

TWELVE EXTRAORDINARY WOMEN



HOW GOD SHAPED WOMEN *of the* BIBLE,
and WHAT HE WANTS *to* DO *with* YOU

JOHN MACARTHUR



THOMAS NELSON
Since 1798

NASHVILLE MEXICO CITY RIO DE JANEIRO

© 2005 by John MacArthur

All rights reserved. No portion of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, scanning, or other—except for brief quotations in critical reviews or articles, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

Published in Nashville, Tennessee, by Thomas Nelson.
Thomas Nelson is a registered trademark of Thomas Nelson, Inc.

Published in association with the literary agency of Wolgemuth & Associates, Inc.

“Unleashing God’s Truth, One Verse at a Time” is a trademark of Grace to You. All rights reserved.

Thomas Nelson, Inc. titles may be purchased in bulk for educational, business, fund-raising, or sales promotional use. For information, please e-mail SpecialMarkets@ThomasNelson.com.

Scripture quotations noted NASB are taken from THE NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE®, © The Lockman Foundation 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995. Used by permission. (www.Lockman.org)

Scripture quotations marked NKJV are taken from the NEW KING JAMES VERSION®. © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Quotations marked KJV are from the King James Version of the Bible.

ISBN 978-1-4002-8028-5 (TP)

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

MacArthur, John, 1939–

Twelve extraordinary women : how God shaped women of the Bible and what He wants to do with you / John MacArthur.

p. cm.

ISBN 978-0-7852-6256-5 (HC)

ISBN 978-0-7852-8354-6 (IE)

1. Women in the Bible—Biography. 2. Women in the Bible—Meditations.

3. Christian women—Religious life. I. Title.

BS575.M26 2005

220.9'2'082—dc22

2005021006

Printed in the United States of America

15 16 17 18 19 RRD 29 28 27 26 25

DEDICATION



*To all the little girls in my life, my granddaughters, who are on the way
to becoming, by God's grace, extraordinary women:*

Kathryn

Olivia

Kylee

Jessica

Susannah

Gracie

Brooke

Elizabeth

Audrey

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS



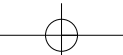
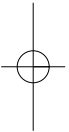
I am grateful for and indebted to Phil Johnson, who has again, as so often before, applied his remarkable editorial skills to my material. For this book, he has done far more than that, by adding his own rich insights to those chapters where my meager material was inadequate.

And very special thanks goes to my extraordinary Patricia, who has faithfully supported this ordinary man through forty-two years of marriage.

CONTENTS



<i>Acknowledgments</i>	iv
<i>Preface</i>	vii
<i>Introduction</i>	xi
1. Eve: Mother of All Living	1
2. Sarah: Hoping Against Hope	27
3. Rahab: A Horrible Life Redeemed	51
4. Ruth: Loyalty and Love	69
5. Hannah: A Portrait of Feminine Grace	87
6. Mary: Blessed Among Women	107
7. Anna: The Faithful Witness	129
8. The Samaritan Woman: Finding the Water of Life	141
9. Martha and Mary: Working and Worshiping	155
10. Mary Magdalene: Delivered from Darkness	171
11. Lydia: A Hospitable Heart Opened	187
<i>Epilogue</i>	199
<i>Study Guide</i>	203
<i>About the Author</i>	217
<i>Notes</i>	219



PREFACE



I never anticipated that my book on the apostles (*Twelve Ordinary Men*) would be as well received by readers as it was. People seemed to appreciate and enjoy the character-study format, even though it is a slight departure from my normal expository style. The book's method and arrangement seemed particularly well suited to small-group studies, and that might have helped fuel a still wider interest. Perhaps even more significant was the intensely practical and personal relevance of such character studies. It helps, I think, to see the apostles as they were: *ordinary* men. That was, after all, the whole point of the book. These were men anyone can relate to. Most of us can easily see aspects of our own character in their personalities, their shortcomings, their struggles, their frequent blunders, and their longing to be everything Christ wanted them to be. It gives us great hope to see how wonderfully God used people such as these.

After *Twelve Ordinary Men* had been on the bestseller lists for more than a year, my friends at Thomas Nelson suggested a sequel. Why not deal

PREFACE

in a similar format with the lives of twelve of the principal women of Scripture? Everyone who heard the idea was immediately enthusiastic about it. Thus the volume you hold in your hands was born.

Of course, there were no decisions to be made about whom to feature in the first book. *Jesus* chose His twelve disciples; all I had to do was research their lives and write about them. This new book would be a different matter. Faced with a plethora of extraordinary women in the Bible, I made a long list of possibilities. The task of narrowing the roll to twelve was by no means easy. I weighed their relative importance in biblical history and chose twelve women who were critical to the story of redemption.

I hope you'll agree that my final short-list includes a good variety of personality types and an interesting assortment of truly extraordinary women. My hope is that, as with the first book, readers will see aspects of themselves in these studies and be encouraged by the reminder that our personal struggles and temptations are the very same kinds of trials that all believers in all ages have confronted. Thus we are reminded that even in the midst of our trouble, God remains eternally faithful (1 Cor. 10:13). The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is the God of Sarah, Rebekah, and Rachel too. He is also the God of every believer in *our* generation—men and women alike. We, like all of them, have our shortcomings. But we are His people and the sheep of His pasture (Ps. 100:3). And His faithfulness *still* reaches to the clouds (Ps. 36:5).

Some have already asked me the significance of the delicate shift in titles. If the disciples were “ordinary,” how is it that these twelve women are *extraordinary*?

The answer, of course, is that while the disciples were ordinary in one sense, they were also *extraordinary* in another sense. As far as their innate talents and their human backgrounds are concerned, they were genuinely ordinary, and deliberately so. “God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base

PREFACE

things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence” (1 Cor. 1:27–29 NKJV). It was only Christ’s work in the disciples’ lives that gave them such remarkable power and influence, so that what they became was something quite uncommon—and what they accomplished (Acts 17:6) was something truly extraordinary.

The same thing is true with the women featured in this book. Most of them were unremarkable in and of themselves. They were ordinary, common, and in some cases shockingly low-caste women—in exactly the same way the disciples were common men. Take the Samaritan woman of John 4, for instance. We don’t even know her name. Likewise, Anna was an obscure, elderly widow who appears in only one brief vignette in the opening of Luke (2:36–38). Rahab was a common harlot. Even Mary, the mother of Christ, was a young girl of no particular distinction, living in an obscure town in a barren and despised district of Galilee. In each instance, what made them extraordinary was a memorable, life-changing encounter with the God of the universe.

The only real exception is Eve, who *began* life as someone quite extraordinary in every way. She was created by God to be the pure and pristine ideal of womanhood. But she soon spoiled it by sinning. Still, she, too, became a living depiction of the truth that God can recover and redeem those who fall—and make them truly extraordinary trophies of His grace in spite of their failures. In fact, I’m convinced that by God’s redeeming grace, the person Eve will be through all eternity is far *more* glorious than she was in her original earthly innocence.

In other words, all these women ultimately became extraordinary not because of any natural qualities of their own, but because the one true God whom they worshiped is great, mighty, glorious, and awesome, and *He* refined them like silver. He redeemed them through the work of an extraordinary Savior—His own divine Son—and conformed them to His

PREFACE

image (Rom. 8:29). In other words, the gracious work of God in their lives made each one of these women truly extraordinary.

