

## **THE DESIRE OF THE WOMAN: GENESIS 3:16 REVISITED**

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### **Abstract**

This paper sought to interpret *tʿšûqâ* as used in Gen 3:16 through an analysis of structure and clause functions within the pericope (3:14-19) and to relate the text to the theme of conflict. The study focused on the divine pronouncement against the woman (3:16) after the entrance of sin. As part of the pronouncement, God told the woman that her desire (*tʿšûqâ*) shall be against her husband but he shall rule (*māšal*) over her (3:16b). Placing 3:16b within the bigger structure, this study concludes that the woman's "desire" (*tʿšûqâ*) and the man's "rule" (*māšal*) in 3:16 occur in a context where the woman's desire is to control the man, but the man was mandated to rule over her. This conclusion is further applied to the theme of conflict from a theological and practical perspective.

**Keywords:** *tʿšûqâ*, *māšal*, Gen. 3:16, Conflict, Women, text-semantics

### **1. Introduction**

Genesis 3:14-19 presents divine pronouncements against the serpent, the woman, and the man following the eating of the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden.<sup>1</sup> In verse 16, the term *tʿšûqâ* is used that has received two major differing interpretations among scholars.<sup>2</sup> One interpretation,

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<sup>1</sup>These verses are often understood as a curse, though the word "curse" is used only on the serpent (v. 14) and the land (v. 17). While some of the pronouncements are negative, there is a picture of hope for the human race as God promises to crush the head of the serpent through the seed of the woman.

<sup>2</sup>There are other interpretations, including: "desire that makes her the willing slave of man" (John Skinner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis* [Charleston, SC: BiblioBazaar, 1930], 82); "psychological dependence on man" (Gini Andrews, *Your Half of the Apple: God and the Single Girl* [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1972], 51); "desire bordering upon disease" C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes, The Pentateuch* [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1886], 1:103); the woman's desires as subservient to her husband's, (see John Calvin,

represented by Susan Foh, is that *tšûqâ* denotes the woman's desire to contend with and exercise control over the man. Foh states:

Contrary to the usual interpretations of commentators, the desire of the woman in Gen 3:16b does not make the wife (more) submissive to her husband so that he may rule over her. Her desire is to contend with him for leadership in their relationship. This desire is a result of and a just punishment for sin, but it is not God's decretive will for the woman. Consequently, the man must actively seek to rule his wife.<sup>3</sup>

The second and traditional position is that *tšûqâ* refers to the woman's longing for intimacy from the man. This is represented by Irvin A. Busenitz:

Lexical and etymological studies of the words of Gen 3:16b yield little help for interpreting the meaning of the woman's desire for [the] man. Contextual evidence, however, indicates that the woman's desire for the man and his rule over her are not the punishment but the conditions in which the woman will suffer punishment. Although there are linguistic and thematic parallels between Gen 3:16b and Gen 4:7, contextual differences and interpretive problems indicate that Gen 4:7 cannot be used to interpret the meaning of 'desire' in Gen 3:16. Cant 7:10[11] provides a better context for understanding the word. It may be concluded that, in spite of the Fall, the woman will have a longing for intimacy with man involving more than sexual intimacy.<sup>4</sup>

Apart from Gen 3:16, *tšûqâ* occurs in only two other places in the Old Testament (OT): Gen 4:7 is used to support the interpretation of *tšûqâ* as "desire to control," while Song of Solomon 7:10[11] is used to support the "sexual intimacy" interpretation. As Busenitz has noted, lexical and

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*Commentaries on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis*, [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1948], 1:172; U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis* [Jerusalem: The Magna Press, 1961], 165; and woman's economic dependence on man, (H. G. Stigers, *A Commentary on Genesis* [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1976], 80; Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis*, The JPS Torah commentary [Philadelphia, PA: Jewish, 1989], 28).

<sup>3</sup>Susan Foh, "What is the Woman's Desire?" *Westminster Theological Journal* 37 (1974/75): 383. See also Kenneth A. Matthews, *Genesis 1-11:26*, New American Commentary, vol. 1A (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 251.

