegated authority in marriage but his personality is that of an aggressor. The Lord brought Ishah to Adam and Adam immediately recognized her as his wife, which is what the Hebrew word **אִשָּׁה 'Ishshah** means.
- 32) In Genesis 3:16 the Lord confirms that in the post-fall corporate marriage the husband will rule the wife. His authority assumes certain responsibilities that are developed over time through the process of progressive revelation.
- 33) For example, God’s plan for marriage permanently unites one man with one woman however the lust patterns of the sinful nature often lead to perversions of this ideal and on every occasion there are negative ramifications for those who engage in such practices.
- 34) To give a specific example, Abraham’s right woman was Sarah. She knew of the Lord’s promise to her husband, originally in Genesis 12:2, that he would become the father of a great nation.
- 35) Her desire was to hurry this circumstance along since she would be the matriarch of a dynasty. We see her rationale in:

Genesis 16:1 - Now Sarai [אִשָּׁה Sarai: “contentious”: exhibiting an often perverse and wearisome tendency to quarrels and disputes; a disposition (MWCD, 11th ed.)], Abram’s wife [אִשָּׁה 'Ishshah], had not given birth to any children, but she had an Egyptian servant named Hagar.

- 36) In this verse we find the obvious and the subtle. First of all the obvious. What Sarai recommends was not uncommon among the people of Ur which was located in Mesopotamia in an area of present-day southern Iraq. Details are provided by:

Vos, Howard F. “Life in Abraham’s Hometown: Ur of Mesopotamia.” Chap. 2 in *Nelson’s New Illustrated Bible Manners & Customs: How the People of the Bible Really Lived.* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1999), 17-18:



Family Life. The special purpose of marriage was to secure sons to perpetuate the male line. In the event that the wife was barren, she could supply a slave girl to her husband to be a substitute for her and bear her children. This action is clearly reflected in Genesis 16:1-4, where barren Sarai give a slave girl (Hagar) to Abraham to bear him a son. (p. 17)

Paralleling this event are laws 145 and 146 from the Code of Hammurabi: "If a man takes a [wife] and she does not present him with children and he sets his face to take a concubine, that man may take a concubine and bring her into his house If a man takes a [wife] and she gives to her husband a maidservant and she bears children, and afterward that maidservant would take rank with her mistress; because she has borne children her mistress may not sell her for money, but she may reduce her to bondage and count her among the female slaves." Abraham and Sarah were definitely children of their culture. (p. 18)

- 37) This historical account allows commentators to interpret Operation Hagar as a normal activity within the culture. But this passage takes place in Canaan, not Ur. Even though the custom may have provided Sarai with the idea, her motivation was quite different.
- 38) Her name defines her as a contentious woman with a trend toward quarrels and disputes. Consequently, she is defined as a wife who challenges Abram's authority and thus lusted for power. Sarai's self-absorption comes out in the next verse:

Genesis 16:2 - And Sarai said to Abram, "Now behold, the Lord has prevented me from bearing children. Please go in to my maid; perhaps I shall obtain children through her." And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai.