

A Hermeneutical Method for Reading Demotion Logic as Evidence of Eve's Primordial Status in Genesis 3, With Implications for Feminist Theology

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ABSTRACT

This article presents a hermeneutical argument asserting that the creation narrative in Genesis 2–3 implies Eve's ontological and social superiority over Adam before the Fall. The central interpretive claim is based on a logical analysis of the structure of divine punishment: specifically, that God's pronouncement in Genesis 3:16, stating that Eve's husband will rule over her, constitutes a demotion intelligible only if Eve previously held a position of superiority or equality that predates patriarchal ordering. By examining the grammatical structure of the Hebrew text and the logic of punitive demotion evident in other biblical literature such as the Lucifer/Satan tradition in Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28, the Davidic kings in Psalms 89, Miriam in Numbers 12, and the nations in Genesis 11 this article constructs a comparative framework in which divine punishment consistently involves the removal of a subject from a previously held position of privilege. Within this framework, the Edenic curse is interpreted not as the establishment of an original order but as the disruption of an existing one. The article engages with feminist biblical scholarship, Hebrew linguistic analysis, and theological anthropology to argue that the subordination of women, as encoded in Genesis 3:16, is penal and historical rather than creational and normative, with significant implications for feminist theological ethics and hermeneutics.

Keywords: Eve, Genesis 2-3, Biblical hermeneutics, subordination, hierarchy, demotion.

INTRODUCTION: THE PUNISHMENT THAT PRESUPPOSES A POSITION

Biblical hermeneutics has long contended with the complexities surrounding Eve, her creation, her role in the Fall, and her subsequent subordination to Adam (Özsert 2023). Predominant interpretations, especially within patriarchal theological frameworks, have often approached Genesis 2–3 as a clear narrative establishing male dominance that is man is created first, woman is fashioned as a helper, and the Fall merely affirms an inherent structural hierarchy(Dike and Agbo 2025). The core argument, though straightforward, is frequently overlooked; punishment inherently alters the condition of the punished. If post-punishment entails subordination, then pre-punishment must have been characterized by a different state, possibly equality or even superiority(Mathiasen Stopa 2023). Applying this reasoning to Genesis 3:16, where God declares that Adam shall rule over Eve, suggests a profound implication: before the Fall, such dominance did not exist. Eve's prelapsarian status was not one of subjugation.

Genesis chapter 3 has historically served as the scriptural foundation for androcentrism within Jewish and Christian theological traditions(Drew 2024). The pivotal verse, Genesis 3:16b, "and he shall rule over you," has been interpreted over centuries as God's affirmation of a natural, creational order that man is the head of woman, her authority, her divinely appointed superior. According to this interpretation, the Fall confirms what was always intended as the divine plan for gender hierarchy(Drew 2024).

This article challenges that interpretation on structural grounds. It does not primarily rely on Pauline revisionism(Morrison 2025), Second Temple literature(Culpepper 2024), or the Lilith tradition(Schaeffer 2023), although these perspectives offer valuable insights. Instead, it examines the internal logic of divine

punishment as a literary and theological construct within the Hebrew Bible and poses a deceptively simple question: what does it mean to be punished by demotion? The article posits that demotion inherently assumes a previously elevated status; one cannot be demoted from a position never held (Howard and Kira 2026). When applied to Genesis 3, this reasoning suggests a profound implication: the divine decree that Eve will be ruled by her husband is structurally coherent as punishment only if she was not previously under his rule, implying a prior state of equality or superiority relative to Adam. Thus, the patriarchal order established in Genesis 3:16 is not a restoration of the original design but rather a punitive alteration. This interpretative approach carries significant ramifications for feminist theology. If women's subordination is viewed as a punitive condition imposed post-transgression rather than a foundational aspect of creation, the traditional normative authority ascribed to Genesis 3:16 is entirely undermined. Consequently, the subordination of women emerges not as a theological mandate but as a theological issue to be lamented, resisted, and ultimately reversed in light of redemption.

The article unfolds in five subsequent sections. Section I outlines the pre-existing creation order. Section II scrutinizes the Hebrew text of Genesis 3:16 and its conventional interpretations. Section III elaborates on the concept of demotion as divine punishment, identifying it as a structural element of biblical theology, supported by six additional examples from the Hebrew Bible. Section IV analyzes the Genesis narrative, including Eve's creation and her role in acquiring wisdom, through this interpretative lens. Section V engages with feminist biblical scholarship, exploring the hermeneutical and theological implications of the argument.

