

ONE MORE LOOK AT “A HELPER SUITABLE FOR HIM (ADgḡḡ. ṛzḡḡ)”

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The meaning of “a helper suitable for him” (ADgḡḡ. ṛzḡḡ)² in Genesis 2:18, 20 has generated considerable debate. “Helper” in English tends to suggest one who is an assistant (according to Webster), a subordinate, and an inferior; thus, many people, in fact, have been misled by the English translation of this word. Driver acknowledges the translation “helpmeet” as an error “implying strange ignorance of the English language.”³ Based upon this expression, Calvin saw woman as “nothing else than an accession to the man”⁴ and interpreted the phrase as “assistant.”⁵ Stitzinger interprets this phrase as positionally subordinate in function to man and explains further that God as divine helper supplied man (male)’s need by designing for him “a subordinate human helper who would aid him in obeying the commands.”⁶ But are these suitable (?) meanings for this phrase in the context that these words are used? The goal of this paper is to reexamine these two Hebrew words, ADgḡḡ. ṛzḡḡ in the context of the first two chapters of Genesis and see how we can best understand the meaning as they are

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²NIV, “a helper suitable for him”; NASB, “a helper suitable to him”; RSV, “a helper fit for him”; KJV, ASV, WEB “a help meet for him”; NRS “a helper as his partner”; NKJ “a helper comparable to him”; The Darby Bible, “a helpmate, his like”; NLT, “a companion who will help him.”

³S. R. Driver, *The Book of Genesis* (London: Methuen & Co., 1906), 41, footnote 2.

⁴John Calvin, *Commentary on the First Book of Moses called Genesis*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948), 129.

⁵Ibid.

⁶F. Michale Stitzinger, “Genesis 1-3 and the Male/Female Role Relationship,” *Grace Theological Journal* 2 (Spring 1981): 31-32.

intended to be read.

THE MEANING OF אֱלֹהֵי. עֲזָרָה

The word עֲזָרָה simply means “help/helper.”⁷ Sixteen out of twenty-one occurrences⁸ in the Old Testament refer to God as the “helper of Israel,” assisting the needs of man. Yahweh as a helper protects and saves (e.g., Deut 33:29; Ps 70:5 [MT 6]). The Psalmist urges Israel to trust in the Lord because he is “their help (עֲזָרָה) and their shield.” Three occurrences refer to military protectors and allies (e.g., Isa 30:5; Eze 12:14; Dan 11:34) who are expected to provide some help. Two other occurrences appear in our passage referring both to man or animal (Gen 2:18, 20). It can also be a proper name for a male (e.g., 1 Chr 4:4; 12:9; Neh 3:19). Moses’ father-in-law, Jethro, names his second son Eliezer for “My father’s God was my *helper*; he saved me from the sword of Pharaoh” (Ex 18:4; writer’s italics).

Because this word is used in referring to a husband and wife relationship, it oftentimes is discussed in defining male and female equality and the headship debate. It is debatable whether we should apply any hierarchical or positional concept to the word “help/helper.” However, if someone insists on gleaning any hierarchical value from this word, we can say that it rather seems to carry a “superior” nuance, as the dominant usage has shown above. According to Freedman, in eight instances this word means “savior” when used with other

⁷Fancis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, eds., *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1951), 740. Hereafter, this source will be identified as *BDB*.

