

The Paradigmatic Role of Genesis 3 for Reading Biblical Narratives about Desire

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Abstract

The biblical Hebrew texts of sexual politics (often involving sordid sexual violence, especially against women) have been studied in the last forty years with an ideological bent that employs contemporary literary analysis. This essay is an attempt to allow the biblical text to furnish strategies for reading its troubling narratives rather than imposing external ideologies over it. An ethical narrative close reading of the text of primeval desire (Gen 3) led me to the discovery of four themes—desire, particularly its derivative, sexual passion; power-play; alterity; and peril—and to the biblical authors' characterization of God in divine response to human deviant behavior as heuristic tools for reading these texts of desire.

Introduction

Sex is an important aspect of human life.¹ Indeed, the Bible discusses sexual relationships of all sorts, including noncongenial ones (cf. Gen 26:8; 38:1–30; 2 Sam 13). In the explicit discussion of sexual relations, the Bible has undeniably more records of dysfunctional sexual encounters than those arising from

¹ O. Palmer Robertson, *The Genesis of Sex: Sexual Relationships in the First Book of the Bible* (Philipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2002).

agreeable circumstances. Sex of any kind flows from passion or desire.

My goal in this essay is to study Genesis 3 through a narrative close reading for the leitmotifs in its composition. As a text of primeval desire, Genesis 3 embodies strategies for the ethical reading of biblical narratives of inordinate desire. The opening pages of all good literature provide guideposts for understanding what ensues, and this is true of biblical literature: the prefatory positioning of Genesis in the larger Israelite history (Genesis to Kings) is indicative of its role in the reading of history and the critical place of primeval history.²

The texts of inordinate desire in Hebrew biblical narratives have been variously addressed. Robin Parry, for example, in sketching a path for appropriating the ethical potential of biblical Hebrew narratives, surveys the current biblical-theological ethical approaches to Old Testament narratives and the history of interpretation of Genesis 34. He then carries out a close reading of the text in its canonical context, highlighting the different understandings of the narrative in patriarchal, Mosaic, and Christian contexts. He concludes by responding to the different feminist readings of this text and affirming its canonical patriarchy.³ Parry reads the narrative with the narrator but is willing to give voice to the voiceless women in it. Insights from his work and others of this nature provide a general direction for the ethical appropriations of Old Testament narratives for the present essay.

Following James Muilenburg's epoch-making Society of Biblical Literature presidential address of about half a century ago, I will raise questions and seek answers from within the structural patterns and literary fabric that shape the text into a literary unity,⁴ not from an agenda imposed from outside of the text. Muilenburg's proposition regarding biblical texts is applicable to the Bible globally; and this is where one of the cardinal principles of Reformation hermeneutics becomes relevant, namely, that Scripture is its best interpreter. Thus, Genesis becomes essential even in seeking how best to read other Hebrew narratives.

I. Aspects of the Study of Old Testament Ethics

Since this essay pertains to the field of Old Testament ethics, it will be helpful to provide a basic understanding of the discipline. Allen Verhey

² See David M. Carr, *Reading the Fractures of Genesis: Historical and Literary Approaches* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 3–4.

³ Robin Allinson Parry, *Old Testament Story and Christian Ethics: The Rape of Dinah as a Case Study*, Paternoster Biblical Monographs (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2004).

⁴ James Muilenburg, "Form Criticism and Beyond," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 88 (1969): 8.

defines ethics as “a disciplined reflection concerning moral conduct and character.”⁵ Ethics—as moral philosophy—deals with issues of moral values and conduct. Discussions of biblical ethics, particularly, ought to presuppose persuasions about the divinely revealed truth of Scripture. This, however, is not always the case.⁶

How biblical ethics has been studied can be broadly categorized in three ways, using the prepositional phrases “behind the text,” “in the text,” and “of the text.” Ethics behind the text is mostly a historical enterprise. Studies in this form tend to focus on outlining the historical development of Israelite morality, giving attention to the cultural and historical sources of the ethical formulations of the text studied.⁷ At the heart of the contemporary development of this approach is the attempt to expose the crudities of ancient Israelite ethical development that scandalizes modern readers.⁸

Writings on Old Testament ethics in the modern period, in the frame of ethics “in the text,” is traceable to the late 1800s.⁹ The focus here is on the biblical text and what it says. Several studies in this vein focus on merely describing what is found in the text, thereby adopting historical, anthropological, and sociological stances to the text to reconstruct the variety of ethical perspectives operative in the text, depending on its layered history, ideologies, and social settings.¹⁰

The third set of approaches consists of ethics “of the text.” This approach refers to the ethics generated by the possibilities of the world of the text. These approaches tend to be literary or canonical in orientation, recognizing the authority (literary, through textual compositional rhetorical strategies,¹¹ or canonical—from a confessional standpoint¹²) of the text to shape morality. Within this framework two main approaches are used:

⁵ Joel B. Green and Jacqueline E. Lapsley, eds., *Old Testament and Ethics: A Book-by-Book Survey* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 1.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁷ See Hinkley G. T. Mitchell, *The Ethics of the Old Testament* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1912); John Merlin Powis Smith, *The Moral Life of the Hebrews* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1923).