Eve in the Pre-Lapsarian Narrative: Textual Indicators of Primacy

The Apex Logic of Creation Order

A common argument for Adam's superiority is based on his being created first (Genesis 2:7). However, this argument is weakened when the same logic is applied consistently: if sequential creation establishes hierarchy, then the animals created before Adam (Genesis 2:19) would be considered superior to him, which is clearly not the intention of the text. A more textually consistent interpretation, as famously argued by biblical scholar Gordon Wenham, is that the order of creation in Genesis 1 progresses from the lesser to the greater: light precedes life, vegetation precedes animals, and animals precede humanity (Wenham 2019). In the Priestly account (Genesis 1), humanity is the culmination, the apex of creation, being created last. Applying this logic to the Yahwist account in Genesis 2 suggests that Eve is the culmination of the creative sequence, rather than an afterthought (Gregerman).

The Ezer Mistranslation Problem

Eve is introduced in Genesis 2:18 as an *ezer kenegdo*, traditionally translated as "helper suitable for him" (NIV) or "help meet" (KJV) (Parry). The term *ezer* has often been interpreted as implying a subordinate, assistive role. However, as extensively documented by Hebrew scholar David Freedman and others, *ezer* in the Hebrew Bible is used almost exclusively to describe God himself (Freedman 1983; Parry): "I lift up my eyes to the mountains where does my help (*ezer*) come from?" (Psalm 121:2); "We wait in hope for the LORD; he is our help (*ezer*) and our shield" (Psalm 33:20). In nearly every other biblical occurrence, *ezer* describes a superior party coming to the aid of an inferior one a rescuer, not a subordinate. The term conveys connotations of indispensable strength rather than servitude. Interpreting Eve as an *ezer* in this context suggests she is introduced not as Adam's subordinate (Call 2023).

The Kenegdo Qualifier

The term *kenegdo* is traditionally interpreted as "corresponding to him" or "suitable for him." However, the root *neged* conveys a spatial and relational nuance of facing, opposite, or in front of, suggesting confrontation, directness, and equivalence. Eve is positioned in front of Adam, facing him, rather than behind or beneath him. The phrase *ezer kenegdo* is more accurately translated as "a powerful counterpart facing him," which implies neither subordination nor mere equivalence, but rather an active, direct, and empowered presence (Call 2023).

Adam's Response as Recognition of Superiority

Upon first seeing Eve (Genesis 2:23), Adam's response is poetic. The only instance of poetry in the creation narrative and is entirely recognitional: "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh." The phrase "at last" (*hapaam*) suggests that Adam has finally encountered what he has been anticipating. Unlike his authoritative naming of the animals (Genesis 2:19-20)(Swanson, Bussert, and Tyers 2024), Adam does not immediately name Eve, but instead expresses admiration for her. In the ancient Near Eastern context, where naming signified control and dominion, Adam's initial ecstatic recognition before naming may indicate a moment of deference rather than authority. The naming of Woman is a descriptive etymology (*ishah* from *ish*), rather than a dominion-asserting nomenclature(Crane 2022; Weiss 2022).

Genesis 3:16 as Punitive Reversal: The Logic of Demotion

The divine pronouncements following the Fall in Genesis 3 are articulated as curses and judgments, representing alterations from a prior state. This distinction is critical. God does not merely describe the existing condition; rather, God declares what will now change. Consider the structure(Doukhan 2025):

- The serpent is cursed to crawl on its belly and consume dust (3:14), suggesting it did not crawl before.
- The ground is cursed to yield thorns and thistles (3:17–18), indicating it did not do so previously. Adam is cursed to obtain food through arduous toil (3:17–19), implying that labor was previously easier or without effort.
- Eve is informed that childbirth will involve significant pain (3:16a), suggesting it was previously painless or less painful.

And then: **"Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you"** (3:16b).

The hermeneutical principle at work here is consistently applied across all pronouncements; each curse delineates a new condition that contrasts with the previous state. The serpent now crawls. The soil now resists. Adam now labors with difficulty. Eve now endures painful childbirth. Additionally, as if completing a series of reversals, her husband will now rule over her(Doukhan 2025).

If male dominance over the woman is the punishment, then it was not the original condition. The grammar is prospective (he will rule), not descriptive of an existing state. The theological logic is unequivocally clear that one cannot demote someone to a status they already occupy. The punishment of subjection presupposes a prior condition of non-subjection. Whether that prior condition was one of equality or female primacy, with Eve as *ezer* holding a structurally empowered position, the text's punitive logic necessitates that it was higher than what follows.