⁸References: Gen 2:18, 20; Ex 18:4; Deut 33:7, 26, 29; Pss 20:3; 33:20; 70:6; 89:20; 115:9, 10, 11; 121:1, 2; 124:8; 146:5; Isa 30:5; Eze 12:14; Dan 11:34; Hos 13:9.

expressions.⁹ Spencer is also skeptical about hierarchical judgment about this word in saying, “If being one who helps inherently implies subordination, then, in that case, God would be subordinate to humans!”¹⁰ It is best, therefore, not to interpret אָזַק from the positional viewpoint. As Tribble points out, it is better to understand it as a relational term.¹¹ It designates a beneficial relationship to whom the help is given. And the help can come from God, people, and even animals. Therefore, the word, by itself, does not specify positions or hierarchy within relationships; more particularly, it does not imply inferiority.¹²

The next word following אָזַק rather designates, if we insist on determining any hierarchy between man and woman, the positional relationship. The word אֲדָמָה is a *hapax legomenon* and is composed of preposition כְּ (“like, as, according to”) and pronominal suffix א (3rd person singular) with a substantive דָּמָה. The last word דָּמָה basically means “what is conspicuous,” or “in front of,” “opposite to.”¹³ On many occasions, it refers to physical and local relationship. For example, when Israel came to the wilderness of Sinai, they encamped *before* (or “in front of” רַחֵם דָּמָה) the mountain. And Joshua read the book of the law *before* (or “in the sight of” לְהִקְדָּם דָּמָה) all the assembly of Israel.¹⁴ It also refers to a mental aspect as in “my pain is

⁹David Freedman, “Woman, A Power Equal to Man” *Journal of Biblical Archaeology Review* 9 (1983): 56. The other seven references are Ex 18:4; Hos 13:9; Pss 20:2; 121:1,2; 124:8; 146:5.

¹⁰Aida B. Spencer, *Beyond The Curse* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1985), 27.

¹¹Phyllis Tribble, “Depatriarchalizing in Biblical Interpretation,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 41 (1973), 36.

¹²Ibid. See also Phyllis Tribble, “Eve and Adam: Genesis 2-3 Reread,” *Andover Newton Quarterly* 13 (March, 1973), 252. Serious objection is raised by David Clines against this kind of conclusion about the phrase. His opinions will be discussed in the next section.

¹³BDB, “It is rather stronger and distincter expression than יָדָה” 617.

¹⁴Cf. Deut 31:11; 1 Sam 15:30; 2 Sam 12:12; 1 Kgs 21:13; etc.

ever *before* me” (יִדְגַּם, Ps 38:17b, writer’s italics). *BDB* suggests that the combination of דָּגַם means “to what is in front of” or “corresponding to.”¹⁵ This term used together with רָצַף־literally means “a helper as in front of him.” In other words, woman is not a helper either “under” (subordinate) man or “over” (superior) man but a helper “corresponding to him” (e.g., Speiser, Gunkel, Cassuto, Westermann; *BDB* adds “equal and adequate to himself.”¹⁶) Some have taken the word אֲדָמָה to mean “counterpart,” and render “corresponding to him, his counterpart” (Gunkel, Kohler-Baumgartner, Vriezen, etc.). In commenting on this idea, Delitzsch adds “such an one as should be his counterpart, the reflection of himself, one in whom he may recognize himself.”¹⁷

Targum Onkelos also renders this in a similar way, “a support (or help) alongside of him,” which carries the meaning of equal position. The LXX uses the word *bohqon kat’ auton* in verse 18 and *bohqoj omoioj autw/in* in verse 20. *bohqoj* is used to designate Christ as a “helper” who aids our weakness in 1 Clement (36:1).¹⁸ Also, according to Robertson, *kata* followed by the direct object signifies horizontal rather than perpendicular direction.¹⁹ The lexical meaning of *omoioj* is “of the same nature, like, similar.”²⁰ And *omoioj* in Genesis 2:20 can

¹⁵*BDB*, 617.

¹⁶*Ibid.*

¹⁷Franz A. Delitzsch, *A New Commentary on Genesis*, trans. Wm. B. Stevenson (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988), 140.

¹⁸See William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1979), 144. *bohqoj* is used 45 times to translate several Hebrew words. In 42 of its occurrences, it refers to the stronger one as the helper.

¹⁹A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (Nashville: Broadman, 1934), 608; cited in Aida Spencer, *Beyond the Curse*, 25.