⁸ See Andrew D. H. Mayes, ed., *Text in Context: Essays by Members of the Society for the Study of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 116–40; John W. Rogerson, Mark Daniel Carroll, and Margaret Davis, eds., *The Bible in Ethics: The Second Sheffield Colloquium* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 248–71; Neils Peter Lemche, “The Hebrew Bible in Its Social World and in Ours,” *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* 9.1 (1995): 159–60; and S. Min Chun, *Ethics and Biblical Narrative: A Literary and Discourse-Analytical Approach to the Story of Josiah* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 29.

⁹ William Straton Bruce, *The Ethics of the Old Testament* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1895).

¹⁰ See Andrew Mein, *Ezekiel and the Ethics of Exile* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

¹¹ Green and Lapsley, *Old Testament and Ethics*, 34.

¹² *Ibid.*, 17.

ethics as decision-making, focusing on the law, the prophets, and wisdom,¹³ and ethics as moral formation, focusing on narrative and to a lesser extent wisdom.¹⁴

This essay studies narrative and its role in character (re)formation and socio-ethical transformation. Understanding the role of characters/actants is critical for unpacking the textual meaning of narrative. God also surfaces regularly in the biblical narrative as a character, so in attending to characters and their roles in biblical narratives, one must give special attention to God as well,¹⁵ knowing that his role as a character (his thought, words, feelings, actions/inactions, and identification by other characters) is pivotal. Juliana Claassens has used the characterization of God as a theological resource in discussing the Gideon narrative in Judges 6–8.¹⁶ Gordon Wenham shows that the bar for ethical behavior is higher in narrative than it is in the law. His point is that the law only sets the limiting point for moral behavior, while narrative aims higher, and he links that to God's actions in narratives.¹⁷ He also demonstrates that the importance of the imitation of God in Old Testament ethics has been receiving growing recognition from a variety of scholars.¹⁸ Considering the significance of God's place in narrative ethical development, I will be employing divine response as a critical heuristic tool (among others) for an ethical study of biblical narratives. The outcome of this narrative reading of Genesis 3 will provide a framework for reading the biblical narratives of perilous passionate desires.

¹³ See Bruce N. Kaye and Gordon J. Wenham, eds., *Law, Morality and the Bible: A Symposium* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1978); Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *Toward Old Testament Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983); John Barton, *Amos's Oracles against the Nations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980); and Hetty Lalleman, *Celebrating the Law? Rethinking Old Testament Ethics* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2004).

¹⁴ See Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of Characters* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981); William P. Brown, *Character in Crisis: A Fresh Approach to the Wisdom Literature of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996); Parry, *Old Testament Story and Christian Ethics*; L. Juliana M. Claassens and Bruce C. Birch, *Restorative Readings: The Old Testament, Ethics, and Human Dignity* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2015); and Anne W. Stewart, *Poetic Ethics in Proverbs: Wisdom Literature and the Shaping of the Moral Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

¹⁵ Christopher Wright, *Living as the People of God: The Relevance of Old Testament Ethics* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1983), 133; See also Bruce C. Birch, "Moral Agency, Community, and the Character of God in the Hebrew Bible," *Semeia* 66 (1994): 23–41, esp. 29.

¹⁶ L. Juliana M. Claassens, "The Character of God in Judges 6–8: The Gideon Narrative as Theological and Moral Resource," *Horizons in Theology* 23 (2001): 51–71.

¹⁷ Gordon J. Wenham, *Story as Torah* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2000), 104–5.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 105.