Genesis 3:16 And The Sentence Of Subordination

The divine address to Eve following the consumption of the forbidden fruit (Gen 3:16 NRSV) reads in full: "I will greatly increase your pangs in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children, yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you." The verse comprises four elements: intensified labor pain in childbirth, continued desire for the husband, and male rule over the woman. The final clause, "*wehû yimshol bâk*" ("and he shall rule over you"), employs the verb *māshal*, which in its political and social contexts consistently denotes the exercise of authority, dominion, or governance over a subject who is, by implication, positioned below the one who rules(Drew 2024).

The exegetical tradition has often overlooked the genre of this pronouncement. Rather than describing a pre-existing state, God is issuing a sentence. This speech act is explicitly punitive, directly following the narrative of transgression and framed as a divine response to it. It belongs to the same literary category as the curses pronounced upon the serpent (Genesis 3:14–15) and Adam (Genesis 3:17–19). The serpent is cursed by being lowered, destined to crawl on its belly and eat dust, implying a previous posture of greater dignity. Similarly,

Adam's curse represents a demotion from effortless cultivation to arduous toil, transitioning from the ease of tending a bountiful garden to the struggle of extracting sustenance from resistant ground (Genesis 3:17–19, NRSV). In each instance, the punishment degrades a prior condition: the serpent was once more upright, the ground more yielding, and, as this article argues, Eve was once more equal or superior.

This interpretation of Genesis 2:18 aligns with the argument of punitive demotion. Before Genesis 3:16, there was no structural hierarchy between Adam and Eve; Genesis 3:16 establishes, rather than confirms, such a hierarchy. The critical question is whether this logic of demotion as punishment removal from a superior position is structurally operative in biblical theology more broadly.

The Demotion Logic Of Divine Punishment: Six Biblical Paradigms

For the argument from Genesis 3:16 to hold academic credibility, it must be grounded in a recognizable and recurring pattern within the Hebrew Bible. This section explores six instances where divine punishment explicitly functions as demotion, involving the removal of a subject from a position of elevation, power, or privilege to a lesser one. Each case underscores the structural logic: punishment in the Hebrew Bible's theological imagination is proportional degradation, where one is brought down from their previous standing.

The Day Star: Isaiah 14:12–15 and Ezekiel 28:11–19

The most theologically dramatic example of punitive demotion in the Hebrew Bible is found in the taunt against the king of Babylon in Isaiah 14 (Tiemeyer 2024) and the lamentation over the king of Tyre in Ezekiel 28 (Baker 2024). Both passages operate on a dual level, serving as oracles against historical monarchs and as mythological depictions of a cosmic being whose pride leads to a catastrophic fall. Isaiah 14:12 addresses this figure as "*hēlēl ben šāḥar*, "O Day Star, son of Dawn" (Isa 14:12 NRSV), a being who aspired to ascend to the heights of the divine assembly (Isa 14:13 NRSV) (Chau 2022). The punishment described is a clear reversal: "But you are brought down to Sheol, to the depths of the Pit" (Isaiah 14:15, NRSV). The figure is condemned because the punishment spans the entire hierarchy, from the heights of heaven to the depths of the underworld. The force of the punishment derives entirely from the original elevated position (Nardoizzi and Nardoizzi 2026).

Ezekiel 28:12–15 elaborates on this logic with more mythological detail. The king of Tyre is depicted as "the signet of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty," who was in Eden, the garden of God (Ezekiel 28:12–13, NRSV), deliberately echoing the Edenic setting. He walked among divine beings, blameless until iniquity was found in him. The punishment is described as: "I cast you as a profane thing from the mountain of God, and the guardian cherub drove you out" (Ezekiel 28:16, NRSV). The verb of punishment, *hālal* (הָלַל), means to profane, to demean, to bring to a common level what was once sacred and elevated (Dell 2026; van der Meer).

In both instances, the intelligibility of the punishment relies entirely on the subject's prior elevation. A being of ordinary status cannot be punished by a reduction to ordinariness; only one who occupied an extraordinary position experiences demotion as punishment. This same structural logic, when applied to Eve, necessitates a pre-Fall status that the post-Fall sentence meaningfully diminishes.