They therefore stand as reminders of both our fallenness and our potential. Speaking together as one, they all point us to Christ. In every case, He was the One to whom they looked for salvation. We'll see, for example, how Eve, Sarah, Rahab, and Ruth were all in the line of descent that would produce the Promised One who would crush the serpent's head. Hannah likewise longed for a Savior and rejoiced in the promise of salvation. In fact, Hannah's words of praise about the Savior (1 Sam. 2:1–10) are echoed in Mary's Magnificat. That, of course, was Mary's outpouring of praise when she first learned that she would finally be the one—blessed by God above all other women—to give birth to the Savior. Anna, who had hoped for the Savior all her life, was blessed in her old age to be one of the very first to recognize Him in His infancy (Luke 2:36–38). All the other women featured in this book became some of His earliest disciples. Every one of them therefore testifies to us about Christ.

My prayer for you is that as you read this book you will share their faith, imitate their faithfulness, and learn to love the Savior whose work in their lives made them truly extraordinary. Your life can be extraordinary, too, by His wonderful grace.

INTRODUCTION



One of the unique features of the Bible is the way it exalts women. Far from ever demeaning or belittling women, Scripture often seems to go out of the way to pay homage to them, to ennoble their roles in society and family, to acknowledge the importance of their influence, and to exalt the virtues of women who were particularly godly examples.

From the very first chapter of the Bible, we are taught that women, like men, bear the stamp of God's own image (Gen. 1:27; 5:1–2). Women play prominent roles in many key biblical narratives. Wives are seen as venerated partners and cherished companions to their husbands, not merely slaves or pieces of household furniture (Gen. 2:20–24; Prov. 19:14; Eccl. 9:9). At Sinai, God commanded children to honor *both* father and mother (Ex. 20:12). That was a revolutionary concept in an era when most pagan cultures were dominated by men who ruled their households with an iron fist while women were usually regarded as lesser creatures—mere servants to men.

INTRODUCTION

Of course, the Bible recognizes divinely ordained role distinctions between men and women—many of which are perfectly evident from the circumstances of creation alone. For example, women have a unique and vital role in childbearing and nurturing little ones. Women themselves also have a particular need for support and protection, because physically, they are “weaker vessels” (1 Peter 3:7 NKJV). Scripture establishes the proper order in the family and in the church accordingly, assigning the duties of headship and protection in the home to husbands (Eph. 5:23) and appointing men in the church to the teaching and leadership roles (1 Tim. 2:11–15).

Yet women are by no means marginalized or relegated to any second-class status (Gal. 3:28). On the contrary, Scripture seems to set women apart for special honor (1 Peter 3:7). Husbands are commanded to love their wives sacrificially, as Christ loves the church—even, if necessary, at the cost of their own lives (Eph. 5:25–31). The Bible acknowledges and celebrates the priceless value of a virtuous woman (Prov. 12:4; 31:10; 1 Cor. 11:7). In other words, from cover to cover, the Bible portrays women as *extraordinary*.

The biblical accounts of the patriarchs always give due distinction to their wives. Sarah, Rebekah, and Rachel all loom large in the Genesis account of God’s dealings with their husbands. Miriam, sister of Moses and Aaron, was both a prophetess and a songwriter—and in Micah 6:4, God Himself honors her alongside her brothers as one of the nation’s leaders during the Exodus. Deborah, also a prophetess, was a judge in Israel prior to the monarchy (Judg. 4:4). Scriptural accounts of family life often put wives in the position of wise counselors to their husbands (Judg. 13:23; 2 Kings 4:8–10). When Solomon became king, he publicly paid homage to his mother, standing when she entered his presence, then bowing to her before he sat on his throne (1 Kings 2:19). Sarah and Rahab are expressly named among the heroes of faith in Hebrews 11. Moses’ mother (Jochebed) is included as well by implication (v. 23). In Proverbs, wisdom

INTRODUCTION

is personified as a woman. The New Testament church is likewise represented as a woman, the bride of Christ.

In the social and religious life of Israel and the New Testament church, women were never relegated to the background. They partook with men in all the feasts and public worship of Israel (Deut. 16:14; Neh. 8:2–3). Women were not required to be veiled or silent in the public square, as they are in some Middle Eastern cultures even today (Gen. 12:14; 24:16; 1 Sam. 1:12). Mothers (not merely fathers) shared teaching responsibilities and authority over their children (Prov. 1:8; 6:20). Women could even be landowners in Israel (Num. 27:8; Prov. 31:16). In fact, wives were expected to administer many of the affairs of their own households (Prov. 14:1; 1 Tim. 5:9–10, 14).

All of that stands in sharp contrast to the way other ancient cultures routinely degraded and debased women. Women in pagan societies during biblical times were often treated with little more dignity than animals. Some of the best-known Greek philosophers—considered the brightest minds of their era—taught that women are inferior creatures by nature. Even in the Roman Empire (perhaps the very pinnacle of pre-Christian civilization) women were usually regarded as mere chattel—personal possessions of their husbands or fathers, with hardly any better standing than household slaves. That, once again, was vastly different from the Hebrew (and biblical) concepts of marriage as a joint inheritance, and parenthood as a partnership where *both* father and mother are to be revered and obeyed by the children (Lev. 19:3).

Pagan *religion* tended to fuel and encourage the devaluation of women even more. Of course, Greek and Roman mythology had its goddesses (such as Diana and Aphrodite). But don't imagine for a moment that goddess-worship in any way raised the status of women in society. The opposite was true. Most temples devoted to goddesses were served by sacred prostitutes—priestesses who sold themselves for money, supposing they were performing a religious sacrament. Both the mythology

INTRODUCTION

and the practice of pagan religion has usually been overtly demeaning to women. Male pagan deities were capricious and sometimes wantonly misogynistic. Religious ceremonies were often blatantly obscene—including such things as erotic fertility rites, drunken temple orgies, perverted homosexual practices, and, in the very worst cases, even human sacrifices.

Christianity, born in a world where Roman and Hebrew cultures intersected, elevated the status of women to an unprecedented height. Jesus' disciples included several women (Luke 8:1–3), a practice almost unheard of among the rabbis of His day. Not only that, He *encouraged* their discipleship by portraying it as something more needful than domestic service (Luke 10:38–42). In fact, Christ's first recorded explicit disclosure of His own identity as the true Messiah was made to a Samaritan woman (John 4:25–26). He always treated women with the utmost dignity—even women who might otherwise be regarded as outcasts (Matt. 9:20–22; Luke 7:37–50; John 4:7–27). He blessed their children (Luke 18:15–16), raised their dead (Luke 7:12–15), forgave their sins (Luke 7:44–48), and restored their virtue and honor (John 8:4–11). Thus he exalted the position of womanhood itself.

It is no surprise, therefore, that women became prominent in the ministry of the early church (Acts 12:12–15; 1 Cor. 11:11–15). On the day of Pentecost, when the New Testament church was born, women were there with the chief disciples, praying (Acts 1:12–14). Some were renowned for their good deeds (Acts 9:36); others for their hospitality (Acts 12:12; 16:14–15); still others for their understanding of sound doctrine and their spiritual giftedness (Acts 18:26; 21:8–9). John's second epistle was addressed to a prominent woman in one of the churches under his oversight. Even the apostle Paul, sometimes falsely caricatured by critics of Scripture as a male chauvinist, regularly ministered alongside women (Phil. 4:3). He recognized and applauded their faithfulness and their giftedness (Rom. 16:1–6; 2 Tim. 1:5).