II. *Reconnoitering Desire*

In discussing Genesis 3 I will explore the role of desire (a major factor in the fall) in human conduct, among other issues. Sarah Coakley defines desire as “the physical, emotional, or intellectual longing that is directed towards something or someone wanted.”¹⁹ The longing for objects of many kinds is what humans experience throughout any given day, and it provides the impetus for the things that people do. William Irvine observes that all the choices we make “typically reflect our desires: we choose what, all things considered, we want.”²⁰ Desire is, indeed, integral to human nature.²¹

The Bible has a lot to say about desire. In the Old Testament, it can have a positive or negative connotation. A survey of the Hebrew Bible points to five main terms used in their different morphological (verbal, adjectival, and nominal) forms for the concept of desire. The first is *khamad* (חָמַד), which in the verbal form means to “desire and try to acquire.”²² The idea is that having a strong longing for something or someone, a person is driven to seek possession thereof. It occurs predominantly in the nominal form and can have positive or negative connotations (cf. Gen 2:9; Exod 20:17; Josh 7:21; Ps 19:11; Song 2:3). The second, *’awah* (אָוָה), means “[to] desire, long, lust, covet, wait longingly, wish, sigh, crave, want, be greedy, prefer.”²³

The words *khamad* and *’awah* share a common semantic domain, dealing with a longing or craving for something that drives one to seek it, and only the fulfillment of that desire brings satisfaction (cf. Prov 13:12, 19). Although these two terms are occasionally used as synonyms, a nuance exists between them: while *khamad* refers to the desire of an object for the essence of its being (ontological), *’awah* focuses on its physical characteristic (phenomenological) features. The clearest demonstration of these is seen in the book of Song of Songs, where *khamad* is found exclusively on the lips of the

¹⁹ Sarah Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self: An Essay “On the Trinity”* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 346, as cited by Paul Dominiak, “The Logic of Desire: A Reappraisal of Reason and the Emotions in Richard Hooker’s *Lawes*,” *Reformation and Renaissance Review* 16.1 (April 2014): 37–51.

²⁰ William B. Irvine, *On Desire: Why We Want What We Want* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 91.

²¹ David Hutchinson Edgar, “Desire,” in *Dictionary of Scripture and Ethics*, ed. Joel B. Green (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 219.

²² William L. Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament Based upon the Lexical Work of Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 108.

²³ “40 אָוָה,” *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, and Bruce K. Waltke, 2 vols. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), 1:18 (hereafter *TWOT*); cf. Num 11:4, 34; 2 Sam 3:21; Ps 10:17; 132:13–14; Isa 26:8–9; Song 1:5).

lover, who desires her beloved for the totality of who he is (Song 2:3; 5:16), while *'awah* is found solely in the speeches of the beloved, who is moved with desire by the beautiful physical features of his lover (Song 1:5; 2:14; 4:3; 6:4). In Genesis 3:6, where both terms occur, this pattern of *'awah* drawing upon the impact of outward appearance and *khamad* reflecting that which comes from deep within (such as a desire for wisdom) is manifested.

The third word is *khaphets* (כַּפֶּתֶת), whose distinction lies in its greater emphasis on the emotive element than the other desire terms.²⁴ The core idea in the word is delight or pleasure. It has a lot to do with the impact or impression that the object makes on the subject (cf. 1 Kgs 5:23–24 [ET, vv. 9–10]; Prov 3:15; 8:11; Eccl 12:10; Isa 54:12). The fourth term is *kasaph* (קָסַף), “[to] yearn for, long after.”²⁵ It has been used in only two places with this express denotation (Gen 31:30; Ps 84:3 [ET, v. 4]). It has the same semantic field as *khamad* and *'awah*, but based on what we said above, it is closer in meaning to *khamad* than to *'awah*. The fifth term, *teshuqah* (תִּשְׁוָה), has much fewer occurrences and a more complex range of meanings than the other terms. Thus, I will discuss it in my discussion of Genesis 3, one of the few passages where it occurs.

From a synthesis of the previous survey of desire, I have identified three categories of desires.²⁶ The first of these is *abidance* desires. These are desires for those things necessary for the continuance of human life, including food, shelter, clothing, and security. The second group consists of *sybaritic* desires, which are meant to bring pleasure purely for its own sake. In this category are included aesthetics, beauty and fashion, concupiscence, and certain kinds of recreational activities. Lastly, we have the *prestige* desires. These are desires that when attained bring a sense of significance, fulfillment, and power, as well as a level of influence on others. Admittedly, there is some fluidity in the dividing line between these categories, as some desires may belong to one category, but when pushed to a different level would spill over into another. For example, at the level of the species, sex leads to healthy pleasure and procreation, and could be viewed as an abidance desire. However, the inclination toward whimsical unrestrained fulfillment of this desire, with an assortment of persons, moves it beyond the realm of abidance into concupiscent sybaritism.

With this survey, we can examine the account of primeval desire in Genesis 3, its outcomes, and the divine response, using the narrative critical

²⁴ “712 כַּפֶּתֶת,” *TWOT* 1:310–11.

²⁵ “1015 קָסַף,” *TWOT* 1:450.