<sup>4</sup>Irvin A. Busenitz, "Woman's Desire for Man: Genesis 3;16 Reconsidered," *Grace Theological Journal* 7.2 (1986): 203. See also See Richard M. Davidson, "The Theology of Sexuality in the Beginning: Genesis 3," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 26/2 (1988): 129-130.

etymological study alone cannot resolve the problem.<sup>5</sup> Gordon J. Wenham has raised a similar concern:

Such an interpretation of ‘urge’ is required in the very closely parallel passage in 4:7, where sin’s urge is said to be for Cain, but he must master it. Here in 3:16 woman’s desire for independence would be contrasted with an injunction to man to master her. There is a logical simplicity about Foh’s interpretation that makes it attractive, but given the rarity of the term ‘urge’ . . . certainty is impossible.<sup>6</sup>

It appears that either of the two major interpretations has its own interests in the feminism divide<sup>7</sup> and this has eventually made lexical and contextual considerations subservient to scholarly presuppositions. In this brief reexamination of the nuance of *tšûqâ*, it is recommended that the validity of any interpretation of Gen 3:16 must be based not on mere intra-clausal and proof-text study (i.e., lexical semantics) but rather on an analysis of structure and clause functions (i.e., text semantics) within the pericope. We begin with a sketch of the literary context, propose a structure for verses 14-19 through which we suggest a pragmatic function of verse 16b which contains the words *tšûqâ* “desire” and *māšal* “rule,” and then discuss the theme of conflict within the context of verses 15-16.

## 2. The Context

At the end of Gen 2, the man and the woman are in the Garden of Eden, having received the instructions on what to do (“tend and keep”), what to eat (“of every tree”), and what not to eat (“the tree of the knowledge of good and evil”). In chap. 3, the serpent appears in the narrative. While the man’s activity and initiative are the focus in chap. 2, chap. 3 focuses more on the woman’s initiative. The serpent relates to the woman as if she were the leader in the garden and she accepts such responsibility.<sup>8</sup> It has been

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<sup>5</sup>Busenitz, “Woman’s Desire for Man,” 203.

<sup>6</sup>Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, vol. 1, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas, TX: Word, 1998), 81-82.

<sup>7</sup>Cf. Foh, “What is the Woman’s Desire?” 376.

<sup>8</sup>John Piper and Wayne Grudem, “An Overview of Central Concerns: Questions and Answers,” in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to*

suggested that the serpent's purpose was to overthrow the man through the woman.<sup>9</sup> And in fact, the serpent succeeded. To be sure, both the man and the woman failed to exercise their authority; if the woman failed to exercise her authority over the serpent, the man also failed to exercise his leadership role by yielding to the woman against the Lord's command.<sup>10</sup> And the Lord, in pronouncing the sentence, would emphasize the man's surrender of his leadership role to the woman: "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife" (v. 17).<sup>11</sup> Whether from the standpoint of the serpent or the woman, sin entered the human family through usurpation of authority.<sup>12</sup> And issues of authority and control will surface in the divine

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*Evangelical Feminism*, ed. John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006), 73.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 82; Raymond C. Ortlund Jr., "Male-Female Equality and Male Headship: Genesis 1-3," in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, ed. John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006), 95-112.

<sup>11</sup>Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 82, notes that "the sentence on the man is the longest and fullest, since he bore the greatest responsibility in following his wife's advice instead of heeding God's instructions personally given to him." See also Craig L. Blomberg, "Women in Ministry: A Complementarian Perspective," in *Two Views on Women in Ministry*, rev. ed., ed. Stanley N. Gundry and James R. Beck (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 131; John Piper, "A Vision of Biblical Complementarity: Manhood and Womanhood Defined According to the Bible," in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, ed. John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006), 37.

