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## How Are Women Saved?

By Jeffrey J. Meyers

*What had been reduced to ruin by this sex,  
would by the selfsame sex be recovered to  
salvation.*

*As Eve believed the serpent,  
so Mary believed the angel.*

*The delinquency which the one occasioned  
by believing,  
the other by believing effaced.*

—Tertullian

What is Paul saying about women and salvation in 1 Timothy 2:15? Is this a reference to a women's *preservation*, as the translators of the NIV imply ("but women will be kept safe through childbirth")? Other commentators argue that phrase should be translated "women will be *saved* through childbearing," arguing that evangelical translators are prone to soften the wording because of their reluctance to accept that the Bible would say women were *saved* (from eternal death) through childbearing. Since this would seem to implicate Paul in a works-righteousness scheme, most Evangelical commentators opt for softening the meaning of the Greek verb **sozo** to signify "preserving" or "keeping safe," which, it should be acknowledged, is indeed an appropriate use of the word. Any standard Greek lexicon will provide numerous examples of **sozo** being used to denote a "salvation" from something less than eternal death. Unfortunately, the debate often not only focuses on the wrong word, but fails to take the larger biblical-theological context into account.

First of all, consider *the redemptive historical context* of 1 Timothy 2:15. Paul is not discoursing on the fundamental nature and calling of man and woman in the abstract,

but rather he is reviewing the history of the creation, fall, and the promise of salvation in Genesis 2 and 3. Moreover, Paul follows the flow of these two chapters in Genesis rather closely. He is giving an inspired commentary on that passage as it pertains to women's role in church worship. Earlier in 1 Timothy 2 he gave instructions concerning the duties of men (v. 8). He then proceeds to discuss the function of women in the Church (vv. 9-15). After ruling that a woman may not "teach or have authority over a man; she must remain silent," Paul seeks to justify this command by appealing to the Genesis narrative, especially the woman's role in it. Both the creation order ("Adam was formed first then Eve") and the way in which sin entered the world ("Adam was not deceived, it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner") teach us that women are to be in submission to men in the Church.

Second, I believe that the Greek verb **sothesetai** ("will be saved") denotes "salvation" in the strong sense and not merely "preservation." Most commentators make the mistake of interpreting **tes teknogonias** ("the childbirth") as a reference to "childbearing" in general, an activity which pertains to all women. But this should not be assumed. Is Paul referring to all women in general when he speaks of being saved **dia tes teknogonias** ("through the childbirth")? Having pointed out that it was through the deception of *the woman* that sin entered into the world, and having said that *the woman* "became a sinner" (the very end of v. 14), Paul immediately feels constrained to remind his readers of the *remedy* for sin and the central role that Eve (in fulfillment of "the woman" theme in

Old Covenant typology) played in this redemption. Verse 15a would be better translated: “But *she* will be saved through the childbirth. . . .” The plural “women,” is often inserted as the subject of the verb **sothsetai**. Nevertheless, in the Greek there is no stated subject. The verb **sothsetai** is feminine *singular*, not plural as many translations have inaccurately rendered it (singular: KJV, NKJV, NEB, etc.; plural: NIV, NAS, etc.). Who is the subject of this verb? It seems very likely from the context and all the explicit references to Genesis 3 that it is “the woman” (Gen. 3:15, fulfilled in Eve). Salvation will come through the childbearing of “the woman.” It is “the woman” who will be saved in this way.

But the text is even more specific than that. Not just generic “childbearing,” but “the childbirth” (**tes teknogonias**) saves the woman. In the history of the exegesis of this passage essentially two views have emerged as interpretations of **dia tes teknogonias**: 1) it has been understood as a reference to the birth of the Messiah, translated as “through the childbirth” or “by means of the childbearing,” and 2) the phrase has been interpreted to be a reference to the bearing of children in general, variously translated as “through childbearing” or “through the bearing of children.” I agree with George Knight, who notes in his *Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles* that many Bible scholars “have rejected the understanding of spiritual salvation through the birth of the Messiah (Alford, Bernard, Guthrie, Ward) and have done so virtually out of hand and without giving reasons for this view as unlikely.” (p. 369). The noun is definite, and surely refers to the childbirth of the Christ promised to Eve in Genesis 3:15.