²⁶ In working on this, I drew a lot of inspiration from the work of Irvine, especially his fourth chapter (Irvine, *On Desire*, 55–67).

reading approach. This analysis intends to yield a paradigm for examining the pursuits of desire, particularly the sybaritic (especially sexual) and prestige (power) desires with their catastrophic consequences in subsequent biblical Hebrew narratives.

III. *Desire in Genesis 3: Its Outcomes and Divine Response*

Genesis 3 has a straightforward plot, with the status of the serpent among the animals and other creatures (v. 1) as its foreground. It advances with tension rising between divine will and human desire (vv. 2–5). The actual conflict and climax comes rather too soon (vv. 6–7), when human desire trumps divine will. The second peak comes in the divine interview with the first couple (vv. 9–13) and is followed by the anticlimax, wherein the divine sentence falls squarely upon all the actants in the narrative (vv. 14–19). Finally, we have the denouement, with the implications of the divine judgment (vv. 20–24). The narrative could also be outlined in terms of the narrator's form of presentation, beginning with a dialogic presentation in two acts (Gen 3:1–7 and 3:8–19) and then a report or narration of the conclusion (Gen 3:20–24). The detailed discussion below follows this latter form of outline.

Act 1: The First Couple and the Debacle of Their Desire (Gen 3:1–7)

Scene 1: The Woman's Tango with the Serpent (Gen 3:1–5)

The introduction of the serpent presages the surprising presentation of the serpent as a talking and walking beast. This has affinities with the perception in the ancient Near East, where the serpent was feared or revered as possessing mystical powers.²⁷ Extant texts show the serpent was associated with fertility, health, immortality, occult wisdom, and evil, and it was often venerated or worshiped.²⁸ In biblical literature, this use of the serpent is more than a mythic conception, though there are divergent scholarly interpretations. Ian Provan observes that the association of the serpent with the

²⁷ For details, see John H. Walton and Victor H. Matthews, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Genesis–Deuteronomy* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1977), 203; and Thorkild Jacobsen, "Mesopotamian Gods and Pantheons," in *Toward the Image of Tammuz and Other Essays on Mesopotamian History and Culture*, ed. William L. Moran (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970), 24.

²⁸ Nahum Sarna, *JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 24, cited by Walton and Matthews, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary*, 203. Also see John Scullion, *Genesis* (Collegeville, MN: Glazier, 1992), 47; and Karen R. Joines, *Serpent Symbolism in the Old Testament* (Haddonfield, NJ: Haddonfield House, 1974), 19–24.

devil has no basis in the text but that it arises from Second Temple sources such as 2 Enoch 31:5.²⁹ Walter Brueggemann overtly denies that the serpent is Satan, seeing it merely as a literary device,³⁰ but this reading fails to take into account the canonical shaping of the biblical text. By contrast, Laird Harris, Gleason Archer Jr., and Bruce Waltke affirm that only “naturalistic theology could hold that it was a mere snake referred to in myth or legend.”³¹ While within its context in Genesis there is nothing to explain this enigma, when read in the context of the biblical canon, the explicit association of the serpent with Satan becomes understandable (cf. Job 26:6–13; Ps 91:13; Isa 27:1; Luke 10:18–19; Rev 12:9; 20:2).³²

In the serpent’s dialogue with the woman, its initial goal was to raise doubts in her mind concerning the integrity of God and the veracity of his word: “Did God indeed say, ‘You shall not eat from any tree of the garden?’” (Gen 3:1). The negativity of the question insidiously sowed distrust, making the first couple doubt God’s generosity and believe instead that God’s boundaries were barriers keeping them from a better life.

In the woman’s response she acknowledged that they were given everything except one thing, but in talking about the consequence of eating the tree, she omitted God’s strong expression of certain death (“you will *surely* die,” Gen 2:17, emphasis added). Her altering of God’s threat provided the serpent the opportunity to develop its initial seemingly benign suggestion by negating the certainty of death God had decreed.³³ Indeed, her exaggeration of God’s prohibition—“God said, ‘You shall not eat from it *and you shall not touch it*, lest you die’” (Gen 3:3, emphasis added)—is indicative of rising discontent within her.³⁴ The serpent, taking advantage of discontent, then contradicted God’s word by saying, “It is *not* certain that you will die” (Gen 3:4, emphasis added). It was the adverbial form, not the verbal form, of God’s speech that the serpent negated, so raising doubt as to the certainty of the prescribed consequence for disobedience.³⁵ Cleverly, the serpent

²⁹ Ian Provan, *Discovering Genesis*, Discovering Biblical Texts (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 79.