INTRODUCTION

Naturally, as Christianity began to influence Western society, the status of women was dramatically improved. One of the early church fathers, Tertullian, wrote a work titled *On the Apparel of Women* sometime near the end of the second century. He said pagan women who wore elaborate hair ornaments, immodest clothing, and body decorations had actually been forced by society and fashion to abandon the superior splendor of true femininity. He noted, by way of contrast, that as the church had grown and the gospel had borne fruit, one of the visible results was the rise of a trend toward modesty in women's dress and a corresponding elevation of the status of women. He acknowledged that pagan men commonly complained, "Ever since she became a Christian, she walks in poorer garb!"¹ Christian women even became known as "modesty's priestesses."² But, Tertullian said, as believers who lived under the lordship of Christ, women were spiritually wealthier, more pure, and thus more glorious than the most extravagant women in pagan society. Clothed "with the silk of uprightness, the fine linen of holiness, the purple of modesty,"³ they elevated feminine virtue to an unprecedented height.

Even the pagans recognized that. Chrysostom, perhaps the most eloquent preacher of the fourth century, recorded that one of his teachers, a pagan philosopher named Libanius, once said: "Heavens! what women you Christians have!"⁴ What prompted Libanius's outburst was hearing how Chrysostom's mother had remained chaste for more than two decades since becoming a widow at age twenty. As the influence of Christianity was felt more and more, women were less and less vilified or mistreated as objects for the amusement of men. Instead, women began to be honored for their virtue and faith.

In fact, Christian women converted out of pagan society were automatically freed from a host of demeaning practices. Emancipated from the public debauchery of temples and theaters (where women were systematically dishonored and devalued), they rose to prominence in home

INTRODUCTION

and church, where they were honored and admired for feminine virtues like hospitality, ministry to the sick, the care and nurture of their own families, and the loving labor of their hands (Acts 9:39).

After the Roman emperor Constantine was converted in 312 AD, Christianity was granted legal status in Rome and soon became the dominant religion throughout the Empire. One of the measurable early results of this change was a whole new legal status for women. Rome passed laws recognizing the property rights of women. Legislation governing marriage was revised, so that marriage was legally seen as a partnership, rather than a virtual state of servitude for the wife. In the pre-Christian era, Roman men had power to divorce their wives for virtually any cause, or even for no cause at all. New laws made divorce more difficult, while giving women legal rights against husbands who were guilty of infidelity. Philandering husbands, once an accepted part of Roman society, could no longer sin against their wives with impunity.

This has always been the trend. Wherever the gospel has spread, the social, legal, and spiritual status of women has, as a rule, been elevated. When the gospel has been eclipsed (whether by repression, false religion, secularism, humanistic philosophy, or spiritual decay within the church), the status of women has declined accordingly.

Even when secular movements have arisen claiming to be concerned with women's rights, their efforts have generally been detrimental to the status of women. The feminist movement of our generation, for example, is a case in point. Feminism has devalued and defamed *femininity*. Natural gender distinctions are usually downplayed, dismissed, despised, or denied. As a result, women are now being sent into combat situations, subjected to grueling physical labor once reserved for men, exposed to all kinds of indignities in the workplace, and otherwise encouraged to act and talk like men. Meanwhile, modern feminists heap scorn on women who want family and household to be their first priorities—disparaging the role of motherhood, the one calling that is most uniquely and exclusively femi-

INTRODUCTION

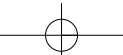
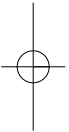
nine. The whole message of feminist egalitarianism is that there is really nothing extraordinary about women.

That is certainly not the message of Scripture. As we have seen, Scripture honors women *as women*, and it encourages them to seek honor in a uniquely feminine way (Prov. 31:10–30).

Scripture never discounts the female intellect, downplays the talents and abilities of women, or discourages the right use of women’s spiritual gifts. But whenever the Bible expressly talks about the marks of an excellent woman, the stress is always on feminine *virtue*. The most significant women in Scripture were influential not because of their careers, but because of their *character*. The message these women collectively give is not about “gender equality”; it’s about true feminine excellence. And this is always exemplified in moral and spiritual qualities rather than by social standing, wealth, or physical appearance.

According to the apostle Peter, for instance, true feminine beauty is not about external adornment, “arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel”; *real* beauty is seen instead in “the hidden person of the heart . . . the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God” (1 Peter 3:3–4 NKJV). Paul, likewise, said godliness and good works are the real essence of feminine beauty; not artificial embellishments applied to the outside (1 Tim. 2:9–10). That truth is exemplified to one degree or another by every woman featured in this book.

The *faithfulness* of these women is their true, lasting legacy. I hope as you meet them in Scripture and get to know more about their lives and characters, they will challenge you, motivate you, encourage you, and inspire you with love for the God whom they trusted and served. May your heart be set ablaze with the very same faith, may your life be characterized by a similar faithfulness, and may your soul be overwhelmed with love for the extraordinary God they worshiped.



1

EVE: MOTHER OF ALL LIVING



Adam called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all living.

—Genesis 3:20 NKJV

Eve must have been a creature of unsurpassed beauty. She was the crown and the pinnacle of God's amazing creative work. The first female of Adam's race was the last living thing to be called into existence—actually fashioned directly by the Creator's own hand in a way that showed particular care and attention to detail. Remember, Eve wasn't made out of dust like Adam, but carefully designed from living flesh and bone. Adam was refined dirt; Eve was a glorious refinement of humanity itself. She was a special gift to Adam. She was the necessary partner who finally made his existence complete—and whose own existence finally signaled the completion of all creation.

Eve, the *only* being ever directly created by God from the living tissue of another creature, was indeed a singular marvel. God had composed a vast universe of wonders out of nothing. Then He made Adam from a handful of dust. But nothing in the whole expanse of the universe was more wonderful than this woman made from a handful of Adam. If the man

EVE

represented the supreme species (a race of creatures made in the image of God), Eve was the living embodiment of humanity's glory (1 Cor. 11:7). God had truly saved the best for last. Nothing else would have sufficed quite so perfectly to be the finishing touch and the very zenith of all creation.

In her original state, undefiled by any evil, unblemished by any disease or defect, unspoiled by any imperfection at all, Eve was the flawless archetype of feminine excellence. She was magnificent in every way. Since no other woman has ever come unfallen into a curse-free world, no other woman could possibly surpass Eve's grace, charm, virtue, ingenuity, intelligence, wit, and pure innocence. Physically, too, she must have personified all the best traits of both strength and beauty. There is no doubt that she was a living picture of sheer radiance.

Scripture, however, gives us no physical description of Eve. Her beauty—splendid as it *must* have been—is never mentioned or even alluded to. The focus of the biblical account is on Eve's duty to her Creator and her role alongside her husband. That is a significant fact, reminding us that the chief distinguishing traits of true feminine excellence are nothing superficial. Women who are obsessed with image, cosmetics, body shapes, and other external matters have a distorted view of femininity. Indeed, Western culture as a whole (including a large segment of the visible church) seems hopelessly confused about these very issues. We need to go back to Scripture to see what God's ideal for a woman really is. And the biblical account of Eve is an excellent reminder of what a woman's true priorities ought to be.

