

Did God Cause Women to Have Pain in Child Birth?

Troy J. Edwards

Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee. (Genesis 3:16)

The Context Group Version is indicative of how many modern translations render this passage: *“I will greatly multiply your pain and your conception; in pain you shall produce sons.”* Basically, the way Genesis 3:16 is rendered in most translations, we are led to believe that, due to Eve’s transgression, God personally punished her by ensuring that she (and all women afterwards) would suffer pain and agony when having babies.

The Automatic Consequences of Sin

The idea that God personally ensured that the woman would have pain in bearing children makes God appear to be vindictive. God who told us that loving those who choose to do us harm is acting as He would act (Matthew 5:43-48; Luke 6:27-36). Furthermore, He left us an example to follow (Luke 23:33-34; 1 Peter 2:21-23). Would this same God had behaved differently in the Garden of Eden by immediately afflicting pain upon Eve because she wronged Him? The answer is an emphatic “No!”

A careful reading of the passage will show us that God was not declaring what He will do to the woman as payback or punishment for her disobedience. On the contrary, He was announcing to her (as well as Adam), or rather, *lovingly preparing her* for, the automatic consequences that she and her husband brought upon themselves due to their sin. Keep in mind Romans 5:12:

Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned:

Notice that it is not “death by God” but *death by sin*. Death was released into the world, not by any power from God, but by Adam’s sin. Since God did not originate sin then neither is He the producer of its consequences. The punishment for sin is within the sin itself. It is not inflicted by God but comes just as a seed automatically brings forth a harvest (Galatians 6:5-7). As the late Bible expositor, Alexander McLaren, said concerning Genesis 3:16:

The fatal consequences came with a rush. There is a gulf between being tempted and sinning, but the results of the sin are closely knit to it. **They come automatically**, as surely as a stream from a fountain.¹ (Emphasis are mine)

¹ McLaren, Alexander. "Commentary on Genesis 3". **Alexander McLaren's Expositions of Holy Scripture**. <https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/eng/mac/genesis-3.html>.

The power of death was never something that was wielded by God as an instrument of punishment against mankind. The power of death was utilized solely by Satan (Hebrews 2:14-15). By yielding to Satan, the first couple placed themselves under his dominion along with all of the pain commensurate with such an allegiance (Genesis 2:15-17; Romans 5:14).

We must remember that death is not merely the cessation of bodily function. Cessation of the body is only a symptom of death. Death is actually synonymous with “evil” and the “curse,” therefore, entailing all the pain, sickness and misery in the world (Deuteronomy 28:15-68; 30:15, 19). One of the symptoms of the death that Eve placed herself under was an increase in pain during child bearing. As Stuart D. Briscoe explained:

Despite the promise of blessing through the woman and the process of childbearing, first there will be pain and anguish through the same experience. Death was the consequence of sin and the first indications of death that woman would feel would be pain in the very act of giving life. The awful irony of sins’ consequences is that even the most blessed events are often tainted with the odor of death.²

Another Bible expositor adds concerning Genesis 3:16, “Apparently the former penalty was to be the natural consequence of the inroads of sin on the human body Sin brought sorrow into the world, and continues to do so: the multiplication of sins results only in the multiplication of sorrows.”³

God is Not the Afflicter of Woman’s Childbirth Pain

The phrase “I will greatly multiply” is the Hebrew word “*rābāh*”. It is used *twice* in the King James Version’s rendering of Genesis 3:16 as “greatly” and “multiply”. When you read the passage in a Lexicon then it becomes obvious that the words “I will” were added by the translators. In most cases, there is nothing wrong with that, but in this case, it is done via a doctrinal bias since the KJV translators (who were predominantly “Calvinistic” in their worldview)⁴ believed that God was the “first cause” of everything that happens. Furthermore, they believed in a God that personally punished. However, note the passage below also from Genesis:

*And the flood was forty days upon the earth; and the waters **increased**, and bare up the ark, and it was lift up above the earth. (Genesis 7:17)*

² Briscoe, Stuart D. **The Communicator's Commentary: Genesis** (Waco, TX: Word Books, Publisher, 1987), p. 65

³ College Press Bible Study Textbook Series: Genesis, E-Sword edition.