<sup>12</sup>This is based on the understanding that God had given leadership responsibility to the man. Though Gen 2 illustrates that man and woman are created equal in essence [the woman is the only comparable partner to the man (2:18-20), both share the same nature and so can be joined in holy matrimony (vv. 22-24), etc], there is a marked focus on the man in the chapter. It appears that divine actions in Gen 2, both before and after the creation of the woman, set the platform for male leadership in the garden. The man takes priority of place not only in terms of creation sequence but also in terms of responsibility within the human family. This primary leadership function of the man does not disrupt the dominion mandate given to the man and the woman in the human-animal relationship. Though there is a school of thought that argues that there is sameness in creation, in function, family function, and in God's sight between the male and female [See Linda L. Belleville, *Women in Ministry: an egalitarian perspective*, in *Two Views on Women in Ministry*, rev. ed., ed. Stanley N. Gundry and James R. Beck (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 19-103], the leadership function of man in Gen 2 is deducible from several factors. First, the man is the one directly charged with oversight responsibility in the garden (2:15). Second, the woman is said to be created for the man as his "help" (2:18). Craig L. Blomberg observes rightly that "what makes an 'ezer a 'helper' in each context is that he or she comes to the aid of someone else who bears the primary responsibility for the activity in question. It may be significant that the man is never said to be an 'ezer of his wife." [Craig L. Blomberg,

pronouncements that follow (3:14-19). If the serpent usurped the woman's authority as a ruler over the animals including the serpent itself, then God would restore her authority by enabling her "seed" to bruise the serpent's head (v. 15). Similarly, if the woman usurped the man's role as head of the human family, then God would restore that role by making him "rule" over the woman (v. 16).

### 3. Structure of Genesis 3:14-19 and Function of 3:16b

The key words in this verse are *tšûqâ* "desire" and *māšal* "rule." The word *tšûqâ* appears only three times in the Hebrew Bible (HB) (Gen 3:16; 4:7; Song 7:10). In Gen 3:16, *tšûqâ* is often understood as "sexual desire."<sup>13</sup> This interpretation is influenced largely by the usage of the term in Song 7:10, where it occurs in a man-woman relationship context. Within the context of Gen 3, advocates find support for this interpretation by arguing that since verse 16 is replete with conception and birth imagery, *tšûqâ* must refer to woman's sexual desire. However, the exact relationship between the woman's "sexual desire" and the man's "rule" (*māšal*) is often not delineated. Although such an interpretation is possible, another interpretation has strongly been defended, namely that *tšûqâ* denotes a woman's desire for control over the man. This interpretation receives strong support from Gen 4:7, an adjacent text that repeats keywords from 3:16b in a context where sin desires to control Cain. If scholars continue to focus on mere word studies, they will only return to the two main positions represented by Foh and Buzinitz, and consensus will remain far from sight.

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"Women in Ministry: A Complementarian Perspective," in *Two Views on Women in Ministry*, rev. ed., ed. Stanley N. Gundry and James R. Beck (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 129-130.]. Third, before the creation of the woman the man is given the responsibility to name the animals (vv. 18-20). [Thomas R. Schreiner, "Women in Ministry: Another Complementarian Perspective," in *Two Views on Women in Ministry*, rev. ed., ed. Stanley N. Gundry and James R. Beck (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 295]. Fourth, the woman is not only created "out of man" but also "brought" to the man (2:22-23). Finally, in this verse the man appreciates the woman as invaluable gift from God and names her. We conclude that whereas Gen 1 highlights the equality of man and woman - God creates them equal in nature (i.e., image of God) and places stewardship responsibility on the two over the earth, Gen 2 speaks of equality of man and woman as comparable partners but entrusts the man with leadership responsibility within the human family.

<sup>13</sup>See Davidson, "The Theology of Sexuality," 129-130; Linda A. Belleville, "Women in Ministry: An Egalitarian Perspective," in *Two Views on Women in Ministry*, rev. ed., ed. Stanley N. Gundry and James R. Beck (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 33.

The meaning of *tšûqâ* is often studied without due consideration given to the structure of the *pericope* (vv. 14-19). Lexical considerations, however, are always incomplete without proper study at the text level (e.g., context, structure, and pragmatic functions).