²⁰Arndt and Gingrich, *Lexicon*, 566.

mean “equally great or important, as powerful as, equal (to).”²¹ Thus, the whole phrase means “helper, of the same nature, equal to him,” which expresses the nature of woman and her status as equal to man.

Freedman even renders this term to mean “a power equal to man.”²² He argues that God made woman, unlike animals, “power (or strength) equal to him.” He traces etymologically the Hebrew word רזק to a combination of two roots, “to save, rescue” and “to be strong” having a mixture of both nuances.²³ Whether we agree with him about this point, at least, he suggests the possibility that even etymologically the word רזק does not convey the nuance of being inferior, but, if anything, rather superior.²⁴ He also argues for the meaning of ADqk being “equal” as found in the famous saying, “The study of Torah is equal (Dqk) to all the other commandments.” Based upon this later Mishnaic Hebrew usage, he rejects the traditional translation of Dqk being “fit” or “appropriate” to describe the woman as “fit helper.”²⁵

Rashi, as a representative of rabbinical interpretations, takes the meaning of ADqk as “opposite,” “be opposed to him,” and explains, “If he is worthy she shall be a help to him; if he is unworthy she shall be opposed to him, to fight him.”²⁶ His interpretation still shows equality in the woman’s position, even to the point of fighting based upon the worthiness of man (a very exciting interpretation!).

All of the above arguments show that the term ADqk rzk designates “a helper who is equal with man.” We can still use the term

²¹Ibid., 576.

²²Freedman, “Woman, A Power Equal to Man” 56.

²³Ibid.

²⁴Ibid., 58. Freedman sees that woman is created being equal to man but superior to animals.

²⁵Ibid., 57.

²⁶Rabbi Silbermann, *Chumash with Targum Onkelos, Haphtaroth and Rashi’s Commentary* (Jerusalem: The Silberman Family, 1934), 11.

“helper” as its translation as long as we understand that the term implies neither superiority nor inferiority of either party, one who provides aid and one who receives it. It is rather a relational and positive term that one who is being helped can be benefited from the help provided. The term *ADQAK* does not convey the meaning of superiority or inferiority either; but, rather, it has a strong nuance of equality and correspondence. In other words, God created a perfect partner, according to God’s own evaluation (Gen 2:18, “it is not good for the man to be alone”), who can provide the help that God intended and who is equal to the male as well. If someone still suggests any kind of hierarchy based upon this term, they not only misunderstand the intention of the term used here but also they, at least, need to accept the fact that since man needs a help (absolutely evaluated by God), therefore, without a woman, man is helpless!

RESPONSE TO THE ARGUMENT OF INFERIORITY

Against the above conclusion, David Clines claims that *ʾADQAK* “helper,” implies inferiority.²⁷ He starts his argument more from an experiential point of view in that he feels a sense of superiority to everyone who helps him and feels a certain sense of inferiority to everyone he helps.²⁸ For him, after all, when he helps someone, it is not his task or his problem, but someone else’s whom he helps. He sees

²⁷David Clines, “What Does Eve Do to Help?” *What Does Eve Do to Help? and Other Irredeemably Androcentric Orientations in Genesis 1-3.*, JSOT Supp. 94 (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990; reprint 1994), 30.

²⁸Ibid.

that the one who helps plays an inferior role, even if in status the person who provides help might be superior (e.g., doctor, professor, psychiatrist, etc.).