Knight observes: “How is salvation promised in Genesis 3? In the *protoevangelium* of Gen. 3:15 which speaks of ‘her seed’ and says ‘He [the seed] shall bruise you [the serpent=Satan] on the head,’ salvation is announced in terms of a child to be born by the woman. Furthermore, this understanding fits the flow of the argument. Paul points out that Eve (**he gune**) brought herself into transgression by abandoning her role and taking on that of the man. But by fulfilling her role, difficult as it may be as a result of sin (‘To the woman he said, “I will greatly multiply your pain in childbirth, in pain you

shall bring forth children; yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you”,’ Gen. 3:16), she gives birth to the Messiah, and thereby, ‘she’ (**he gune**, fulfilled of course in Mary; for this understanding on the part of Paul cf. Gal. 4:4, ‘God sent forth his Son, born of a woman’, **genomenon ek gunaikos**) brings into the world salvation” (Knight, *Commentary*, 369, 370).

Notice how closely Paul is following the text of Genesis 3:

1 Tim. 2:14 “It was the *woman* who was *deceived*”

Gen. 3:13 “The serpent *deceived me*”

1 Tim. 2:15 “She will be saved through the *childbirth*”

Gen. 3:15 “I will put enmity between your seed and *her seed*.”

It would be Eve’s seed (the childbirth = Jesus) that would save men, by crushing the head of the deceiving serpent. Paul has shown how Eve has been instrumental in bringing about the fall into sin, but he does not stop there. He shows how indispensable she will be in the history of redemption. For from the fruit of her body will come the Messiah, who will save both her and all of mankind. In fact, this is how every woman in particular is saved, for Paul switches to the plural in the last half of verse 15 and makes application to women in general. There is then a definite transition from Eve (“The woman”: the singular **he gune**, Gal. 4:4) back to women in general (“women”: the plural **meinosin**, “if they continue”). They will be saved “if they continue in faith, love, and holiness with submission.” Women in general are not saved through bearing children, they are saved through faith in the fruit of “*the childbirth*,” Jesus Christ.

This Messianic interpretation can be found in some modern (Ellicott, Lock, Oden, von Soden, Wohlenberg) as well as ancient commentators (Ignatius, *Eph.*, 19; Irenaeus, *Haer.*, III.22, V.19; Justin, *Dial.*, 100; Tertullian, *De Car.*, XLCI, 17). Thomas Oden comments: “Eve is the referent of the phrase, ‘woman will be saved.’ In the *protoevangelium* of Genesis 3:15, it was prophesied that the tempter’s temporary victory was ultimately to be thwarted. The Lord said to the serpent: ‘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.' The seed of Eve was understood by virtually all classic Christian exegetes as the coming Christ, who would crush the serpent's head, bind up the demonic powers, and bring salvation to Eve's descendants. Hence Paul was not referring to childbirth generally but to a particular Childbirth, that of the Lord, a man born of a woman, the promised seed. *The woman (Eve) will be saved by the Childbearing (of Christ by Mary).* Using Eve as a prototype for all women, the import is that all women are intended recipients of the salvation offered in the birth of Jesus" (Thomas C. Oden, *First and Second Timothy and Titus* [Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1989], 101; see also Thomas Oden, *The Word of Life: Systematic Theology: Volume Two* [San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1989], 148ff.).

If this redemptive historical interpretation is correct, then First Timothy chapter two has nothing to do with the essential mothering role of women in general but rather assures us of the central place of "the woman" in God's redemptive plan and reminds us that women in general are saved from eternal death through faith in the promised Child, if they persevere in the same.

