

Eve: Breath of Life

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To understand Eve, we need to at least know her name. Adam’s name is relatively well-known, but Eve’s, in my experience, is actually misunderstood. We’ll come to that explicitly later. As for Eve’s story, at least the events in Eden, they are some of the best-known events in scripture, if among the most highly debated. It’s vital to begin with the introductory verse, which is excluded from the story by a man-made chapter-break.

And the man (’ādām) and his wife (’iššâ) were both naked (’ārôm) and were not ashamed. Now the serpent was more crafty (’ārûm) than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made. (Gen 2:25-3:1)

The chapter-break that separates these two adjacent verses means they are seldom read together, tragically; and thus the critical fact is missed that the humans and the serpent possess a common trait. The humans are “naked” (’ārôm) and the serpent is “crafty” (’ārûm). Both words derive from the same root (’āram). To automatically assume a similarity of meaning from two words derived from the same root would be incautious – some use the term “root fallacy” to describe the practice of the necessary inference – but in this case we are on stable ground to do so. For one thing, the Hebraic expert Robert Alter asserts this connection¹ and, more importantly, God’s subsequent question demonstrates the two words are irrevocably linked. God challenges:

Who told you that you were naked (’êrôm)? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?” (Gen 3:11)

God uses a third derivative word from the same root. This allows us to logically establish that the derivations from this root are synonymous, otherwise God’s word choice would be off-topic. Ergo, in biblical language, naked and crafty are synonymous.

¹ Robert Alter, Op. cit., p11

This opens new doors. For one thing, it allows us to transpose the words in 2:25 and 3:1, since they are now justified as equivalent. We can now say:

Now the serpent was more naked than any beast of the field that the Lord God had made.

And the man and his wife were both crafty and were not ashamed.

The first transposition doesn't impart any spiritual insight, although it's comforting to see it is physically correct. The serpent, a reptile, is more naked than the beasts of the field, who have fur, hair, or feathers. The serpent, which secular tradition assumes to be a snake but biblical clues suggest is more likely a crocodile, has none of these coverings and is "more naked."

The other transposition yields spiritual treasure. Humans were created crafty; that is our nature. Under any set of rules, we seek out the loopholes. Gen 2:25 teaches that, after the pressure of social expectation is removed, the pretensions of ego stripped away, all personal and societal facades eliminated, we are, at our naked core, crafty. This is a profound truth, and the earliest divine teaching of all.

Thus, Adam and Eve were crafty, and without restraint. Craftiness is no crime *per se*, else God is guilty for creating sin. But potential catastrophe crouches at the door if no restraint is employed with craftiness, if no 'covering' is applied. Adam and Eve are oblivious to this risk.

This is why the serpent existed. God made him more crafty than the animals, but less so than the humans: a half-way condition. His role is to interact with Adam and Eve so that their craftiness is fully teased out, and they can become aware of it. To phrase that with typically ironic Hebrew word-play: the naked serpent was made crafty enough to expose (make naked) the truth: that humans, at their naked core, are crafty. The serpent wasn't there to trip them up, or destroy them; he was there so that Adam and Eve would be illuminated about their core nature.

This repels the cynic's view that the serpent's existence proves Adam and Eve were 'set up to fail' by God. The comic science-fiction writer Douglas Adams, for example, expressed this view vicariously through his character Ford Prefect.

[Ford] "Your God person puts an apple tree in the middle of a garden and says, do what you like, guys, oh, but don't eat the apple. Surprise surprise, they eat it and he leaps out from behind a bush shouting 'Gotcha'. It wouldn't have made any difference if they hadn't eaten it."

[Arthur Dent] "Why not?"

“Because if you’re dealing with somebody who has the sort of mentality which likes leaving hats on the pavement with bricks under them you know perfectly well they won’t give up. They’ll get you in the end.”²

Adams – perhaps tongue in cheek – articulates the cynic’s embittered view, that the existence of the serpent in Eden proves God was ‘out to get us.’ Yet this means the Creator deliberately sabotaged His own creation, which fails in logic. The cynic misses the point that the serpent is designed to trigger Adam and Eve’s mental awakening. Eve’s craftiness drove her desire for the fruit. Regardless of the fruit’s attraction to tastebuds or eye, the principal lure was equality with God, as the serpent offered.