He argues further that, even in Hebrew usage, “though superiors may help inferiors, strong may help weak, gods may help human, in the act of helping they are being ‘inferior.’”²⁹ That means “their help may be necessary or crucial, but they are *assisting* some task that is already someone else’s responsibility.”³⁰ He provides several examples from Hebrew Scripture where help is given to those with problems. Most of his examples are drawn from battle scenes. For example, when Joshua and the Israelites were besieging Lachish, the king of Gezer came up to “help” the inhabitants of Lachish (Josh 10:33). Isaiah warns that Egypt’s “help” for Judah in rebellion against Assyria is worthless (Isa 30:7). When Jehoshaphat is in battle against the king of Syria, he is mistaken for his ally, Ahab of Israel. In surprise he “cried out,” and the Lord “helped” him. God drew the Syrians away from him (2 Chr 18:31-32). All of these examples, according to Clines, show that any kind of help, whether it is from God, from the king of a city-state, or another country, does not replace the main character’s job. In this matter, Clines was responding to the argument made by Tribble regarding her denial of associating “helper” with any connotation of inferiority.³¹ For him, the act of helping does connote the sense of inferiority.

Several responses can be given to Clines’ arguments. First, in

²⁹Ibid., 30-31.

³⁰Ibid., 31.

³¹Phyllis Tribble, “Depatriarchalizing in Biblical Interpretation,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 41 (1973): 36.

the above examples used, in the case of the book of Joshua, it is proven that in the Amarna period Lachish and Gezer had very close connections.³² They must have had some kind of covenant relationship in which they were obliged to help each other in case of a crisis; or, possibly, Gezer felt threat from Joshua that the rescue was provided to protect themselves. In the book of Isaiah, when Israel asks for help from Egypt, it is natural to assume that Egypt was looked upon to have power and ability to help in the eyes of Israel. In Jehoshaphat's case God intervened in the situation in order to fulfill the prophecy by Micaiah against Ahab, king of Israel. And at the same time since Jehoshaphat was a good king, God is showing favor to him in contrast to Ahab. According to Clines' logic, they all become inferior in their act of helping or while they are in the process of helping. However, the very opposite logic can be applied. All of the above examples show that all of them who asked for help were in desperate situations. When there was no other alternative, they asked for help. In the very act of helping, the main character could not do anything but passively accepting the help given. In the very process of helping, the helper takes the initiative and plays an active role. In the case of Jehoshaphat, it becomes more obvious. Without God's help, he could have been killed. Before and after God's help, Jehoshaphat is a main character. However, in the very time of God's help, the focus is rather on God and His action. Even the narrative presents God as the subject (2 Chr 18:31). Therefore, it can be argued that a helper is powerful and able enough to provide appropriate help; and, in the very act of helping, he takes the

³²Yohanon Aharoni, *The Land of the Bible*, trans. A. F. Rainey (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1979), 218.

place of the main character and plays a main role. Is this logic workable? The answer is quite positive as much as Clines' is manageable. The purpose for citing Clines here is not so much to dismiss his ideas as wrong or totally unacceptable, but rather to show the awkwardness and inappropriateness of applying a positional or a status-oriented category to the word "help."

Second, another point we can make in response to Clines is that all of the above examples provided by him employ the verbal form of "help." However, in Genesis 2:18, 20, Eve is designated as "helper," a noun form. God did not say, "I will make woman to *help* man," which focuses more on the action of her doing, but "I will make him a *helper*," which focuses on her role as such.³³ Therefore, the author might have intended to convey a different nuance for a noun form from a verb. Eve is not made to provide help whenever it is necessary or if the help is requested, but she ought always to play that role regardless of the need or request.

Third, unlike the above examples, in Genesis 2, Adam did not do anything. He remained passive. He did not ask for help; it was purely God's idea to make woman. God, in His deliberation, says in verse 18, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper equal to him" (writer's translation). Against the sevenfold refrain of "and God saw that it was (very) good (𐤀𐤁𐤅)" in chapter 1, now God finds Adam's being alone as, for the first time, "not good (𐤀𐤁𐤅 - 𐤀𐤁𐤅)." Cassuto explains that the word 𐤀𐤁𐤅, before an adjective, is a more emphatic negation than 𐤁𐤀𐤅 ("not").³⁴ Therefore, it is absolutely not

³³It cannot be her "being," because not all women are wives. It is not her being a woman that is discussed here but the role of being a wife.