As "the mother of all living," Eve is obviously a major character in the story of humanity's fall and redemption. Yet in all of Scripture, her *name* is used only four times—twice in the Old Testament (Gen. 3:20; 4:1), and twice in the New Testament (2 Cor. 11:3; 1 Tim. 2:13). Not only is no physical description of her given; we don't even know such details as how many children she had, how long she lived, or where and how she

MOTHER OF ALL LIVING

died (Gen. 5:3–5). The way Scripture tells her story, almost in abbreviated fashion, helps us focus more clearly on the aspects of her life that have the most significance.

Although Scripture is silent about many things we might like to know about Eve, we are given detailed accounts of her creation, her temptation and fall, the curse that was placed on her, and the subsequent hope that she clung to. Naturally, that's where we'll focus our study of this truly extraordinary woman.

HER CREATION

The biblical account of Eve's remarkable creation is given in Genesis 2:20–25:

So Adam gave names to all cattle, to the birds of the air, and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper comparable to him. And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place. Then the rib which the LORD God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man. And Adam said: "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man." Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed. (NKJV)

In other words, God performed a surgical procedure on Adam. Scripture describes the operation with a surprising measure of detail. Adam was anesthetized—not by any artificial means, but God simply caused him to fall into a deep sleep. In such a slumber (especially in a world that was still a perfect paradise), Adam would feel no pain, of course. But, more significantly, the pure, passive restfulness of Adam's sleep makes an ideal illustration of how God's grace is *always* received. Grace is never set in

EVE

motion by any effort or activity or volunteerism on our part, but it always flows freely from the sovereign will of God. Notice there's nothing to indicate that Adam *asked* God for a wife. Adam certainly wasn't given any conditions to fulfill as a prerequisite to receiving God's kindness. God Himself instigated this whole event and single-handedly brought it to pass—as an expression of sheer grace and benevolence to Adam. Adam was instrumental only in that he contributed a rib, but even that was done while he was asleep. The work was wholly and completely God's.

Adam's side was opened, a rib was carefully removed, and the incision was closed again. With such an infinitely skilled surgeon, and in the paradise of Eden prior to the curse, there was no danger of infection, none of the discomfort of postoperative pain, and (in all likelihood) not even a scar. God took a redundant bone that Adam would never miss and made for him the one thing he lacked: a soul mate. Adam lost a rib, but he gained a loving companion, created especially for him by the Giver of every good and perfect gift (James 1:17).

The Hebrew expression describing how God “made [the rib] into a woman” denotes careful construction and design. Literally, it means God *built* a woman. He carefully assembled a whole new creature with just the right set of attributes to make her the ideal mate for Adam.

Specially created by God for Adam from his own flesh and bone, Eve suited Adam perfectly in every way. She is a wonderful illustration of the goodness of God's grace and the perfect wisdom of His will. Again, God made her while Adam was asleep, without any tips or suggestions from him. Yet she perfectly met every need Adam had, satisfied every longing he may ever have felt, and delighted every faculty of his senses. She answered his need for companionship; she was a source of joy and gladness to him; and she made possible the procreation of the human race. She complemented Adam perfectly, and she enhanced everything about his existence. Eden was now truly a paradise.

When Adam awoke and found Eve, he must have been overjoyed!

MOTHER OF ALL LIVING

The moment he saw her, he loved her. His first words upon meeting her express a profound sense of wonder, genuine delight, and abiding satisfaction: “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.” Clearly, he already felt a deep, personal attachment to Eve. She was a priceless treasure to be cherished, a worthy partner to encourage him, and a pleasing spouse who would love him in return. Instantly, he adored her and embraced her as his own.

The unique method of Eve’s creation is deliberately emphasized, I think, in order to remind us of several crucial truths about womanhood in general.

First, it speaks of Eve’s fundamental equality with Adam. The woman was “taken out of man.” They shared the same essential nature. She was not a different kind of creature; she was of exactly the same essence as Adam. She was in no way an inferior character made merely to serve him, but she was his spiritual counterpart, his intellectual coequal, and in every sense his perfect mate and companion.

Second, the way Eve was created reminds us of the essential unity that is the ideal in every marriage relationship. Jesus referred to Eve’s creation in Matthew 19:4–6 to prove that God’s plan for marriage was established at the very beginning of human history and was based on the principles of monogamy, solidarity, and inviolability. “Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning ‘made them male and female,’ and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh?’ So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate” (NKJV). So the one-flesh principle is perfectly illustrated in the method of Eve’s creation. As a matter of fact, this is where that principle finds its true origin.

Third, the circumstances of Eve’s creation illustrate how deep and meaningful the marriage of husband and wife is designed to be. It is not *merely* a physical union, but a union of heart and soul as well. Eve was

EVE

Adam's complement in every sense, designed by God to be the ideal soul-companion for him. And the intimacy of her relationship with her husband derives from her being literally taken from his side. In his classic commentary on the Bible, Puritan author Matthew Henry wrote these familiar words, which have been adapted and quoted in many marriage ceremonies: "The woman was *made of a rib out of the side of Adam*; not made out of his head to rule over him, nor out of his feet to be trampled upon by him, but out of his side to be equal with him, under his arm to be protected, and near his heart to be beloved."

The symbolism Matthew Henry saw in Adam's rib accords well with what Scripture teaches about the proper relationship between husbands and wives. It reminds us, again, of how Scripture exalts women.

Fourth, Eve's creation contains some important biblical lessons about the divinely-designed role of women. Although Eve was spiritually and intellectually Adam's peer; although they were both of one essence and therefore equals in their standing before God and in their rank above the other creatures; there was nonetheless a clear distinction in their earthly roles. And this was by God's own deliberate creative design. In the words of the apostle Paul, "Man is not from woman, but woman from man. Nor was man created for the woman, but woman for the man" (1 Cor. 11:8–9 NKJV). Adam was created first; then Eve was made to fill a void in his existence. Adam was the head; Eve was his helper. Adam was designed to be a father, provider, protector, and leader. Eve was designed to be a mother, comforter, nurturer, and helper.

That God has ordained these different functions for men and women is clearly evident from nature alone (1 Cor. 11:14). Men and women do not possess equal physical strength. They are bodily and hormonally different (in a number of rather obvious ways). A mountain of empirical and clinical evidence strongly suggests that men and women are also dissimilar in several other important ways—including socially, emotionally, and psychologically.

MOTHER OF ALL LIVING

To acknowledge that there are such fundamental differences between the genders, and that men and women were designed for different roles, may not correspond with modern feminist sensibilities, but this is, after all, what God's own Word says. God created men and women differently with a purpose, and His plan for them reflects their differences. Scripture is clear in teaching that wives should be subject to the authority of their husbands in marriage (Eph. 5:22–24; Col. 3:18; 1 Peter 3:1–6) and that women are to be under the authority and instruction of men in the church (1 Cor. 11:3–7; 14:34–35).

First Timothy 2:11–15 is a key passage on this issue, because that is where the apostle Paul defends the principle of male headship in the church. The *first* reason Paul gives for this arrangement stems from creation, not from the fall: “Adam was formed first, then Eve” (1 Tim. 2:13 NKJV). So the principle of male headship was designed into creation. It was not (as some have suggested) a consequence of Adam's sin and therefore something to be regarded as a fruit of evil. And when Scripture assigns men the role of headship in the church and in marriage, it reflects *God's blueprint as Creator*. I'm convinced that if people today would simply embrace God's purpose and seek to fulfill the roles God has designed for our respective genders, both men and women would be happier, the church would be healthier, and marriages would be stronger.