The Tower of Babel: Genesis 11:1–9

The narrative of Babel in Genesis 11 depicts humanity in a state of linguistic unity and exceptional collective capability, suggesting that nothing they propose will be impossible for them (Gen 11:6 NRSV). The divine response to this human ambition is punitive. Dispersal and linguistic fragmentation result in diminished communicative capacity and geographic division. This punishment enforces a reduction from a prior state of unified power (Williams Jr and Church).

The relevance of Babel to our argument is structural rather than typological. The narrative illustrates that Genesis 3 is not an isolated instance of punitive demotion but part of a sequence within the primeval history (Genesis 1–11), where divine punishment consistently manifests as a transition from unity to fragmentation,

abundance to scarcity, and elevation to subordination. The primeval history, as a literary unit, is a chronicle of demotions(Kou 2023).

Miriam: Numbers 12:1–16

Numbers 12 recounts the punishment of Miriam for challenging Moses' prophetic authority. Miriam is explicitly identified in earlier tradition as a prophet (Exod 15:20) and as one of the three leaders of the Exodus: Moses, Aaron, and Miriam (Mic 6:4 NRSV). Her punishment, leprosy, and a week of ritual exclusion from the camp, is structurally significant as it removes her from communal leadership and prophetic activity, roles she previously held(Friedman 2026).

The case of Miriam is particularly pertinent as it demonstrates punitive demotion along gendered lines in a context where a woman's prior elevation is textually explicit. The narrative leaves no doubt that Miriam held significant authority before her punishment; the meaning of the punishment relies on that prior authority. This mirrors the logic in Genesis 3:16: Eve's subordination to Adam is only a punishment if she was not previously subordinate(Fleishman and Darabi 2025).

Saul's Loss of Kingship (1 Samuel 15–16)

King Saul's narrative follows a similar trajectory. Chosen by God, anointed, and elevated from the most insignificant clan of the smallest tribe (1 Samuel 9:21) to the kingship over all Israel, Saul reaches the pinnacle of Israelite political and spiritual authority(Baker 2025). His punishment for disobedience, specifically his failure to fully execute God's command concerning the Amalekites, results in the removal of his kingship: "Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, he has rejected you as king" (1 Samuel 15:23). The subsequent anointing of David (1 Samuel 16) signifies not merely a transfer of power but a structural demotion. Although Saul retains the throne, he is stripped of divine legitimacy and suffers increasing spiritual torment. His decline is marked by a descent from the nation's highest position to, ultimately, consulting a forbidden medium in desperation (1 Samuel 28)(Baker 2025; Gosal 2026).

The punishment precisely mirrors his prior status. Saul, once elevated above all others, is brought low above all others. The structure of punitive demotion is consistent. Sin committed from a position of superiority is punished by the removal of that superiority.

Nebuchadnezzar's Humbling (Daniel 4)

The Book of Daniel offers one of the most detailed and narratively rich accounts of divine punitive demotion. Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon and the most powerful ruler of his time, is driven to madness and reduced to living as a beast of the field for seven years (Daniel 4:28–33)(Atkins 2024). During this period, he consumes grass like cattle, his body is soaked with dew, and his hair grows like eagle feathers, while his nails resemble bird claws. For the duration of his punishment, he becomes indistinguishable from an animal(Hays 2007).

The theological significance is clearly articulated in the text: "The Most High is sovereign over all earthly kingdoms and grants them to whomever He wishes, appointing even the lowliest of people to rule". (Daniel 4:17). The purpose of Nebuchadnezzar's punishment is to compel him to acknowledge that Heaven holds ultimate authority. His punishment directly addresses his claim to supremacy, as evidenced by his declaration, "Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?" (Daniel 4:30). God's response is to deprive him of the very thing he boasted about. The punishment serves as the inverse of the sin, with the demotion made possible only because there was a pinnacle from which to fall(Wiseman 2024).

Upon Nebuchadnezzar's repentance and the restoration of his sanity, he is reinstated to his former glory (Daniel 4:36). This restoration further emphasizes that his humiliation was a reversal of a prior condition, rather than a permanent ontological reassignment, a distinction that raises intriguing questions about the nature of Eve's punishment as well(Al-Rawahneh 2025).

Adam Himself: Genesis 3:17–19

The closest parallel to Eve's punishment, and perhaps the most overlooked, is Adam's own. The divine sentence on Adam explicitly represents a demotion from an easier to a more arduous mode of existence, transitioning from productive cultivation in a fertile garden to laborious toil in cursed ground. This punishment is significant precisely because it degrades a prior condition. Adam was not always destined to eat bread by the sweat of his face (Gen 3:19 NRSV); this is a sentence of punishment, not a description of an original state (Simiyu 2025).