³⁴U. Cassuto. *From Adam to Noah: A Commentary on Genesis I-VI* 8, trans. Israel Abrahams

good from God's point of view. Sailhamer points out that after God prohibits Adam from eating the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (vv. 16-17), the remainder of the chapter is designed to set forth a specific example of God's knowledge of the "good," which is the creation of woman.³⁵ Adam could not understand what is "good" (or "beneficial") to him by himself. Thus, God planned something to create the need for a partner in Adam. That is why the account of the naming of the animals is included as part of the story of the creation of the woman. As God intended, the conclusion of the man's naming the animals was that "no suitable helper was found" for Adam (v. 20). This assures the fact that man is distinctive from other creatures and also that inferior animals (man is superior over other creatures as a ruler) cannot meet man's need for a partner. This "helper suitable for him" therefore should be someone who is equal to him, neither superior nor inferior, in order to be compatible, but also reflects God's supreme example of "good." Both man and woman together will meet the requirement of "good" that God intended, each taking a different role. Again Clines' notion of inferiority in the word "help" is not expressed in the context.

IN WHAT SENSE SHOULD A WOMAN BE "A HELPER"?

David Clines is right in pointing out that the term "help" is not entirely adequate to establish the meaning of the word in the present

(Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, The Hebrew University, 1978), 126.

³⁵Frank Gaebelin, ed., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 2, *Genesis*, by John Sailhamer (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 126.

context; but, rather, the meaning can be better clarified when we ask the question what Eve did do to help.³⁶ Therefore, it is important to read the narrative to see in what sense a woman should be a “helper” to man.³⁷

First, in light of the importance of the blessing (“Be fruitful and increase”) in the creation of man and woman in 1:28, it is likely that both man and woman are created to fulfill this promise. In fact, God’s blessing is given both to animals (v. 22) and to humans (v. 28), but a difference is intended. In verse 22 the blessing is introduced with *rmøle* (God blessed and “said”), and in verse 28 with *~h,l' rmayo* (God blessed and “said to them”). Now man (mankind) is created in God’s image so that God can speak to them and God’s blessing is addressed to them. Aalders adds, “This is the first revelation of God to humanity.”³⁸ This concept of woman’s role as child bearing is supported in Genesis chapter 3 in woman’s judgment by a word play between the promise of the “offspring ([*rZ*; lit., “seed”])” in 3:15 and the woman’s role as a “helper (*rZ*”).³⁹ The clear intention of the author is that one of the woman’s roles is child bearing. This theme is also highlighted in the remaining chapters of Genesis (16:1; 17:17; 25:21; 29:31-30:24; etc.).

Some church fathers, in particular Augustine, and later Aquinas, think that procreation is the primary or even the sole purpose of the creation of woman. For example, Augustine says, “But if the woman

³⁶David Clines, “What Does Eve Do to Help?” 32.

³⁷Compare how Clines gives a title in his article, “What Does Eve Do to Help?” He emphasizes the action Eve is taking. The writer of this article is emphasizing in what sense God made woman “helper” to man, emphasizing her role.

³⁸Charles G. Aalders, *Genesis*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 72.

³⁹Sailhamer, *Genesis*, 46.

was not made for the man as a helper in begetting children, for what purpose was she created as a helper?”⁴⁰ In quoting this, Clines argues for an androcentric orientation of the text of Genesis.⁴¹ However, this is a misreading of the text. Though woman is the one who bears a child, this blessing is addressed to both male and female, not just to woman. Both need to fulfill this purpose.

Second, rulership over other creatures, along with the blessing of procreation, is given to both man and woman in the same passage (1:28). In fact, this seems to be the primary reason for God’s creation (1:26, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.”).

Third, this final point is related to woman’s role addressed in chapter 2. It is a rather long description. Thus, it will be separately dealt with in the next section.