Adam was the representative head and archetype for the whole human race. But remember, although Eve was given a subordinate role, she remained Adam's spiritual and intellectual equal. She was his “helper,” neither his supervisor nor his slave. By calling her Adam's “helper,” Scripture stresses the mutuality and the complementary nature of the partnership. Eve was in no way inferior to her husband, but she was nonetheless given a role that was subordinate to his leadership.

Subordinate, yet equal? Yes. The relationships within the Trinity illustrate perfectly how headship and submission can function within a relationship of absolute equals. Christ is in no sense inferior to the Father. “In Him

EVE

dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily” (Col. 2:9 NKJV). He has eternally existed “in the form of God . . . [and] equal with God” (Phil. 2:6 NKJV). “I and My Father are one,” He testified (John 10:30 NKJV). The apostle John made it as clear as possible: From eternity past, Jesus was with God and was Himself God (John 1:1–2). Three divine Persons (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) constitute the one true God of Scripture. All three are fully God and are fully equal. *Yet the Son is subordinate to the Father.* Jesus said, “I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me” (John 5:30 NKJV). “I always do those things that please Him” (John 8:29 NKJV).

The apostle Paul drew a clear parallel between Jesus’ willing submission to his Father and a wife’s willing submission to her husband: “I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God” (1 Cor. 11:3 NKJV). So if you wonder how two persons who are truly equal can have a relationship where one is head and the other submits, you need look no further than the doctrine of the Trinity. God Himself is the pattern for such a relationship.

Eve’s creation establishes a similar paradigm for the human race. Here is the sum of it: Men and women, though equal in essence, were designed for different roles. Women are in no sense intellectually or spiritually inferior to men, but they were quite clearly created for a distinctive purpose. In the economy of church and family, the Bible says women should be subordinate to the authority of men. Yet Scripture also recognizes that in a completely different sense, women are exalted *above* men—because they are the living and breathing manifestation of the glory of a race made in God’s image (1 Cor. 11:7).

That was precisely Eve’s position after creation and before the fall. She was under her husband’s headship, yet she was in many ways an even more glorious creature than he, treasured and extolled by him. They were partners and companions, fellow-laborers in the garden. God dealt with Adam as head of the human race, and Eve was accountable to her husband. Far

MOTHER OF ALL LIVING

from consigning Eve to menial servitude or a state of domestic enslavement, this arrangement utterly liberated her.

This was true paradise, and Adam and Eve constituted a perfect microcosm of the human race as God designed it to be.

But then it was all ruined by sin. Tragically, Eve was the unwitting portal through which the tempter gained access to assault Adam.

HER TEMPTATION

Genesis 2 ends with a succinct description of the innocence of Eden's paradise: "They were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed" (v. 25 NKJV).

Genesis 3 then introduces the tempter, a serpent. This is clearly Satan, who has somehow manifested himself in the form of a reptile, though Scripture doesn't formally identify this creature as Satan until the final book of Revelation (Rev. 12:9; 20:2).

Satan was an angel who fell into sin. Isaiah 14:12–15 and Ezekiel 28:12–19 make reference to the demise of a magnificent angelic creature who is described as the highest and most glorious of all created beings. This can only be Satan. We're not told in Scripture precisely when Satan's fall occurred or what circumstances led to it. But it must have been sometime during the events described in Genesis 2, because at the end of Genesis 1, all creation—including everything in the visible universe as well as the spirit world—was complete, pristine, and unblemished. "God saw *everything* that He had made, and *indeed it was very good*" (Gen. 1:31 NKJV, emphasis added). But then in Genesis 3:1, we meet the serpent.

The chronology of the account seems to suggest that a very short time elapsed between the end of creation and the fall of Satan. A similarly short time appears to have elapsed between Satan's fall and Eve's temptation. It might have been only a few days—or perhaps even only a

EVE

matter of hours. But it could not have been very long. Adam and Eve had not yet even conceived any children.

In fact, that is undoubtedly one of the main reasons the tempter wasted no time deceiving Eve and provoking her husband to sin. He wanted to strike at the head of the human race before the race had any opportunity to multiply. If he could beguile Eve and thereby cause Adam to fall at this moment, he could sabotage all of humanity in one deadly act of treason against God.

Here is the biblical account in full from Genesis 3:1–7:

Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, "Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?'"

And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.'"

Then the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings. (NKJV)

Satan came to Eve in disguise. That epitomizes the subtle way he intended to deceive her. He appears to have singled her out for this cunning deception when she was not in the company of Adam. As the weaker vessel, away from her husband, but close to the forbidden tree, she was in the most vulnerable position possible.

Notice that what the serpent told her was not only plausible; it was even

MOTHER OF ALL LIVING

partially true. Eating the fruit would indeed open her eyes to understand good and evil. In her innocence, Eve was susceptible to the devil's half-truths and lies.

The serpent's opening words in verse 1 set the tenor for all his dealings with humanity: "Has God indeed said . . .?" Skepticism is implicit in the inquiry. This is his classic *modus operandi*. He questions the Word of God, suggesting uncertainty about the meaning of God's statements, raising doubt about the truthfulness of what God has said, insinuating suspicion about the motives behind God's secret purposes, or voicing apprehension about the wisdom of God's plan.

He twists the meaning of God's Word: "Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?'" God's commandment had actually come to Adam as a positive statement: "Of every tree of the garden *you may freely eat*; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat" (Gen. 2:16–17 NKJV, emphasis added). The serpent casts the command in negative language ("You shall *not* eat of every tree"), making God's expression of lavish generosity sound like stinginess. He was deliberately misrepresenting the character and the command of God.

It is likely that Eve had heard about God's only restriction not directly from God, but from her husband. Genesis 2:16–17 records that God gave the prohibition just prior to her creation, at a time when Adam must have been the lone recipient. This concurs perfectly with the biblical truth of Adam's position as the representative and head of the whole human race. God held him directly accountable. Eve's instruction and her protection were his responsibility as head of his family. Consequently, the farther she went from his side, the more she was exposed.

In the innocent bliss of Eden, of course, Eve was unaware that any danger like this existed. Even if (as it appears) the serpent discovered her looking at the tree, she was not thereby sinning. God had not forbidden the couple to *look* at the tree. Contrary to Eve's statement in Genesis 3:3,

EVE

God had not even forbidden them to *touch* the tree. She was exaggerating the rigors of God's one restriction.

Notice that she also understated the severity of God's warning, softening God's decisive tone of absolute certainty ("in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die" [Gen. 2:17 NKJV]) to the language of a mere potentiality ("lest you die" [Gen. 3:3 NKJV]).

At this point, however, it seems she was more flustered and confounded than anything else. There's no reason to assume she was purposely misrepresenting the facts. Perhaps for her protection, to put a fence around the danger, *Adam* had advised Eve not to "touch" the forbidden fruit. In any case, Eve was doing nothing wrong by simply looking at it. She would naturally have been curious. Satan seized the opportunity to beguile her, and thereby tempt Adam.

The second time the serpent speaks to Eve he does not merely misquote God's Word in order to put a sinister spin on it. This time he flatly contradicts what God had told Adam. God's word to Adam was, "In the day that you eat of it you shall surely die" (Gen. 2:17 NKJV). Satan's reply to Eve was the exact opposite: "You will not surely die" (3:4 NKJV).