³⁰ Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis*. Interpretation (Atlanta: John Knox, 1982), 47.

³¹ “1347 שָׁחַט,” TWOT 2:571.

³² See Allen Ross, *Genesis*, Cornerstone Biblical Commentary 1 (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2008), 49–50.

³³ On the serpent’s distortion of God’s word, see Ephraim A. Speiser, *Genesis*, AB (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1964), 23.

³⁴ On Eve’s distortion of God’s word see Ross, *Genesis*, 51.

³⁵ For a fuller explanation of this grammatical form, see Bruce K. Waltke and M. O’Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 583; Walton and Matthews, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary*, 205; and Hans W. Wolff, *Joel and Amos* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), 344.

sought to avoid outright contradiction of God and the risk of incredulity.

Having insidiously cast doubts on the certainty of God's word, the serpent subsequently assaulted the credibility of God by accusing God of undermining the interest of Adam and Eve—hiding from them that which would widen the vistas of their knowledge and make them God-like (Gen 3:5). The goal of this was the sundering of the relationship between the first humans and their Creator. Consequently, the couple moved away from God and chose to act independently (Gen 3:6–7).

Propelled by desire, following the serpent's instigation, the couple separated from God. In a moment the woman experienced all three types of desires (abundance, sybaritic, and prestige). Her inordinate desires took her in a direction contrary to God's unambiguous ordinance. As she fixed her gaze on the tree and its fruits, she saw the tree was good for food (an abundance desire), pleasing (*'awah*) to the eyes (a sybaritic desire), and desirable (*khamad*) for making one wise (a prestige desire).

We note that God had already provided for these desires. Genesis 2:9 shows that God's created flora had all that Eve was looking for: it was pleasing to the eyes (sybaritic desire), desirable for food (abundance desire). The tree of life, in contrast with the tree of knowing good and evil, met their prestige desire. Moreover, humanity already had the likeness to God that the serpent was offering them through disobedience (Gen 1:26–27). In the creational mandate, God's address to the first couple provided for their prestige desires—to have dominion over the earth (Gen 1:28). Additionally, he addressed their abundance desires in providing an abundance of food for them (Gen 1:29). Lastly, God himself testified that his creation was adequate for satisfying sybaritic desires, as he *looked* at it and declared it to be “very good” (Gen 1:31). In their rebellion, in pursuit of their desires (Gen 3:6), the first couple threw away what they had for a mere illusion.

Scene 2: The Couple's Pursuit of Their Desire and Its First Disappointment (Gen 3:6–7)

The second scene of act 1 (Gen 3:6–7) constitutes the climax of this narrative: the outcome of the conflict. Its two sentences are replete with a flurry of activities (the persons concerned doing things), conveyed in finite verbs (nine in all) that are on the main storyline, one of the characteristics of climactic settings: she *saw* ... *took* ... *ate* ... *gave* to her husband ... he *ate* ... eyes *opened* ... they *knew* they were naked ... *sowed* fig leaves ... *made* loin-covering. The promise of the serpent was partly fulfilled; their eyes were opened; they now knew evil—they had known only good previously—but they became less God-like (cf. v. 4). One of the immediate consequences of

their sin was the sin itself: separation became a given in human life. When they were at one with God, they were at one with each other—naked before each other but unabashed (Gen 2:23–25). Having separated from God, their emergent alterity generated shame from the resultant consciousness of their nakedness. This is just a prelude to the manifestation of separation from God (the first installment of death) that will become palpable in act 2.

Act 2: The Fallout of Fulfilled Desire (Gen 3:8–19)

As act 1 built up to the climax of the narrative, act 2 is its anticlimax. Act 2 consists of two scenes. Scene 1 (Gen 3:8–13) is made up of a transition, which is a vivid portrayal of the hostility that ensued between Adam and Eve on the one hand and between both humans and God on the other following the pursuit of their desires apart from God (Gen 3:8). The bulk of scene 1 consists of the interview between God and his creatures (Gen 3:9–13); and scene 2 contains the announcement of sanctions for the violation of the divine command (Gen 3:14–19).

This narrative has several indicators of the excellence of its compositional artistry. Genesis 3:8, which reflects human separation with God, is back-to-back with Genesis 3:7, which tells of separation within humanity. Scenes 2 and 3 form a perfect ideational chiasm:

A	God queries Adam	3:9–12
B	God queries Eve	3:13
C	God is told of the serpent	3:13b
C'	God curses the serpent	3:14–15
B'	God's punishment for Eve	3:16
A'	God's punishment for Adam	3:17–19

In God's speech to the offending parties, the chiasm shows he begins with Adam and ends with him (A and A'). This highlights Adam's leadership, which he abdicated to his wife, but God brings him back to its reality. The placement of Eve between Adam and the serpent fits the malevolent mediatory role she played between the serpent and her husband (in B and B'). The serpent is found at the core of the chiasm (in the woman's discourse C and God's judgment pronouncement C'), implying it is the chief culprit.