The following structure can be observed in Gen 3:14-19:

- A Serpent: harsh conditions, change in food, and death (v. 14)
- B Serpent vs. Woman: strife between serpent and woman's seed (v. 15)
- C Woman: harsh conditions—labor - pain in childbirth (v. 16a)<sup>14</sup>
- B<sup>1</sup> Woman vs. Man: strife between woman and man (v. 16b)
- A<sup>1</sup> Man: harsh conditions, struggle for food, and death (vv. 17-19)

From this structure, we can observe similarities in the pronouncements against the serpent and the man (A and A<sup>1</sup>). It will also be noted that the progression of the pronouncements is not simply Serpent—Woman—Man, even though this is what most interpreters seem to observe. Rather, the progression is Serpent—Serpent vs. Woman—Woman—Woman vs. Man—Man. Important elements are missed if one ignores the complete progression. It is critical to proper understanding of the question of this study to note that the divine pronouncement upon the woman-man relationship in B<sup>1</sup> (“And against your husband [is] your desire, but he shall rule over you,” v. 16) parallels the judgment upon the serpent-woman relationship in B (“He [woman's seed] shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel,” v. 15).<sup>15</sup> Both sentences describe relationships characterized by strife and desire for mastery. The idea of strife is explicit in verse 15 as the Lord Himself introduces enmity between the woman and the serpent and between the descendants of both.<sup>16</sup> In verse 16, strife in the woman-man relationship is implied by the fact that the man's “rule” (*māšal*)

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<sup>14</sup>Among other things, the structure above shows that the woman stands at the center of the divine judgment because it was through her that sin entered the human family. At the same time, the focus of the divine judgment upon the woman's childbirth gives hope to humanity, for it is through her “seed” that the serpent will be destroyed.

<sup>15</sup>See Jacques B. Doukhan, “Genesis,” *Seventh-day Adventist International Bible Commentary* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2916), 104, who has noted that “the immediate context of this verse [v. 16], most notably its close literary connection with the preceding verse (3:15), suggests that 3:16 should be read in the light of 3:15.”

<sup>16</sup>See Afolarin O. Ojewole, “The Seed in Genesis 3:15: An Exegetical and Intertextual Study” (PhD diss., Andrews University, 2002), 155-165, 183-190.

is a reversal of the woman's "desire" (*tšûqâ*),<sup>17</sup> just as in verse 15 the struggle between the serpent and the woman's "seed" brings about a reversal of situation. Moreover, just as verse 15 introduces pain and conflict into the serpent-woman/seed relationship, so does verse 16 introduce pain and conflict into the woman-man relationship. In this context, the Hebrew particle 'el in verse 16 is best translated "against" rather than "for/towards."<sup>18</sup> Similarly, in verse 16 the conjunction (*wê*) plus the personal pronoun (*hû* ' ) is used adversatively, and should be rendered "but he" instead of "and he." Putting all together, we state that the second part of verse 16 does not continue the labour-pain pronouncement on the woman; rather, it functions as the divine pronouncement upon the *relationship* between the woman and the man and thus structurally and thematically parallels the judgment upon the *relationship* between the serpent and the woman in verse 15.

What then should *tšûqâ* and *māšal* mean? As a linguistic rule, the meanings of individual words must be controlled by the functions of the clauses and the context within which they are set.<sup>19</sup> This is to say that if, within verses 14-19, verse 16b presents a struggle in the woman-man relationship, then *tšûqâ* and *māšal* must relate to this struggle. Foh may thus be correct in interpreting *tšûqâ* to mean the woman's "desire" to "contend with him [the man] for leadership in their relationship."<sup>20</sup> This then allows

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<sup>17</sup>Katherine C. Bushnell has argued against translating *tšûqâ* as "desire," asserting that in the Ancient Versions of the Bible "out of the 28 known renderings of *teshuqa* . . . the word is rendered 'turning' 21 times. In the 7 remaining renderings, only 2 seem to agree; all the others disagree." Bushnell then renders the verse as "thou art turning away to thy husband, and he will rule over thee" (Katherine C. Bushnell, *God's Word to Woman* [Minneapolis, MN: Christians for Biblical Equality, 2003], 139). However, the explanation of *tšûqâ* in this study also captures the nuance of "turning" as Bushnell contends.

<sup>18</sup>In view of the similar context of strife in 4:7, the particle 'el is best rendered "against." *BDB* s.v. "'el" suggests that "where the motion or direction implied appears from the context to be of a hostile character," 'el conveys the sense "against." Although many scholars interpret Gen 3:16 based on Song 7:10, we notice that in Song 7:10 the context of strife in relationship is absent. Further, in Song 7 the man's positive "desire" is "for/upon" (Heb. 'al) not "against" ('el) the woman.