Then Satan went on to confound Eve with his version of what would happen if she ate: "God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (v. 5 NKJV). This was another partial truth. If Eve ate, her eyes *would* be open to the knowledge of good and evil. In other words, she would forfeit her innocence.

But buried in the middle of those words is the lie of all lies. It is the same falsehood that still feeds the carnal pride of our fallen race and corrupts every human heart. This evil fiction has given birth to every false religion in human history. It is the same error that gave birth to the wickedness of Satan himself. This one lie therefore underlies a whole universe of evil: "You will be like God" (v. 5 NKJV).

Eating the fruit would *not* make Eve anything like God. It would (and did) make her like the devil—fallen, corrupt, and condemned.

MOTHER OF ALL LIVING

But Eve was deceived. She “saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise” (v. 6 NKJV). Notice the natural desires that contributed to Eve’s confusion: her bodily appetites (it was good for food); her aesthetic sensibilities (it was pleasant to the eyes); and her intellectual curiosity (it was desirable for wisdom). Those are all good, legitimate, healthy urges—unless the object of desire is sinful, and then natural passion becomes evil lust. That can never result in any good. Thus we are told by the apostle John, “All that is in the world; the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life; is not of the Father but is of the world” (1 John 2:16 NKJV).

Eve ate and then gave to her husband to eat. Scripture doesn’t say whether Adam found Eve near the forbidden fruit or she went and found him. Either way, by Adam’s act, according to Romans 5:12, “sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men” (NKJV). That is known as the doctrine of original sin. It’s one of the most important, truly foundational doctrines in Christian theology, and therefore certainly worth the effort to understand in the context of Eve’s story.

People sometimes ask why it was *Adam’s* failure that was so decisive for humanity and why Scripture treats Adam’s disobedience as the means by which sin entered the world. After all, Eve actually ate the forbidden fruit first. She was the one who succumbed to the original temptation, allowed herself to be drawn away by an appeal to lust, and disobeyed God’s command. Why is Adam’s transgression deemed the original sin?

Remember, first of all, that 1 Timothy 2:14 says, “Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression” (NKJV). Adam’s sin was deliberate and willful in a way Eve’s was not. Eve was deceived. But Adam chose to partake of the fruit Eve offered him with full knowledge that he was engaging in deliberate rebellion against God.

There is, however, an even more important reason why Adam’s sin, rather than Eve’s, led to the fall of all humanity. Because of Adam’s unique position as head of the original family and therefore captain of the whole

EVE

human race, Adam's headship had particular significance for all of humanity. God dealt with him as a kind of legal delegate for himself, his wife, and all their offspring. When Adam sinned, he sinned as our representative before God. When he fell, we fell with him. That is precisely why Scripture teaches that we are *born* sinful (see Gen. 8:21; Ps. 51:5; 58:3) and that we all share in *Adam's* guilt and condemnation (Rom. 5:18).

In other words, contrary to what many people assume, we don't fall from a state of complete innocence into sin individually, on our own. But Adam, who in effect was acting as an agent and proxy for the entire human race, plunged *all of humanity at once* into sin. In the words of Romans 5:19, "By one man's disobedience many were made sinners" (NKJV). Every one of Adam's progeny was condemned by his actions. And that is why the whole human race is said to be guilty because of what *he* did, and not because of what Eve did.

It is impossible to make sense of the doctrine of original sin if we ignore this principle of Adam's headship. Ultimately, it is impossible to make sense of Scripture at all without understanding this vital principle. In an absolutely crucial sense, even the truth of the gospel hinges on this very same idea of representative headship. Scripture says that Adam's headship over the human race is an exact parallel of Christ's headship over the redeemed race (Rom. 5:18; 1 Cor. 15:22). In the same way that Adam brought guilt on us as our representative, Christ took away that guilt for His people by becoming their head and representative. He stood as their proxy before the bar of divine justice and paid the price of their guilt before God. Jesus also did everything Adam failed to do, rendering obedience to God on behalf of His people. Therefore, "by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous" (Rom. 5:19 NKJV). In other words, Christ's righteousness counts as ours, because He took His place as the representative Head of all who trust Him. That is the gospel in a nutshell.

Don't get the idea, however, that Eve's sin was excusable because it

MOTHER OF ALL LIVING

wasn't as deliberate or as far-reaching as Adam's. Eve's sin was exceedingly sinful, and her actions demonstrated that she was a full and willing partner with Adam in his disobedience. (Incidentally, in a similar way, we all demonstrate by our own willful deeds that the doctrine of original sin is perfectly just and reasonable. No one can legitimately cast off the guilt of the human race by protesting that it is unfair for the rest of us to be tainted with guilt for Adam's behavior. Our own sins prove our complicity with him.)

Eve's sin subjected her to God's displeasure. She forfeited the paradise of Eden and inherited a life of pain and frustration instead. The divine curse against sin targeted her in a particular way.

HER HUMILIATION

The serpent was right about one thing: eating the forbidden fruit opened Eve's eyes so that she knew good and evil. Unfortunately, she knew evil by experiencing it—by becoming a willing participant in sin. And in a moment, her innocence was gone. The result was agonizing shame.

Scripture describes it in a few picturesque words: "Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings" (Gen. 3:7 NKJV).

Their famous attempt to make clothing of fig leaves perfectly illustrates the utter inadequacy of every human device ever conceived to try to cover shame. Human religion, philanthropy, education, self-betterment, self-esteem, and all other attempts at human goodness ultimately fail to provide adequate camouflage for the disgrace and shame of our fallen state. All the man-made remedies combined are no more effective for removing the dishonor of our sin than our first parents' attempts to conceal their nakedness with fig leaves. That's because masking over shame doesn't really deal with the problem of guilt before God. Worst of all, a

EVE

full atonement for guilt is far outside the possibility of fallen men and women to provide for themselves.

That was the realization Adam and Eve awoke to when their eyes were opened to the knowledge of good and evil. The Lord, of course, knew all about Adam's sin before it even occurred. There was no possibility of hiding the truth from Him, and He certainly did not have to come physically to the garden to find out what the first couple were up to. But Genesis tells the story from an earthly and human perspective. What we read in Genesis 3:8–13, in essence, is what Eve heard and saw:

And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.

Then the LORD God called to Adam and said to him, "Where are you?"

So he said, "I heard Your voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself."

And He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you that you should not eat?"

Then the man said, "The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate."

And the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" (NKJV)

It is evident that the shame of our first parents was accompanied by a deep sense of fear, dread, and horror at the prospect of giving account to God for what they had done. That is why they tried to hide. Like the fig leaves, their hiding place was inadequate to conceal them from the all-seeing eye of God.

Adam's reply reflects his fear, as well as a note of deep sorrow. But there's no confession. Adam seems to have realized that it was pointless to try to plead innocence, but neither did he make a full confession. What he

MOTHER OF ALL LIVING

did was try to pass off the blame. He immediately pointed the finger at the one closest to him: Eve.

Also implicit in Adam's words ("The woman whom *You* gave") was an accusation against God. So quickly did sin corrupt Adam's mind that in his blame shifting, he did not shy away from making God Himself an accessory to the crime. This is so typical of sinners seeking to exonerate themselves that the New Testament epistle of James expressly instructs us, "Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am tempted by God'; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed" (James 1:13–14 NKJV). Adam, however, was subtly trying to put at least some of the blame on God himself.