If Adam's punishment (harder labor) signifies a reduction from a prior condition of easier labor, and the serpent's punishment (belly crawling) signifies a reduction from a prior condition of greater dignity, then hermeneutical consistency demands that Eve's punishment (male rule over her) (Tao and Chen 2023) signifies a reduction from a prior condition of non-subordination or equality. Any interpretation that considers Adam's and the serpent's punishments as demotions while treating Eve's as merely the institution of a natural order is internally inconsistent.

The Disciples' Dispute and Jesus's Inversion Logic (Mark 9:35; Matthew 20:26–27)

While the New Testament does not present cases of divine punishment in the same manner as the Hebrew Bible, Jesus's teachings on status inversion participate in and extend the same logic. "Whoever wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all" (Mark 9:35). "Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted" (Matthew 23:12). These sayings presuppose that current conditions of status are reversals of or departures from the proper order "the last will be first" (Matthew 20:16). The logic of demotion as punishment and elevation as restoration permeates the entire biblical theological arc (Williams 2025).

Re-Reading The Edenic Narrative: Eve Before The Fall

The demotion logic established in the preceding six cases allows for a renewed interpretation of Genesis 2–3 as a cohesive narrative. When the creation and Fall narrative is examined with a focus on the implications of the punishments for the prior state, several aspects of Eve's characterization gain new significance.

Eve as Moral and Intellectual Agent

The narrative of Genesis 3:1–7 presents Eve not as passive or gullible, as is often stereotypically interpreted, but as a deliberative moral and intellectual agent (Blyth and Colgan 2023). When the serpent speaks, it is Eve, not Adam, who engages in theological reasoning. She references the divine command, considers the serpent's counterargument, and evaluates the tree on multiple grounds: that it was good for food, pleasing to the eyes, and desirable for gaining wisdom (Gen 3:6 NRSV). This reflects reasoned moral agency rather than impulsivity.

In contrast, Adam remains textually silent throughout the exchange. He receives the fruit and eats it (Gen 3:6 NRSV); there is no recorded deliberation, reasoning, or engagement with the serpent's argument (Levin 2025). This also highlights the notion that Eve had instructed Adam to eat the fruit, a command that implies authority when issued by a superior. If the narrative encodes a hierarchy of moral seriousness, it does so in favor of Eve. God's more elaborate and theologically charged address to Eve in the subsequent punishment scene further emphasizes her role as the primary moral subject of the narrative.

Eve as the Bearer of Wisdom

The tree from which Eve sought fruit is known as the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil (Youvan 2024). Consuming its fruit imparts wisdom, specifically the ability for moral discernment, which, in the Hebrew wisdom tradition, is a defining trait of divine beings: "you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Gen 3:5 NRSV; Gen 3:22 NRSV). Eve is the first to pursue this capacity for wisdom, and it is only following her initiative that Adam partakes (Manley 2024).

From a theological perspective centered on wisdom, Eve emerges as the narrative's seeker of wisdom, akin to those who pursue wisdom in Proverbs 1–9. Commentators often note the irony that the wisdom she seeks enables her (and Adam) to recognize their nakedness, vulnerability, and moral state (Fields 2024). In this interpretation, Eve's punishment is directed at the being whose quest for wisdom initiated the transformation of the human condition.

The Naming Question Reconsidered

Traditional interpretations of Genesis 2 have cited Adam's naming of Eve (Gen 2:23; Gen 3:20) as evidence of male authority, arguing that naming signifies dominion (Napora 2022b; Gellman 2006). However, this argument, if applied consistently, presents challenges. Eve is named twice. The first naming, "*iššā*" (woman) (Gen 2:23 NRSV) (Napora 2022a), occurs before the Fall and any punitive sentence, suggesting that hierarchy existed before transgression. The second naming, "*Ḥawwā*" (Eve) (Gen 3:20 NRSV), occurs after the Fall (Hadromi-Allouche 2023). Feminist scholars have convincingly argued that Gen 2:23 is more naturally read as an expression of recognition and solidarity rather than dominion (Hadromi-Allouche 2023; Drew 2024; Pioli 2022). Adam identifies in the woman his own nature ("bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh") before assigning a name that emphasizes their shared humanity (Napora 2022a). In this interpretation, the pre-Fall naming signifies mutuality, not hierarchy.