<sup>19</sup>See C. H. J. van der Merwe, "Discourse Linguistics and Biblical Hebrew Grammar," in *Biblical Hebrew and Discourse Linguistics*, ed. R. D. Bergen (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 16; Walter R. Bodine, "Introduction: Discourse Analysis— What It Is and What It Offers," in *Discourse Analysis of Biblical Literature*, ed. Walter R. Bodine (Atlanta, GA: Scholars, 1995), 1-3; Susan Anne Groom, *Linguistic Analysis of Biblical Hebrew* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2003), 159.

<sup>20</sup>Foh, "What is the Woman's Desire?" 383.

us to look to the adjacent text of Gen 4:7—where both *tšûqâ* and *māšal* are used in a similar context—for additional support in understanding the nuances of the terms. If the pragmatic function of Gen 3:16b as described above is correct, then 4:7 provides a better analogy for the interpretation than does Song 7:10[11].<sup>21</sup> As in 3:16, 4:7 presents a tension between *tšûqâ* and *māšal* with striking structural similarity:

3:16 And against ( ' el) your man [is] your desire (*tšûqâ*), but he must rule (*māšal*) over you  
 4:7 And against ( ' el) you [is] its desire (*tšûqâ*), but you must rule (*māšal*) over it

In 4:7 sin's "desire" (*tšûqâ*) and Cain's "rule" (*māšal*) occur in a context where sin seeks to overpower Cain, but Cain is encouraged to rule over it. The woman's "desire" (*tšûqâ*) and the man's "rule" (*māšal*) in 3:16 occur in a similar context where the woman's desire is to control the man,<sup>22</sup> a path which she had taken by first eating of the fruit and having the man eat of it, with devastating results. Thus, the appetitive desire (indicated by *ta' wâ* and *h āmad* in 3:6) with which the woman coveted the fruit would now turn into a different kind of desire (*tšûqâ*) directed against the man.

The verb *māšal* does not in itself convey the negative associations of the word "dominate." *Māšal* has several nuances within the semantic range of "rule" —for example, to "rule" over siblings (Gen 37:8), slaves (Exod 21:8), nations (Deut 15:6), to "take charge" over someone's possessions (Gen 24:2; Ps 105:21), to control (Gen 4:7; Ps 19:14), or to exercise self-control (Prov 16:32). Its noun form is used twice in Gen 1:16 to denote the "ruling" of the luminaries over day and night. The "rule" of humans over the earth and the animal creation is conveyed by *rādāh* "rule, govern" instead of *māšal*. The man is not to rule over the woman as both would rule over the animals. In the context of Genesis 3, *māšal* conveys man's leadership in the marriage

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 379, even insists that the understanding of *tšûqâ* as desire to contend or control also holds for Song 7:10 because here too "the immediate context is that of possession: 'I am my beloved's'."

<sup>22</sup>So also Bruce K. Waltke, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 94, who concludes, "The chiasmic structure of the phrase pairs the terms 'desire' and 'rule over', suggesting that her desire will be to dominate. This interpretation of an ambiguous passage is validated by the same pairing in the unambiguous context of 4:7." See also Matthews, 251; C. John Collins, *Genesis 1-4: A Linguistic, Literary, and Theological Commentary* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P. & R., 2005), 160.

relationship.<sup>23</sup> It has already been indicated that the woman exercised authority over the man by influencing him to partake of the fruit. This is explicitly indicated in verse 17 with the invective against the man for having “heeded the voice” of the woman. Moreover, the pronouncement upon the man is immediately predicated upon this yielding of his leadership to the woman’s authority (v. 17a).<sup>24</sup> He who was given the divine command and placed in charge of the garden was expected to have exercised restraint (2:15; 3:17).<sup>25</sup> But, despite this surrender of his responsibility during the Fall, God’s plan was for man’s leadership to continue. If the woman had, through the serpent’s invitation, taken leadership over the man, then 3:16b serves to re-establish the leadership role of the man in the family.<sup>26</sup> As the New Testament would show, man’s leadership was to be one of love and responsibility, not lordship and disrespect (Eph. 5).