Scene 1: Immediate Consequence of Sin and the Divine Interrogation (Gen 3:8–13)

The immediate outcome of human disobedience to the divine command was the visible widening of the gap between humanity and deity that had begun conceptually during the temptation phase earlier in the narrative.

The first couple hid as they heard the approach of their maker (Gen 3:8), yet the voice of the one from whose eyes nothing is hidden came calling with prodigious love, inquiring, “Where are you?” (Gen 3:9), which begins the ensuing series of interrogations. Adam, in response, told of his hiding due to fear because of nakedness. It is sad that the voice that was once a delight had now become a terror because human rebellion had vitiated the divine glory with which humanity was clothed at creation so that, contrary to the promise of the serpent, they could not withstand the dazzling glory of their creator (Gen 3:10).

Like a just judge in court, God reached no conclusions until after a thorough cross-examination, affording the errant pair a fair hearing. God’s first question was followed by a series of others to the man and the woman, both of whom deflected the questions by passing the buck to others (Gen 3:11–13). Two things are noteworthy in this narrative. First, God was completely silent during the temptation of the first couple. Second, after the rebellion, God engaged with Adam and Eve but did not engage the serpent directly, even though it is mentioned in the dialogue. Silence, in the first instance, reflects the relative autonomy that humanity had as free moral agents, who nonetheless were accountable for their actions. However, divine silence also portends danger. God’s engagement with an errant party indicates that the person may be judged, but the judgment will be mitigated by divine grace (as his engagement with Adam and Eve shows). In contrast, when God averts direct engagement with an errant party (like his non-engagement with the serpent), judgment in such a case comes with certain finality.

Scene 2: The Divine Pronouncement of Judgment (Gen 3:14–19)

In the previous scene, God engaged Adam and Eve after they had fled (albeit in vain) from his presence. The divine interview proceeded from Adam to the woman, who eventually passed the buck to the serpent. As the woman’s answer closed with the mention of the serpent (Gen 3:13), the divine judgment began with the pronouncement against the serpent (Gen 3:14–15). The series of judgments consist of reversals of fate. The serpent, which was the shrewdest of all the animals, would become the most cursed of them all (Gen 3:14). In the place of friendship with humanity, there will be an interminable enmity; likewise, the seed of the woman, whom it lured into death, will give it the deadly strike on the head (Gen 3:15).

The reversal of fate is also found in the judgment against the woman. Whereas she had sought to be on par with God, she will be reduced to a place lower than her initial estate at creation. When created, the Creator

blessed and mandated them to multiply and fill the earth without any intimation of pain as concomitant with birthing. Now in her fallen state, she will henceforth be attended with great pain as she bears children. Similarly, as she was driven by prestige desire (seeking for God-likeness), demonstrated in usurping leadership from her husband, she was placed under the headship of her husband, notwithstanding her continuing contention for leadership (Gen 3:16).

It is pertinent at this point to unpack the preceding statement, which is an interpretation of a portion of Genesis 3:16 on which scholarly consensus is lacking. I translate the second part of the judgment on the woman as “and your desire will be against³⁶ your husband, but he will rule over you.”³⁷ The noun *teshuqah* occurs only thrice in the Hebrew Bible, twice in Genesis (3:16; 4:7), and once in poetry (Song 7:11). The noun has the primary meaning of desire, longing, or craving for something.³⁸

Opinions diverge sharply as to the kind of *teshuqah* the woman was going to have toward her husband. Susan Foh compares Genesis 3:16 with Genesis 4:7, where the idea is that of desire for dominance. Supporting her analysis with comparative linguistics (with an Arabic cognate), Foh concludes that it points to the woman’s desire for dominance over her husband.³⁹ John Walton and Victor Matthews, in disagreement with Foh, suggest that she went too far afield to use Arabic for the explanation of the word. Using Song of Songs 7:11, they take the noun to be what they call instinct, without specifying what they mean by that, and conclude that *teshuqah* refers to a woman’s instinctive desire for children and motherhood, and this will subordinate her to her husband.⁴⁰ Nothing could be further from the truth. There are several things that Walton and Matthews fail to factor into their discussion. Firstly, they fail to reckon with the genre, which is most crucial

³⁶ For similar use of the preposition *’el* (לְ), see Genesis 4:7–8; 1 Samuel 24:8; Exodus 14:5; Numbers 32:14; Nahum 2:14.