But Adam handed most of the culpability to Eve. The Lord responded, not by arguing with Adam about it, but by turning to Eve and confronting her directly. Obviously, this was not a signal that Adam was off the hook. Rather, the Lord was giving Eve an opportunity to confess her part.

But she just tried to push the blame off onto the serpent: "The woman said, 'The serpent deceived me, and I ate'" (Gen. 3:13 NKJV). That was true enough (1 Tim. 2:14), but the serpent's guilt did not justify her sin. Again, James 1:14 stands as a reminder that whenever we sin, it is because we are drawn away by *our own lust*. No matter what means Satan may use to beguile us into sin—no matter how subtle his cunning—the responsibility for the deed itself still lies with the sinner and no one else. Eve could not escape accountability for what she had done by transferring the blame.

Notice, however, that the Lord made no argument and entertained no further dialogue. There was enough to condemn Adam and Eve in their own words, despite their efforts to avoid a full confession. All their excuses were no better at concealing their guilt than the fig leaves had been.

So in Genesis 3:14–19, the Lord simply pronounces a comprehensive

EVE

curse that addresses the guilty parties in turn—first the serpent, then Eve, and finally Adam:

So the LORD God said to the serpent: "Because you have done this, you are cursed more than all cattle, and more than every beast of the field; on your belly you shall go, and you shall eat dust all the days of your life. And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel."

To the woman He said: "I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception; in pain you shall bring forth children; your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you."

Then to Adam He said, "Because you have heeded the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree of which I commanded you, saying, 'You shall not eat of it': cursed is the ground for your sake; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you, and you shall eat the herb of the field. In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for dust you are, and to dust you shall return." (NKJV)

To examine the entire curse exhaustively might consume many chapters. It would certainly require more space than would be reasonable for a chapter like this. What we are chiefly interested in, of course, is how this curse relates to Eve in particular. Notice that the curse has three sections. The first part is addressed to the serpent; the second part to Eve; and the third part to Adam. But all three sections had serious ramifications for Eve. In order to see this clearly, let's start with the final section, which is addressed to Adam, and work our way backward.

Bear in mind, first of all, that the curse on Adam applied not only to him personally, but also to the entire human race. It furthermore promised significant changes in the earthly environment. So the curse on Adam had immediate and automatic implications for Eve (and for all their

MOTHER OF ALL LIVING

offspring) also. The loss of paradise and the sudden change in all of nature meant that Eve's daily life would be filled with onerous consequences, just as Adam's life would be. Her toil, like his, would become a burden. The sweat, the thorns and thistles, and ultimately the reality of death would all be part of her lot in life too. So the curse on Adam was a curse on Eve as well.

It is significant, I think, that the shortest section of the curse is the part dealing with Eve directly. Eve's part is completely contained in one verse of Scripture (v. 16), and it has two elements. One direct consequence of Eve's sin would be a multiplication of the pain and sorrow associated with childbirth. The other would be a struggle that would occur in her relationship with her husband. In other words, when the curse addresses Eve in particular, it deals with the two most important relationships in which a woman might naturally seek her highest joy: her husband and her children.

The first part of verse 16 is simple and straightforward: "I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception; in pain you shall bring forth children." Of course, sin is what brought sorrow and misery into the world in the first place. The expression *multiply your sorrow* does not suggest that there would have been a lesser degree of anguish or distress in an uncursed Eden anyway. Presumably, even childbirth would have been as painless and as perfect as every other aspect of Paradise. But this language simply recognizes that now, in a fallen world, sadness, pain, and physical difficulties would be part and parcel of the woman's daily routine. And in *childbirth*, the pain and sorrow would be "greatly multiplied"—significantly increased over the normal woes of everyday life. The bearing of children, which originally had the potential to bring the most undiluted kind of joy and gladness, would instead be marred by severe pain and difficulty.

The second part of the verse is a little harder to interpret: "Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you." Clear light is shed on the meaning of that expression by a comparison with Genesis 4:7,

EVE

which uses exactly the same language and grammatical construction to describe the struggle we wage with sin: “Sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it” (NKJV). In other words, sin desires to gain mastery over you, but you need to prevail over it instead.

Genesis 3:16, using the very same language, describes a similar struggle that would take place between Eve and her husband. Before Adam sinned, his leadership was always perfectly wise and loving and tender. Before Eve sinned, her submission was the perfect model of meekness and modesty. But sin changed all of that. She would now chafe under his headship and desire to gain dominance over him. His tendency would be to suppress her in a harsh or domineering way. And thus we see that tensions over gender roles go all the way back to our first parents. It is one of the immediate effects of sin and the awful curse that it brought upon our race.

Paradise was utterly ruined by sin, and the severity of the curse must have shattered Eve’s heart. But God’s judgment against her was not entirely harsh and hopeless. There was a good deal of grace, even in the curse. To the eyes of faith, there were rays of hope that shone even through the cloud of God’s displeasure.

For example, Eve might have been made subject to the serpent to whom she had foolishly acquiesced. But instead, she remained under the headship of her husband, who loved her. She might have been utterly destroyed, or made to wander alone in a world where survival would have been difficult. Instead, she was permitted to remain with Adam, who would continue to care for her and provide for her. Although their relationship would now have tensions that did not exist in Eden, she remained Adam’s partner. Even though she might have justly been made an outcast and a pariah, she retained her role as a wife.

In the worst case, Eve might have even been forbidden to bear children. Instead, although the experience would now be painful and accompanied by sorrow, Eve would still be the mother of all living. In fact, her very name, given to her by Adam after the pronouncement of the curse,

MOTHER OF ALL LIVING

gave testimony to that fact. “Adam called his wife’s name Eve; because she was the mother of all living” (Gen. 3:20 NKJV).

As a matter of fact, the promise that Eve would still bear children mitigated every other aspect of the curse. That one simple expectation contained a ray of hope for the whole human race. There was a hint in the curse itself that one of Eve’s own offspring would ultimately overthrow evil and dispel all the darkness of sin. Eve had set a whole world of evil in motion by her disobedience; now, through her offspring, she would produce a Savior. This powerful hope had *already* been implicitly given to her, in the portion of the curse where the Lord addressed the serpent.

HER EXPECTATION

God’s curse on the serpent was the most severe of all. In the most literal and obvious sense, the curse appears to be addressed to the actual reptile. But remember, *this* reptile was somehow indwelt or controlled by Satan. The true significance of the curse, therefore, actually looks beyond the snake and his species. Its primary message is a grim sentence of condemnation against Satan himself.

Still, the curse *does* have important implications for the literal serpent and his species. Don’t miss the fact that the Lord implicitly declares “all cattle, and . . . every beast of the field” accursed (Gen. 3:14 NKJV). Of course, God did not hold the animal kingdom culpable for Adam’s sin. (Scripture never portrays animals as morally sentient beings, and this is no exception. Even in the case of the serpent, the moral fault lay in the satanic spirit who used the reptile’s form, and not in the beast itself.) But God cursed even the animals for Adam’s sin. In other words, the curse on them was part of God’s judgment against Adam.