WOMAN AS A “HELPER” IN GENESIS 2

Genesis 1 provides a general statement on the creation of mankind (man, as male and female). Next, chapter 2 develops and explains that statement further. The topic of the creation of the man and the woman is zoomed into in chapter 2: “In chapter 1 man is the

⁴⁰Augustine, *De Genesi ad litteram libri duodecim* 9.5.9 (J. P. Migne, *Patrologia Cursus Copmpletus [Patrologia Latina]*, vol. 34 [Paris, 1845], col 396 (=Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Ltinorum 28/1); English translation by John Hammon, S.J., *St. Augustine, The Literal Meaning of Genesis* (Ancient Christian Writer, 41-42; Ramsey, NJ: Paulist, 1982); quoted in Clines, “What Does Eve Do to Help?” 37.

⁴¹Clines, “What Does Eve Do to Help?” 37.

pinnacle of a pyramid, in chapter 2 the center of a circle.”⁴² Chapter 1 shows how both man and woman should be related to the rest of the creatures (rulership). Chapter 2 focuses on how husband and wife are to be related to each other.

Genesis 2:24 (“Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh.”) provides the context for the whole chapter dealing with the marital relationship, not just any male and female relationship. How the wife should be related to her husband is the issue of this chapter. It begins with the description of the creation of the male first. Genesis 2:7 says, “The Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.” The word “formed (ἔπλασεν),” if it is used in its present participle, means a “potter” (e.g., Jer 18:2). The imagery of a potter shaping his clay lies behind this description of man’s creation. God’s handiwork and skill are seen in the creation of man (cf. Isa 29:16; 44:9-10; 45:9). There is a play on the two terms ~d’ah’ (“man”) and hmd’ah’ (“the ground”), and it emphasizes man’s relationship to the land. In the creation, man is taken out of the ground; but, in the Fall, he returned to the ground (3:19). To be more exact, man returned to the dust of the ground. The word ἄσπις (“dust”) “has been obviously chosen to point to the perishable material from which human beings are made.”⁴³ Adam is created. Then, the Lord God prepares a garden for man and puts him there in the Garden of Eden.

⁴²Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1972), 77. He quotes Benno Jacob.

⁴³Clause Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, trans. John Scullin (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1984), 205.

Many English versions translate the purpose of God's putting man in the garden in the following way: "God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden *to work it and to take care of it* (Hrḥmṽl W Hdb.[l])" (writer's italics). One difficulty that exists in this translation is that, in the expression Hrḥmṽl W Hdb.[l], the pronominal suffix in the Hebrew, the final ה with the mappiq, refers to the feminine, whereas the noun "garden," to which the pronoun refers, is masculine in Hebrew. Some try to see the pronominal suffix referring to ḥm'd'a] (feminine noun, meaning "ground"), but this noun (v. 9) is found too far away from the present verse (v. 15) to be an antecedent. By observing several texts having no mappiq, Cassuto suggests seeing the form as an infinitive (with added ה) without the pronominal suffix.⁴⁴ Another difficulty faced with this translation is that man's "working the ground" (3:23) is said to be a result of the Fall. Thus, "working" and "keeping" the garden before the fall would not really provide a sense of punishment after the Fall.

The word db[can mean "to work, till" but is often used in a religious sense of serving God (Ex 3:12; Deut 4:19) and attending the tabernacle duties of the Levites (Num 3:7-8; 4:23-24; etc.).⁴⁵ The verb ḥmṽ also has the simple sense of "guard"; yet, it is frequently used in legal texts of observing religious commands and duties (Gen 17:9; Lev 18:5; Num 28:2) and the Levitical responsibility for guarding the tabernacle (Num 1:53; 3:7-8).⁴⁶ If we consider all of the difficulties pointed out in the above and the semantic ranges of the verbs used, then

⁴⁴Cassuto, *From Adam to Noah*, 122.