³⁷ I have rendered the *waw* prefixing the pronoun “he” (*hu’*, הוּא) as a contrastive conjunction because of its *waw-X-yiqtol* construction in direct discourse, rather than the usual storyline *weyyiqtol* format. Gesenius gives the following as examples of similar uses: Genesis 17:21; 19:19; Leviticus 2:12 (E. Kautzsch, ed., *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar*, 2nd ed. [Oxford: Clarendon, 1910], 484–85 [§154]). So also Holladay, *Concise Lexicon*, 85. For an elaborate discussion of this, see Alveiero Niccacci, “Basic Facts and Theory of the Biblical Hebrew Verb System in Prose,” in Ellen Van Wolde, ed., *Narrative Syntax and the Hebrew Bible: Papers of the Tilburg Conference 1996* (Leiden; Brill, 1997), 170–90.

³⁸ Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (1906; repr., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2012), 1003; Holladay, *Concise Lexicon*, 396; “2352a תְּשׁוּקָה,” *TWOT* 2:913.

³⁹ Susan T. Foh, “What Is the Woman’s Desire?,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 37 (1974): 376–83.

⁴⁰ Walton and Matthews, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary*, 228–29.

when dealing with language use. They furnish no justification for jumping over Genesis 4 and rather importing the signification from Song of Songs. Secondly, they ignore the context: Genesis 3 is not discussing the congeniality of family relations but the entrance of sin and its effect in rupturing relationships, which spills over into Genesis 4. Relevant here are both the subject matter of the narrative and the extent of coverage. Thirdly, there is a fair argument that the conjunction prefixing the desire's object is contrastive, not copulative. Lastly, if the contrastive sense is correct, it would be unexpected for God to overrule an affectionate feeling with leadership. The uses of *teshuqah* in Genesis 3 and 4 contextually have the same signification, the desire for dominance.⁴¹ As the woman usurped leadership in rebellion, the consequences of sin will subsequently exacerbate the contest for control. The divine verdict sustained male headship. God's preamble to his judgment against Adam ("Because you harkened to the voice of your wife, and ate from the tree" [Gen 3:17a]) reinforces this position.

Male headship was implicit in the creative order. With respect to other creatures, the vicegerency of humanity was clearly stated in Adam's naming the animals. God brought the animals to Adam and whatever he called them became their name (Gen 2:19–20). As for the woman, while male priority is not explicitly stated, several things make this obvious. First, in the biblical world, primogeniture signifies priority, and that is why any deviations from it were viewed as errant (cf. Gen 48:13–18). Secondly, the language used in Genesis 2 and 3 is also indicative of Adam's headship. The very terms used in Genesis 2:19–20 about God bringing the animals to Adam, and him naming them, are used of God bringing Eve to Adam and him naming her (Gen 2:22–23). Sin problematized male headship, but God restated his creative purpose. It is in this regard that after the fall, Adam's first act was renaming (the same verb form, *weyyiqra'* [וַיִּקְרָא], is still used) his wife as a way of reasserting his authority (Gen 3:20).

After the reproach of Adam for failed leadership in respect to the forbidden fruit, the major part of God's judgment was that the ground (from which he came) would be in "rebellion" against him to make providing food arduous for him. The root for "eat" (*'akhal*, אָכַל) acts as a *leitwort*, occurring five times in three sentences in active verbal forms (Gen 3:17–19). Though industry was implicit in the creational mandate (cf. Gen 1:28), it was not to consist of toilsome labor. God had already made adequate provision for human sustenance (Gen 1:29), and he even planted their garden; humans were merely to tend it and reap from where they had not sown (Gen 2:8,

⁴¹ For a similar analysis with nuanced conclusions, see Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1–17*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 201–2.

15–16). In rebelliously eating what was forbidden, they made eating a problem: only with painful toil would they find their food subsequently (Gen 3:18–19). The point of their sin (eating or food) becomes the tool of their punishment.

Adam was the federal representative of all humanity, so all humanity fell with him and were damned with him. The principle of degeneracy pronounced on creation because of Adam affects all creation (Gen 3:17c–18a). The last pronouncement in Adam's punishment sealed human fate with finality, affirming the certainty of death: the ground will unremittently harden itself against humans until they fall dead into it (Gen 3:19). Though the serpent, at the beginning, questioned the certainty of death, God had the final say; he affirmed the certainty of physical death, even as spiritual death (separation) was already a *fait accompli*.