#### 4. Theological Application

Whatever position one takes on the meaning of *tšûqâ* in Gen 3:16, both positive and negative implications can be drawn. For example, the “sexual desire” interpretation puts women in a negative light, as if to suggest that women have a stronger sexual drive, which may not necessarily be the case as a universal rule for women. Again, the “desire to control” interpretation has given rise to the subjugation of women, thereby serving the interests of men. Gen 3:16 can justify neither a man’s lordship over a woman nor the

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<sup>23</sup>Frank B. Holbrook, “A Brief Analysis and Interpretation of the Biblical Data Regarding the Role of Women,” *Symposium on the Role of Women in the Church* (Washington, DC: The General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1984), 89.

<sup>24</sup>In other words, the causal (*kî*) clause that precedes the judgment (v. 17) serves to highlight the man’s yielding to the woman as the immediate basis for the judgment.

<sup>25</sup>The man was to “tend” the garden and “keep” it. The Hebrew *šamar* “keep” often means “guard,” hence “take charge.” As God personally gave the man the instructions on the forbidden fruit (2:15), so would He hold him primarily responsible for the disobedience of the command (3:9-11).

<sup>26</sup>As Matthews, 220, points out, “This usurpation of the creation ideal is, however, properly rearranged in the judgment oracles: now the serpent is to subject to the ‘seed’ of the woman, the woman to subject to the man, and all subject once again under the Lord.”

“harsh exploitive subjugation, which so often characterizes women’s lot in all sorts of societies.”<sup>27</sup>

Generally, the pronouncements in Gen 3:15-19 convey a new set of conditions for human life—the introduction of pain, hardship, struggle, and death—that did not prevail before the Fall.<sup>28</sup> The pronouncement relating to the woman touches on the two major areas of her activity as presented in Gen 2-3: childbearing (3:15-16) and companionship (2:18, 21-24).<sup>29</sup> First, the woman shall fulfill the divine mandate of procreation but this will come with “labour-pain.”<sup>30</sup> Yet there is hope for humanity, for through the “seed” of the woman the head of the “serpent” shall be bruised (3:15). Second, the companionship between the man and the woman which started in a sin-free environment—with the man cherishing the woman as “bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh”—will now be fraught with struggle and frustration (3:16).

There is a theme of conflict in Gen 3:15-16. This conflict is seen, first, between humans and the serpent. The instruction to the man to guard (*šāmar*) the garden (2:15) may be understood to mean that there was already a possible intruder.<sup>31</sup> This intruder, represented in the serpent, could encourage disobedience on the part of the man and the woman. And it happened. Consequently, there would be a conflict between the serpent and humans till the “seed” of the woman bruises the head of the serpent and thus defeat it (3:15). This conflict may represent the spiritual struggle of humans against sin and the forces of evil (Eph 6:10-20). But the conflict would not be manifested only in the struggle with evil forces. It would manifest itself also within the human family—a struggle between man and

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<sup>27</sup>Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 81.

<sup>28</sup> Wenham observes that “the sentences on man and woman take the form of disruption of their earlier appointed roles.” *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup>As John H. Sailhamer, “Genesis,” *Expositor’s Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids; Zondervan, 1990), 56, has noted, “In those moments of life’s greatest blessing—marriage and children—the woman would serve most clearly the painful consequences of her rebellion from God.”

<sup>30</sup>The term *‘ešeb/’iṣṣāḥôn* may mean “labour” or “toil” in the context of 3:16-19 (cf. 5:29). The woman will experience *‘ešeb/’iṣṣāḥôn* in conception/childbirth (v. 16) and the man will also experience *‘iṣṣāḥôn* in the field (v. 17). Yet in the context of childbirth, *‘ešeb* would denote “labor-pain” as the force of *harbāh ’arbbēh* “I will greatly multiply” seems to imply (cf. 1 Chr 4:9-10).

<sup>31</sup>In the context of Gen 1-5, the verb *‘āḥad* “tend” is used of cultivating the soil (Gen 2:15; 3:23; 4:2) while *šāmar* is used of watching or guarding in the sense of protection (Gen 3:34). The man’s task may have included not only ensuring obedience to the Lord’s command, but also protecting the garden from intrusion (cf. Gen 3:24).

woman. The man-woman conflict could, in fact, be part of the cosmic conflict between humans and evil forces.