⁴ Edwards, Troy J. **The Permissive Sense: Hints and Helps to Bible Interpretation that Vindicates God’s Character of Love** (Pawtucket, RI: Vindicating God Ministries, 2018), see pp. 31-44.

The word “increased” is also from the Hebrew word “*râbâh*”. This time the translators did not add anything to it, and rightly so. The automatic consequences of constant rain is an increase of water. Thankfully, some translations took note of this and rendered Genesis 3:16 without adding the “I will” that is not in the original Hebrew, thus removing the idea that God personally ensured that women would endure pain in birthing children:

To the woman he said, Great will be your pain in childbirth; in sorrow will your children come to birth; still your desire will be for your husband, but he will be your master. (Bible in Basic English)

Then the Lord said to the woman, “You will suffer terribly when you give birth. But you will still desire your husband, and he will rule over you.” (Contemporary English Version)

I think these translations are more accurate based on what I see in the Hebrew (not that I am an expert mind you, but I did look through a couple of Lexicons to draw my conclusions). Also, some Bible paraphrases are helpful as well:

Then God said to the woman, “You shall bear children in intense pain and suffering; yet even so, you shall welcome your husband’s affections, and he shall be your master.” (The Living Bible)

To the woman he said, “Because my design of love has now been replaced with fear and selfishness, having and raising children will be very hard and filled with sorrow. Fearful, you will seek protection from your stronger husband, but he will dominate you.” (Timothy R. Jennings Expanded Paraphrase)

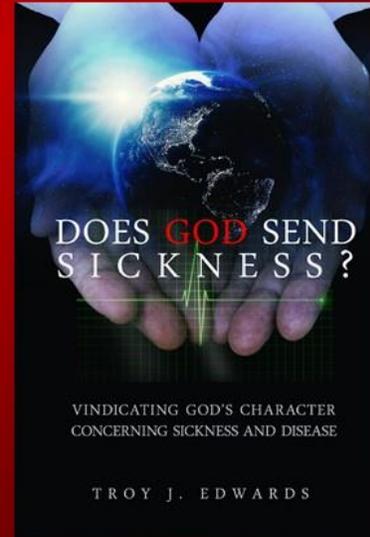
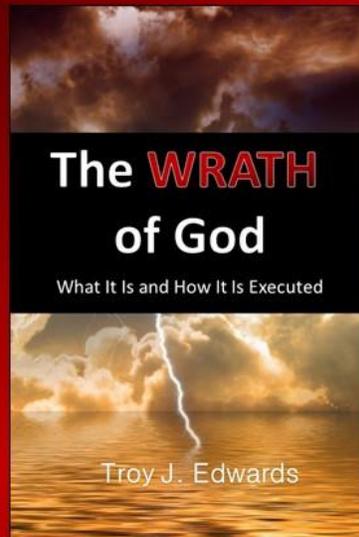
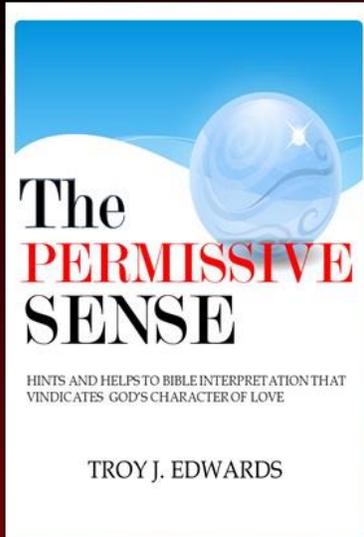
Turning to the woman, God said, “Because you have sinned, childbearing will be painful for you. And because you desired to control your husband, you will be subject to him.” (The Clear Word by Dr. Jack C. Blanco)

Hence, I believe that the passage should be understood in the sense that Adam and Eve brought this on themselves through their sin. As God once told Israel, “*O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself; but in me is thine help*” (Hosea 13:9).

In light of the above, perhaps the best way to paraphrase Genesis 3:16 would be, “The automatic consequences of your sin have affected your body in such a way that your pain will be increased when giving birth.” God is never the cause of any pain, including the woman’s birthing pains. Rather, He is the One who saves us from the consequences of our own rebellion, including Eve’s (1 Timothy 2:14-15). Amen.

Confused about Bible Passages

That seemingly paint God as a sickness inflictor, natural disaster sender, and creator of evil?



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