Dénouement (Gen 3:20–24)

There is a shift from the scenic presentation in the first part of the chapter to narration in the last five verses. These last verses bring closure to the doleful tale of the fall. The unraveling of the harmony that had defined the world of Adam continued its downward spiral. As distance was introduced in the human-divine relationship, it invariably affected relations in the human realm. Adam, who had previously reveled exuberantly in the communion he shared with his wife (Gen 2:22), with the distance now between them could only celebrate her as the mother of his children (Gen 3:20).

God did not abandon his own, despite failure, but showed abundant grace. For the future of humanity, grace was offered in the promise of the triumph of the woman's seed over the serpent (Gen 3:15). This promise is a triumph because of the symbolism of the parts of the body where their blows would fall: the serpent strikes the heel of the woman's seed but is smitten on the head. For the moment, God stepped down to clothe them in animal-skin clothing, more durable than the ephemeral leafy loin-covering that Adam and Eve had made for themselves (Gen 3:21), and this began a ritual that would recall their alienation daily.

Divine mercy does not obliterate divine retribution (Exod 34:6–7). Thus, humanity must face its fate. To this end, there was a divine deliberation (Gen 3:22) regarding the future option for humankind. In choosing to eat from the forbidden tree, humanity now lost unhindered access to the tree of life (the restoration of which will occur for the elect only in the eschaton, cf. Rev 2:7; 22:14). Consequently, not only were humans thrown out of Eden, but sword-wielding angels were also posted sentry to ensure the blockage of access to the tree of life for fallen humanity (Gen 3:23–24),

thereby ensuring the inevitability of human death.

IV. Genesis 3 as Paradigm for Reading Other Passages of Desire

We began with the Reformation hermeneutical principle of Scripture as its best interpreter. The goal of this narrative reading of Genesis 3 was to explore its fabric as the text of primeval desire, to guide our reading of other texts of desire in biblical Hebrew narratives. Three things emerge from our reading of this narrative. First, through paying attention to the questions that drive the narrative, we find direction as to how to make ethical choices and live ethical lives. The entire narrative is driven by questions, questions we will do well to pause each day to reflect over apropos of our own lives. The first question was first asked by the serpent: What has God said? Correctly understanding God's communication is determinative for right living; therefore, the serpent sought to pervert and distort human understanding of the divine word. The second question, the one asked by God, is Where are you? It is important to constantly ascertain where we stand relative to God: do we stand with God or with some other god or idol? Are we maintaining our assigned estate, or have we moved on to places of our choosing? Thirdly, we should ask ourselves, To whose voice are we listening? This reflects the question God asked Adam, "Who told you that you are naked?" There are many voices speaking today, and loudly too, that drown out the voice of God. It is easy to be carried away with the voices from friends, spouses, the media (especially electronic), popular culture, and the state, among many others. All must be weighed against the one voice—that of the Shepherd. Fourthly, we always should ask ourselves, "What have you done?" Answering this question will help us discover which voices we have been listening to, where we are in our journey in life, and whether we are still staying true to what God has said.

Second, a set of themes provide a framework for reading other biblical narratives of passion. These themes are rooted in desire, whether abidance, sybaritic, or prestige. Out of these three categories of desire, only abidance desire has to do with the survival of humans as a species. Wrong application of it moves it into the realm of either sybaritic or prestige desires. Thus, priority is given to these latter two, and particularly to sexual passions and power plays. The theme of alterity is also prominent, beginning in Genesis 3, with the first couple conceptually distancing themselves from God in their volition, and eventually spatially (at least in their conception). It is not possible for us to hurt others if we feel at one with them. It is only as we view others as "other," including even family members, that they become

objects for attack. The fourth theme is that of peril. The combination of the first three themes inevitably leads to disaster either at the individual level or the communal level or both, as we see in the story of Adam and Eve. The themes of pleasure and power embody the driving motivations for the actions in the narrative; alterity offers the rationale, while the resultant peril is the consequence.

The third matter arising from our discussion that could inform our ethical reading of other narratives, is divine response. Divine response is significant because it helps point us in the direction of proper and approved patterns of being in the world (biblical ethics). Careful attention to the moral issues in these narratives and how God responded to them can help inform our ethical orientation and decisions. The various ways of divine response to given situations or characters include engagement and nonengagement; each of these has implications for the kind of consequences for those on the receiving end. For example, divine engagement in the face of Adam and Eve's sin shows they would receive mitigated judgment, whereas nonengagement and response are more indicative of nonmitigated consequences, as the case is with the serpent in this narrative.

From what precedes, five themes arising from human actions with damaging consequences were identified, which could provide biblical lenses for reading other biblical narratives of passion. These themes are (sexual) passion, power play, alterity, peril, and divine response.