## The Return of Hamor

by James B. Jordan

Back in *Biblical Horizons* 132 I discussed the horrible abuse of the converted men of Salem/Shechem in Genesis 34. These Hivites had joined the covenant by circumcision and then were slaughtered by Simeon and Levi. That, however, is not the end of their story.

In Joshua 9 we find the only other story about Hivites in the Bible. Apart from these two places, the name Hivite appears only in the lists of nations Israel was to displace in Canaan. These Hivites, from Gibeon, came to the army of Joshua in rags and pretended to be from a faraway land. They asked Israel to make a covenant with them. When Joshua was uncertain, they said that they would be Israel's slaves (Joshua 9:6, 8). They also said that they had heard of the fame of Yahweh and wanted to be part of His kingdom, to join His covenant (vv. 9-11). Joshua and the

army listened to them and did not seek Yahweh's counsel. As a result, Joshua made a covenant of peace with these Hivites.

(It is often assumed that Yahweh would have told Joshua not to covenant with the Gibeonites but to exterminate them. But would He have? He might have enlightened Joshua about who they really were, but also welcomed them as He welcomed Rahab.)

After three days, Joshua and the army learned that these Hivites were their neighbors in the land, but because of the covenant they had sworn to them, they did not attack them. Joshua said that they would continue in the covenant, but as "hewers of wood and drawers of water in the house of Yahweh" (vv. 23, 27). The Hivites replied that they would do whatever Joshua said, provided that they might live with Israel and not die, because they feared Yahweh.

God's covenant is everlasting. An earlier group Hivites had joined the covenant people, and God brought it about in His providence that the descendants of their relatives were included in the covenant people.

It is more than interesting to read the false story told by the Hivites of Gibeon. They claimed that they had made an exodus from a far country. They had left with fresh bread, as Israel had left Egypt with unleavened bread on their backs. Now they had finally arrived. Though this story was a lie, in a sense these men were identifying with Israel in her story. By joining Israel, they moved into Israel's history, a history of leaving a far country and wandering for a long time before reaching the land of promise.

It is also noteworthy that these men became assistants to the Levites, who served at Yahweh's house. The earlier Hivites had made a covenant specifically with Levi and Simeon, and now these later Hivites are linked again with Levi. Levi has been restored, and the Hivites are joined to that restoration.

When the Canaanite kings attacked Gibeon, Joshua and his army rose to defend them (Joshua 10). No longer would Israel mistreat her Hivite covenant-brothers.

God continued His covenant with these people. One of the four Gibeonite/Hivite cities was Kiriath-jearim (Joshua 9:17). When the Ark of the Covenant was returned from Philistia, it went initially to Beth-Shemesh, where the Israelites treated it

without respect, and then to Kiriath-jearim. There it remained under the supervision of Levites and their Hivite servants (1 Samuel 6:10 - 7:2a) until David brought it to Jerusalem.

Meanwhile, separated from the Ark, the rest of the Tabernacle was taken to another Hivite city, Gibeon itself, and there it remained until Solomon built the Temple (1 Chronicles 16:39; 1 Kings 3). With the Ark at Kiriath-jearim and the Tabernacle at Gibeon, it appears that these Hivites were more faithful and trustworthy custodians of God's palace than were the Israelites!

We learn from 2 Samuel 21 that King Saul, in his folly trying to earn the favor of God and of the people, tried to exterminate the Gibeonites. In this, he was acting like Simeon and Levi of old.

It is interesting to read in Jeremiah 26:20 that the faithful prophet Uriah was from Kiriath-jearim, while in Jeremiah 28:1 the false prophet Hananiah was from Gibeon. These men might have been Levites living among the Gibeonites, but they might have been Hivites. Either way, the Hivite place names continue to be associated with the service of Yahweh, either true or false.

After the restoration from Babylonian exile, we find Gibeonites involved in rebuilding the city (Nehemiah 3:7), and the other three Hivite cities are listed as part of Israel in Nehemiah 7:29.

God's covenant is everlasting.

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