⁴⁵See David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker, eds, *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 1, *Genesis 1-15*, by Gordon Wenham, ed. John D. W. Watts (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1987), 67; cited in Cassuto, *From Adam to Noah*, 122-3.

⁴⁶*Ibid.* Wenham points to the interplay of tabernacle and Eden symbolism.

it is more suitable to render the Hebrew expression $\text{Hr}m.v'l \text{W} \text{Hdb.}[\text{l}]$ as “to serve and to obey.”⁴⁷ In other words, man is put in the garden to serve God and to obey Him. Man is not created to be a worker and keeper of the garden; his life in the garden was to be characterized by service to God and obedience to Him.

Our rendering of $\text{Hr}m.v'l \text{W} \text{Hdb.}[\text{l}]$ as “to serve and to obey” is further supported by the fact that, in v. 16, God, for the first time, “commanded (WCYW)” the man as if to see whether man would live a life of obeying God’s commandment: “And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, ‘You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die’” (2:16-17).

Then, the narrative continues with a *waw* consecutive and comes to our passage, “Then the LORD God said, ‘It is not good that the man should be alone (ADb:l); I will make him a helper equal to him’” (2:18).

The word db:l with the suffix form expresses the idea of “by oneself, alone.” It is used in the context as, for example, in Exodus 18 when Moses was serving as a judge between the people and informed them of God’s decrees and laws all day long. When Moses’ father-in-law saw this, he said, “What you are doing is not good ($\text{bAj} - \text{al} \text{ } \text{)} . . .$; you are not able to perform it alone (^ADb:l .)” Then he suggested the appointment of officials who could help Moses. The work of Moses could not be carried out by Moses alone; he needed assistance. Similarly, in the context of Genesis, the command is given to Adam; then God said, “It is not good ($\text{bAj} - \text{al} \text{ } \text{)}$ that the man should be alone

⁴⁷Cf. Sailhamer, “Genesis,” 45.

(ADb|.)” In what sense is it not good? The previous context is assumed here—that is, man, by himself (“alone”), cannot carry out the task God gave. Thus, God provides a helper, in this case, equal to him. The wife is designed by God to help her husband in serving God and obeying him. This was her role as a helper. In effect, God created the first worshipping community. The married couple, therefore, should represent the community that will serve God. Together, they are to exercise obedience to God by not eating from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. It is ironical that this is exactly the area in which she failed: “She took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it” (3:6b). There is a word play on woman (hva) being deceived (avli) by the serpent (vxi). She did exactly the opposite of the role that God had designed. Later in the Pentateuch, God prohibits intermarriage with gentiles: “For they will turn your sons away from following me to serve (db[]) other gods . . . ” (Deut 7:4). Those gentile wives could not function as the “helper” that God intended. Those wives should be avoided when entering into the marriage covenant.

CONCLUSION

In the Fall narrative, women are affected by these two areas of her roles: procreation and relationship with her husband. She would now bear children in increased pain. In chapter 1, rulership was to be exercised over other creatures. Now, woman’s “desire” will be for her husband⁴⁸—that is, this rulership is directed toward her husband. She

⁴⁸For this interpretation, see Susan Foh, “What Is the Woman’s Desire?” *Westminster Theological*

will try to control and dominate her husband instead of helping him, and her husband will rule over her as well. The effects of sin touch the very role of the woman that is portrayed in chapters 1 and 2. The judgment relates precisely to these two points: “Just where the woman finds her fulfillment in life, her honor and her joy, namely in her relationship with her husband and as mother of her children, there too she finds that it is not pure bliss, but pain, burden, humiliation and subordination.”⁴⁹

Proverbs 31 talks about a virtuous wife. She obviously does a lot more than childbearing. Her foundation is the fear of the Lord. With that foundation, she does her husband good (DAJ, Prv 31:12); and her husband is respected at the city gate where he takes the leadership (“his seat among the elders of the land,” Prov 31:23). She is truly a “suitable helper” to her husband.

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⁴⁹Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, 263.

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