On this reading, the pre-Fall naming encodes mutuality, not hierarchy. The post-Fall naming occurs within the already altered relational structure created by Gen 3:16. The chronological distinction supports the demotion argument as hierarchy enters the relationship through punishment, not creation.

Feminist Theological Implications

The argument presented in the preceding sections aligns with and extends a significant strand of feminist biblical scholarship. Phyllis Trible's foundational work in "God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality" argued decades ago that the Genesis narrative, when properly interpreted, does not encode the subordination of women as a creational given but rather as a consequence of sin, representing a distortion of an original mutuality (Trible 1978, 2022).

Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's hermeneutics of suspicion encourages readers to identify the ideological interests served by dominant interpretations of texts such as Genesis 3 and to recover alternative readings that the dominant tradition has suppressed (Wang 2025; Gay 2023). The interpretation advanced here accomplishes precisely this: it uncovers the internal logic of divine punishment as a hermeneutical key that the tradition has consistently overlooked. This oversight is not due to the absence of the key in the text, but because recognizing it destabilizes theological justifications for patriarchal structures.

Carol Meyers's historical anthropological work on early Israelite gender relations posits that Genesis 3:16 reflects the social realities of ancient Israelite agrarian life, including intensified labor pain and male authority over household and reproduction, as historical contextual conditions rather than eternal divine mandates (Meyers 2024). The demotion logic developed in this article complements Meyers's historical contextual argument by providing a textual theological foundation for the same conclusion that Genesis 3:16 describes a penal historical state, not a creational normative one (Meyers 2023).

The theological implications are profound. If women's subordination is viewed as a punishment rather than a creational design, several traditional arguments supporting the normativity of gender hierarchy lose their theological foundation. The argument based on the order of creation that Adam was formed first and Eve second, thus establishing man as the head, must address the counterargument that the punitive structure of Genesis 3 suggests a pre-Fall condition of equality or even female superiority, which the Fall disrupted (Bulahari et al. 2024).

Moreover, if subordination is indeed penal, the soteriological question becomes urgent: does redemption in Christ reverse the conditions established by the Fall? Paul's assertion that "there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28, NRSV) gains heightened significance when considered

alongside the demotion logic of Genesis 3:16. Galatians 3:28 not only declares the spiritual equality of redeemed individuals but also announces the reversal of the specific penal ordering instituted at the Fall.

The African theological context, where much contemporary biblical feminist scholarship is produced, lends additional urgency to this argument. In many sub-Saharan African Christian communities, the subordination of women is theologically justified through a literalist interpretation of Genesis 3:16 and the Pauline household codes (Naicker 2025). The argument that Genesis 3:16 describes a punishment rather than a design offers theological communities in these contexts an internally biblical, exegetically rigorous framework for challenging the use of Genesis to legitimize patriarchal social structures.

CONCLUSION

This work presents a structurally grounded hermeneutical argument asserting Eve's primordial superiority or, at the very least, equality with Adam in the pre-Fall Edenic narrative. The argument hinges on a single, deceptively powerful observation: in the Hebrew Bible, divine punishment functions as a demotion, removing a subject from a previously elevated position. When applied to Genesis 3:16, this observation suggests that the male rule imposed as Eve's punishment is only comprehensible if Eve was not previously subject to such rule.

This interpretation is supported by five additional biblical instances where the same logic is clearly operative: the cosmic fall of the Day Star in Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28; the linguistic and communal reduction of humanity at Babel; Miriam's leprosy and exclusion following her exercise of prophetic authority; the conditional demotion of Saul from kingship in 1 Samuel 15 and Psalm 89; and Adam's own demotion from effortless to laborious agricultural work (Genesis 3:17–19), as well as the demotion logic in Jesus' teachings (Mark 9:35; Matthew 20:26–27). In each case, the punishment diminishes what was genuinely possessed, and its intelligibility relies on the prior elevation of its subject.

The proposed reading does not necessitate the introduction of extrinsic feminist agendas into the biblical text. It requires only hermeneutical consistency, applying to Eve's punishment the same structural logic traditionally applied to every other punishment in the primeval history, albeit without recognizing the implication. Eve was demoted, and for demotion to be meaningful, she must have previously held a higher status.

The theological implications of this conclusion extend beyond academic hermeneutics. If the subordination of women is understood as a punishment, a distortion of original mutuality introduced by sin and its penal consequences, then its normative force is entirely nullified. Part of feminist theological ethics involves the duty of redemptive reversal, aiming to restore the equality that existed before the Fall and is essentially reinstated in Christ within ecclesial and social contexts.

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