

Genesis 3:16

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee.

Analysis

Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt ... This chapter narrates humanity's tragic fall from innocence through temptation, sin, and divine judgment. The serpent's subtle questioning of God's word, Eve's addition to and misquotation of God's command, and Adam's passive participation demonstrate the progression from doubt to disobedience to disaster.

The consequences affect every dimension of human existence: spiritual death (separation from God), physical death (mortality), relational dysfunction (shame, blame, conflict), vocational difficulty (cursed ground, painful labor), and cosmic disruption (groaning creation). Yet within the curses, God provides gracious provisions: proto-evangelium promise of redemption, clothing to cover shame, and preservation of life despite deserved death.

Theologically, this chapter establishes the origin and nature of sin, the reality of Satan's activity, the universality of human fallenness, the justice of divine judgment, and the necessity of redemption. Understanding the fall illuminates why the world contains suffering and evil, why humans rebel against God, why salvation requires divine intervention, and how Christ as the second Adam reverses the first Adam's failure (Romans 5:12-21, 1 Corinthians 15:22, 45).

Historical Context

The serpent in Genesis 3 reflects ancient Near Eastern associations between serpents and chaos, evil, or deceptive wisdom. Unlike pagan myths where serpents might be deified, Genesis presents the serpent as a mere creature, though Satan's instrument (Revelation 12:9, 20:2). Ancient curse formulas from various cultures parallel God's pronouncements, but Genesis uniquely embeds redemptive promise within judgment.

The agricultural curses (thorns, sweat, difficult labor) would have resonated deeply with ancient subsistence farmers for whom crop failure meant starvation. The pain in childbearing acknowledges a universal female experience that ancient cultures attributed to various causes, but Genesis traces it to sin's consequences rather than divine cruelty or inherent evil in creation or sexuality.

Archaeological evidence of humanity's ancient struggles with agriculture, disease, death, and violence aligns with Genesis's portrayal of a fallen world. Ancient wisdom literature from Mesopotamia and Egypt grappled with suffering's origins, but Genesis alone provides the theological explanation: human rebellion against God brought cosmic corruption. This account would have answered Israelite questions about why their promised land required hard labor, why they suffered pain and death, and why they needed redemption.

Related Passages

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Study Questions

1. How does this verse deepen our understanding of God's character and His relationship with creation?
2. How should this truth about Curse and Promise shape our daily decisions and priorities?
3. How does understanding Christ as the ultimate fulfillment illuminate this passage's meaning?

Interlinear Text

אֶל H413	הָאִשָּׁה H802	אָמַר H559	אֲרֹבָה H7235	אֲרֹבָה H7235	עֲצֹבוֹךָ H6093
Unto the woman	he said	I will greatly	I will greatly	thy sorrow	
וְהָרִיךְ H2032	בְּעָצֹב H6089	תֵּלֵד י H3205	וְאֶל H413	בְּנֵי יִם H1121	
and thy conception	in sorrow	thou shalt bring forth	children		
אִישׁ H376	וְתִשְׁקֶה H8669	וְהָיָה H1931	וְיִמְשֹׁל H4910	בָּךְ H0	
shall be to thy husband	and thy desire		and he shall rule		

Additional Cross-References

Titus 2:5 (Parallel theme): To be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed.

Colossians 3:18 (Parallel theme): Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as it is fit in the Lord.

1 Corinthians 11:3 (Parallel theme): But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God.

1 Timothy 2:15 (Parallel theme): Notwithstanding she shall be saved in childbearing, if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety.

1 Corinthians 14:34 (Parallel theme): Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law.

1 Corinthians 7:4 (Parallel theme): The wife hath not power of her own body, but the husband: and likewise also the husband hath not power of his own body, but the wife.

John 16:21 (Parallel theme): A woman when she is in travail hath sorrow, because her hour is come: but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world.

Genesis 4:7 (Parallel theme): If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him.

Jeremiah 6:24 (Parallel theme): We have heard the fame thereof: our hands wax feeble: anguish hath taken hold of us, and pain, as of a woman in travail.

Numbers 30:13 (Parallel theme): Every vow, and every binding oath to afflict the soul, her husband may establish it, or her husband may make it void.