God had intended the man-woman relationship as one of perfect harmony (Gen 2:18, 21-25). However, the intrusion of sin tainted the relationship with unsavory consequences including struggle (3:16). This struggle is seen in families, work relationships, and even churches. The desire to be in charge is seen among some women in their marriages and families. Some show this in their work environment and in the church as well. In the divine pronouncements, we see this sad reality of life.

Though the picture presented in the Genesis story places the man as the head and leader of the family unit, many women have literally taken over the leadership roles in their homes. Some women want to live their lives independent of their husbands. In fact, there are women who want men in their lives only to get pregnant. This trend has increased the rate of divorce as some go into marriages without any motive of commitment. They just go for a man who can fertilize their ovum and then seek for divorce. Some feminists go to the extremes of frowning upon the marriage institution and looking at it as a tool in the hands of men to exploit women.

Today's woman has generally displayed the desire to be at par with her male counterpart in marriage and in the society. In the work environment, this struggle is observed. Women bosses attempt to show that they are in charge. The struggle for promotion and the need for equal recognition is displayed in the work attitude. This struggle doesn't seem to be ending anytime soon. In churches, the gender issues arise in many forms. The struggle to take certain positions that were hitherto reserved only for men has increased in many churches. Even churches that have hitherto ordained only males have considered the option of ordaining women.<sup>32</sup> Women today desire to be given the same opportunities as men in the church, though some denominations still think a woman should have limitations.

It is also important to note that some men are taking advantage of women because they feel they are supposed to be in charge. Today, there are so many marriages in which the males literally "rule" over their wives. In as much as the woman, according to the divine pronouncement, is supposed to be under the leadership of her husband, it is important to

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<sup>32</sup>The 2015 General Conference Session of the Seventh-day Adventist church in San Antonio will be remembered as a session in which the question of women ordination played a significant role. There was an interest hype in the session which was mainly because of the issue of women ordination on the agenda (J. B. Andor, "2015 General Conference Session in San Antonio: A Study of the Interest Hype among Adventists in Southern Ghana," *Asia-Africa Journal of Mission and Ministry* 13 (2016): 29-44).

mention that women should be treated with respect. Relationships in marriage should be a co-operative partnership that will enhance both partners. There should be a healthy inter-dependence between the partners. This same principle should apply in the society, in the work environment, and in church.

Generally, women are protected by law from domestic violence and other acts of aggression they may face. Also, there should be the same social, economic, and political opportunities for both men and women at all times. The female child should be given the same opportunity to be as educated as her male counterpart. None should be discriminated against because of their gender.

Although the pronouncements against the woman and the man in Gen 3:15-19 describe a sad reality of life following the disobedience, there is hope for the human family. The reader is informed that the conflict between the serpent and humans will end on a positive note: victory will be won for humans (v. 15). The sacrificial system that is soon introduced (Gen 4) and later institutionalized in Israel (Lev 1-7) would point to the ultimate sacrifice of the "Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (Rev. 13:8; cf. John 1:29) who will have victory over "that serpent of old" (Rev. 12:7; cf. 17:14). This victory over evil also provides the antidote to the struggle between man and woman. Ephesians 5 directs that the leadership of the man in the family must be exercised with Christ in view. Paul states that "the husband is head of the wife," but that the husband's headship must reflect Christ's headship over the church (vv. 23-24). Even though sin marred the relationship between man and woman and that this would be evident in a relational struggle, the command to love as Christ loves or as one loves his own body would serve to mitigate the tendency for strife in the family (vv. 1-2, 22-33).

## 5. Conclusion

This brief study reexamined the meaning of *tšûqâ* in the context of Gen 3:14-19. There have been two major differing interpretations of the term: (1) a woman's longing for intimacy and (2) a woman's desire to contend with man for leadership. It is argued here that while the context better supports the second interpretation, advocates of this view, just like those holding the first view, have based their conclusions only on atomistic word studies of *tšûqâ* which occurs only twice elsewhere. This study has affirmed the second interpretation by arguing from structure and clause functions

within the pericope and has applied the text to the theme of conflict, tasks which hitherto have not been undertaken.

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