But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”
(Gen 3:4-5)

Let’s be clear: the serpent was wrong. In fact it’s a shocking error in logic. The serpent has said: “In order to become like God, do the exact thing God wouldn’t do.” Eve doesn’t spot the logical error. She literally grasps at equality with God, adding beautiful poignance to the words written about Jesus, who behaved in the godliest way possible by doing the precise reverse.

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped. (Phil 2:5-6)

Eve makes her choice:

So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. (Gen 3:6)

It’s only now we learn Adam is even there. This is a female-led story, although arguably this one shouldn’t be, given Eve’s unwise choice. But her silent husband is entirely passive.

What did eating the fruit actually do? The text says nothing – which is almost certainly the answer. Nothing happened. It was just fruit. And yet, because nothing happened, everything happened. It’s precisely because no flash of light dropped them to their knees, no explosion rocked the sky, no tingly feeling filled their bodies, that the realization came to them: “We just

² Douglas Adams, “The Restaurant at the End of the Universe,” 2021, p213

tried to steal from God. We are crafty; it's our nature." This was the knowledge of good and evil. And, being thus exposed – made ideologically naked – they hid. Hence the genius of God's question.

"Who told you that you were naked?" (Gen 3:11)

It's seldom noticed, but Adam and Eve never answer the question. The reason they don't answer, presumably, is that the answer is the indictment – as God already knows. "No-one told us we were naked/crafty," is the answer, "it's what we discovered when we tried to steal your powers by eating the fruit."

Consequences are administered to all three parties: Adam, Eve and the serpent. Six penalties are handed down: two to each party.³ All earn a physical penalty: the Serpent is humbled in ambulation: consigned to travel "on his belly,"⁴ while Adam and Eve are both sentenced to pain. The 'pangs' (*'iṣṣābôn*) with which Adam will yield food from the ground are the same 'pangs' (*'iṣṣābôn*) with which Eve will labour to produce children.

There is also a spiritual penalty for each. The Serpent is cursed with eternal enmity against the Woman, culminating in his ultimate destruction by her Child. The spiritual lesson is that the Serpent, who comes to represent destructive human behaviour, must ultimately be destroyed for humans to live.

Adam's punishment is banishment from the Garden. One might assume this punishment is applied to both him and Eve, but the text isn't written that way. Curiously, the eviction is attributed wholly to Adam, implying that Eve, as Adam's partner, is merely collaterally involved in the expulsion.

...the Lord God sent him out from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken. He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life.
(Gen 3:23-24)

Eve's spiritual punishment is demotion from her role as Leading Lady. Having mis-led, she's told:

³ Some suggest the Serpent is a metaphor representing the rebellion of humans against God. This hypothesis can gain some traction, because ultimately it will develop into a scriptural truth, and it neatly avoids the difficulties of talking animals, too. Yet the six punishments, two to each of the three participants, is just one argument which is more suggestive of three discrete entities.

⁴ Again, both snake and crocodile fit this criterion.

Your desire (tʰšûqâ) will be for your husband, and he will rule over you. (Gen 3:16, NIV)

The Hebrew word *tʰšûqâ* is fascinating. It's not the common Bible word for desire, *bāqas̄*, which occurs over 200 times. This word, *tʰšûqâ*, appears three times only. It's a desire which is aggressive and predatory.

Then the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires (tʰšûqâ) to have you, but you must rule over it." (Gen 4:6-7, NIV)

Tʰšûqâ is the desire sin has for Cain. This isn't a romantic desire; sin's desire for Cain is to devour and destroy him. This has fascinating implications for Eve's "desire" towards Adam. Her curse may be best paraphrased: "Your husband is now placed in authority over you, and you will develop a burning desire to devour and destroy that dynamic."

As they leave Eden's Garden, the Man does so with a curse: "So the Lord God banished him from the Garden of Eden," yet the Woman leaves with a promise: "Adam named his wife Eve, because she would become the mother of all the living." It's a stark contrast. Adam had been the first living man, yet his collapse into self-service spelled the end of his lineage. For survival, he must now look to Eve, the vessel of continuing life.

This provides a perfect segue into our opening thesis: Eve's name. It occupies the starring role of the biblical formula for human composition. The Bible isn't a science textbook, so this formula isn't a chemical or biological composition, but a theological composition. A human, says the Bible, is one part mud and one part God's breath. One part from Earth, and one from Heaven.