Remember, the curse had negative ramifications for Adam’s whole environment. Evil is infectious, and, therefore, when Adam sinned, his

EVE

entire domain was tainted. The sweeping extent of the curse reflects that truth. That is why, in verse 17, the Lord cursed even the ground. Obviously, the animal kingdom would be likewise subject to the many and far-reaching effects of Adam's rebellion. Every beast of the field would henceforth live in a decaying and dying world. They, too, would be subject to disease, destruction, disaster, death, and various other hardships that all stemmed from the presence of evil. Therefore the animals were also formally included in God's curse. They were consigned to suffer the miseries of evil that Adam's sin had brought into his environment. This was all part of *Adam's* judgment, a constant reminder to him about God's displeasure over sin.

But the serpent would be cursed above all species, reduced to crawling on his belly in the dust. This seems to suggest that serpents originally had legs. We're not given a physical description of the serpent prior to the curse, but it could well have been a magnificent and sophisticated creature. From now on, however, all serpents would be demoted to the dirt, condemned to writhe on the ground, and therefore unable to avoid eating the offscouring of all kinds of filth along with their food. Whatever the glories of this creature prior to the fall, he now would take a form that signified the loathsomeness of the tempter who indwelt him.

Furthermore, the serpent would forever bear the stigma of human contempt. The very real effects of this pronouncement are clearly evident in the human species' near-universal hatred of snakes. No other creature arouses so much fear and loathing.

But again, the full meaning of this text really looks beyond the reptile and addresses the satanic spirit who controlled him. The serpent's degradation to the dust simply mirrors and illustrates Satan's own demotion from heaven. "How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How you are cut down to the ground" (Isa. 14:12 NKJV). The loathing of all humanity likewise applies to Satan. Although our race is fallen and spiritually aligned with Satan against God (John 8:44), the devil himself is a

MOTHER OF ALL LIVING

reproach and a disgrace among Eve's children. People, as a rule, are naturally repulsed by Satan and satanic imagery.

But that's not all this means. The important spiritual implications of the curse against the serpent are even more profound than that. And I believe Eve understood this in some measure. Genesis 3:15 is often referred to as the *Protevangelium* (meaning, literally, "the first gospel"). Here is the earliest glimmer of good news for fallen humanity, and it comes in the opening words of God's *curse!* He says to the evil spirit indwelling the snake: "I will put enmity . . . between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel" (NKJV).

Though framed as a malediction against the tempter, that part of the curse was a bright ray of light for Eve. Here was an explicit promise that her Seed would bruise the evil one's head. She could not possibly have grasped the full scope of the divine pledge concealed in those words, but she could hardly have failed to take heart from what she heard.

First of all, the mere mention of "her Seed" indicated that she would bear children and have the opportunity to raise a family. At the very least, she now *knew* she was not going to be instantly and abruptly destroyed because of her sin. She would not be consigned to unmitigated condemnation alongside the serpent. Instead (and Eve surely understood that this was only owing to God's great grace and mercy), she would still have the opportunity to become the mother of the human race. Moreover, God would ensure that enmity would perpetually exist between Eve's descendants and that evil creature. All of this was clearly good news from Eve's perspective.

Even better, however, was the promise that her seed would bruise the serpent's head. This was a guarantee that her race would not be hopelessly subordinated to the evil one's domination forever. In fact, whether Eve fully grasped it or not, this curse against the serpent hinted at an ultimate remedy for her sin, giving Eve reason to hope that someday one of her descendants would inflict a crushing blow to the tempter's head, utterly

EVE

and finally destroying the diabolical being and all his influence—and, in effect, overturning all the wickedness Eve had helped to unleash.

Make no mistake; that is precisely what these words meant. The curse against the serpent held a promise for Eve. Her “Seed” would crush the serpent’s head. Her own offspring would destroy the destroyer.

This sense of Genesis 3:15 reflects the true divine intention. And that fact is made absolutely clear by the rest of Scripture. (Indeed, it is the main plot of the story the rest of Scripture tells.) For example, there is an echo of this same language in Romans 16:20: “The God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly” (NKJV). Hebrews 2:14 says Christ (who, of course, *is* the eternal “God of peace”) took on human form—literally became one of Eve’s offspring—so “that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil” (NKJV). First John 3:8 says, “For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil” (NKJV). Thus Christ, who was uniquely “born of a woman” (Gal. 4:4 NKJV)—the offspring of a virgin, and God in human form—literally fulfilled this promise that the Seed of the woman would break the serpent’s head.

How much of this did Eve genuinely understand? Scripture does not say, but it seems clear that Eve clung to the hope that eventually one of her own offspring would wound her mortal enemy. To borrow words from a slightly different context, she seemed to sense that her species would, by God’s grace, be “saved in childbearing” (1 Tim. 2:15 NKJV). We can be certain that her deep enmity toward the tempter never wavered as long as she lived. She must have longed for the day when one of her children would smash his head.

Evidence of that hope is seen in her great joy upon first becoming a mother. Genesis 4:1 describes the birth of Cain, Eve’s eldest son. Eve said, “I have acquired a man from the LORD” (NKJV). The Hebrew expression might literally be translated, “I have acquired a man; YHWH.” Some commentators have suggested that perhaps she thought Cain was

MOTHER OF ALL LIVING

God incarnate, the promised Redeemer. Scripture gives us few reasons to think her messianic hope was quite that highly developed. Certainly, if she even assumed Cain would be the promised Seed, she was sorely disappointed. He crushed his mother's heart rather than the serpent's head, by murdering Abel, his younger brother.

Whatever Eve may have meant by that expression in Genesis 4:1, it was nonetheless a clear expression of hope and rejoicing because of God's grace, compassion, kindness, and forgiveness toward her. There's a tone of exultation in it: "I have acquired a man from the LORD."

It is also clear that her hope was personified in her own children. She saw them as tokens of God's goodness and reminders of the promise that her seed would be the instrument by which the tempter's ultimate destruction was accomplished. In fact, when Eve bore Seth—after Cain had already broken her heart by murdering Abel—Scripture says, she "named him Seth [meaning, "appointed one"], 'For God has appointed another seed for me instead of Abel, whom Cain killed'" (Gen. 4:25 NKJV). The reference to the "appointed seed" *does* suggest that her heart had laid hold of the promise concealed in the curse, and she treasured the undying hope that one day her own Seed would fulfill that promise.

Were Adam and Eve saved? I believe they were. God's grace to them is exemplified in the way He "made tunics of skin, and clothed them" (Gen. 3:21 NKJV). In order for Him to do that, some animals had to be slain. Thus the first ever blood sacrifice was made by the hand of God on their behalf. Furthermore, concealed in God's declaration that the woman's Seed would defeat the serpent was an implicit promise that their sin and all its consequences would one day be vanquished and the guilt of it would be eradicated. We know from a New Testament perspective that this promise involved the sending of God's own Son to undo what Adam's sin did.

They believed that promise, insofar as they understood it. Scripture records that Seth founded a line of godly people: "As for Seth, to him also

EVE

a son was born; and he named him Enosh. Then men began to call on the name of the LORD” (Gen. 4:26 NKJV). Where would their knowledge of the Lord have come from? Obviously, it came from Adam and Eve, who had more direct and firsthand knowledge of God than anyone else since the fall. This godly line (which endures in the faith of millions even today) was to a large degree their legacy. Happily for Eve, it will eventually prove to be an infinitely more enduring legacy than her sin. After all, heaven will be filled with her redeemed offspring, and they will be eternally occupied with a celebration of the work of her Seed.