Then the Lord God formed man ('ādām) from the dust of the ground ('ādāmâ), and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life (nʰšāmâ ḥay); and the man became a living being. (Gen 2:7)

A later psalm verifies this formula, adding a sneak preview of resurrection. It says if God's breath is removed, the human is reduced to dust, the earthly component. Yet, if God's breath is returned, the human is (re)created.

When you take away their breath (rûah), they die and return to the dust ('āpār).

When you send your Spirit (rûah), they are created. (Ps 104:29-30)

Despite the symmetry of composition: one part from Earth, one part from Heaven, notice the *asymmetry* in the man's name. God took the clay (*'ădāmā*) and formed the man (*'ādām*). His name is Adam, from the clay. His name reflects the earthly component.

Enter Eve.

The man named his wife Eve (ḥaûâ), because she was the mother of all living (ḥay).
(Gen 3:20)

Adam's name is transliterated, i.e. the Hebrew remains in the English text, but Eve's name is translated, so the Hebrew is literally lost in translation. Her name is Ḥaûâ, meaning "breath," which conceptually matches the heavenly component of humanity: the breath that is added to the clay, bringing the human to life.⁵

The translation into English can be conceptually misleading. Almost every translation reads: "The man called his wife's name EVE (*Ḥaûâ*) because she was the MOTHER (*'ēm*) of all living."

"Eve" in English, speaks of a beginning, which connects conceptually to the word "mother" in the verse, and I find it common for Christians to believe that Eve's name refers to the idea of beginning, or motherhood. But this is the wrong connection: the Hebrew "*Ḥaûâ*" doesn't have any relation to "*'ēm*". It's visible from the text, and verified by Hebraists,⁶ that the correct connection is between her name and the concept of life, i.e. "The man called his wife's name EVE (*Ḥaûâ*) because she was the mother of all LIVING (*ḥay*)."

This now directly links Eve's name to God's breath in Gen 2 (*nʹšāmā ḥay*). This reveals the fascinating contrast between the male and female. Adam is named after the Earthly component; Eve is named after the Heavenly component.

Eve is the breath of life to Adam's clay.

The Helper

Eve is introduced to Adam by God.

Then the Lord God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper ('ēzer) fit for him" ...and brought her to the man. (Gen 2:18, 22)

⁵ Gen 2:7

⁶ Robert Alter, "Genesis," 1996, p15

The woman is the “helper”. Does that mean that woman is introduced as man’s ‘assistant’, and therefore his subordinate? It’s possible to read these words that way, and through history these verses are among those employed to justify systems with males in the ascendancy. But not so fast.

Conceptually, it’s true a ‘helper’ can be a subordinate, as a personal assistant (PA) is to a corporate CEO. But the opposite can also be true. A ‘helper’ can be a tutor, like a schoolchild might need to help them with mathematics. In this context, it’s vital that the helper is superior, i.e. better at mathematics than the child being helped. So when Eve is provided as a “helper” (*’ēzer*) for Adam, which concept is meant? A subordinate PA to a CEO? Or a guiding tutor to a struggling student?

The evidence is compelling. Biblically, the word *’ēzer* is used eighteen times outside the three references to Eve. Fifteen of those uses refer to God,⁷ describing the comforting, sustaining, strengthening, often life-saving help that His Spirit provides. God is not man’s subordinate. And nor is there any case in which the word *’ēzer* is used to plainly identify a subordinate.

Thus, we learn Eve’s help for man is described in the same way as God’s. This marries perfectly with her name: she is the Heavenly breath to Adam’s Earthly clay. In both cases the implication encoded in the Hebrew is that God introduced woman to man, not as a subordinate, but as a message from Heaven to commend (perhaps even model?) godliness. Eve, mother of the living, *Ḥaiâ hay*, Breath of Life, was created by God to help Adam, *’Ādāmâ*, Clay, to become more godly; to encourage him to look up from the mortal, clay-encased world below to the living world above. After all, what other assistance would God be interested in providing except that which makes someone more godly?

⁷ Ex 18:4x2; Dt 33:7,26,29; Ps 20:2; 33:20; 70:5; 89:19; 115:9,10,11; 121:1,2; 124:8; 146:5; Hos 13:9