The Transformation of Deception: Understanding the Portrait of Eve in the Apocalypse of Abraham, Chapter 23

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My three-year-old daughter, Lórien, is just beginning to ask that perennial human question, “Why?” I find that I need to take a deep breath before attempting to respond. Sometimes I do not have patience to explain the real reason. And sometimes I find myself using that line that parents have employed for generations: “Because I said so!”

The question “Why?” has plagued humankind for as long as we can remember, and the question, “Why is there evil and sin in the world?” continues to push pastors, theologians, small group leaders, and parents to the heights of their creative resources to come up with answers. The Apocalypse of Abraham is one such attempt. It is an ancient piece of literature that was circulated among Jews and Christians to help them understand their faith in a troubled world. Though written in a different style that feels foreign to modern readers, the Apocalypse has been read in the same way that Christians today read the works of C. S. Lewis. Just as Lewis’s fiction and nonfiction illuminate the Christian life, enabling us to wrestle with old problems in new ways, the author of the Apocalypse reworks the story of Adam and Eve in order to answer the perennial question: Who is to blame for sin and evil in the world? To answer this question, he does what any good preacher would do: he takes us back to Genesis. But here we find the story of Eve transformed from her simple confession, found in Genesis 3:13, “The serpent deceived me and I ate,” into the sin of sexual seduction.

How did such a transformation take place? Given its relative obscurity as a Jewish legend preserved in Old Slavonic by the Russian Orthodox Church, it would be easy to dismiss this Apocalypse as simply erroneous, irrelevant, or out of sync with Jewish and Christian teaching on the first woman. Unfortunately, as this article will show, the suggestive portrait of Eve found in the Apocalypse of Abraham witnesses to a common stream of biblical interpretation that may extend as far back as the first century before Christ. What is worse is the fact that this ancient prejudice persists today.

We all know the power that stories have to shape the ways we look at the world, especially their power to form opinions that we cannot always explain. Stories about Adam and Eve have been told for thousands of years in efforts to understand human beings, men and women. A careful look at how the old story of Adam and Eve has been told will help us retell this story in our own day in ways that are faithful to the Bible, fair to men and women, and that build up the church.

The portrait of Eve in the Apocalypse of Abraham

Though preserved in the Christian East, the Apocalypse of Abraham is fundamentally a Jewish text. It is believed to have been written in Hebrew or Aramaic some time after the fall of Jerusalem (A.D. 70) and wrestles with questions of God’s justice in the face of such disastrous events. The author of the Apocalypse, like people today, is trying to make sense of the problem of evil. He uses the character of the patriarch Abraham as an example of righteousness amid idolatry and as a revealer of God’s message to the present generation.

The presentation of Eve occurs in the twenty-third chapter, which I have divided into four sections: the introduction, 23:1–3; description, 23:4–8; explanation, 23:9–11; and implications of the vision, 23:12–14. Eve is mentioned in all but section four.

In the first line of the introduction, Abraham is told to look more closely at the images beneath him and to ask two questions: (1) Who seduced Eve? and (2) What is the fruit of the tree? Abraham begins to describe the vision:

And I looked at the picture, and my eyes ran to the side of the garden of Eden. And I saw there a man very great in height and terrible in breadth, incomparable in aspect, entwined with a woman who was also equal to the man in aspect and size. And they were standing under a tree of Eden, and the fruit of the tree was like the appearance of a bunch of grapes of the vine. And behind the tree was standing (something) like a dragon in form, but having hands and feet like a man’s, on his back six wings on the right and six on the left. And he was holding the grapes of the tree and feeding them to the two I saw entwined with each other.

Abraham asks “the Eternal, Mighty One” who the three characters are and what the fruit is. God answers, “This is the world of men, this is Adam and this is their thought on earth, this is Eve. And he who is between them is the impiety of their behavior [unto] perdition, Azazel himself.”

It is significant to note that the introduction to the vision singles out Eve in a way that the description and explanation do not. In the introduction, God tells Abraham to ask, “Who is the one who seduced Eve, and what is the fruit of the tree?” Yet, the vision does not focus on Eve, but describes Eve and Adam as identical in appearance (great in aspect and size), position (entwined), and behavior (eating grapes). Of additional importance is that Eve is said to have been “seduced”—a subtle but significant shift from the presentation of Eve in Genesis 3:13, where Eve describes herself as having been “deceived.” This subtle change is exaggerated by two of the six surviving copies which replace the Slavonic word for “tree” (dreva) with “tree of life” (drevva).

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with “womb” (מִטָּה, מַטָּה), producing the translation, "Who is the one who seduced Eve, and what is the fruit of the womb?"

These two questions are not answered in direct fashion either by the vision or its explanation. In analyzing the text for clues, readers will observe two other enigmatic features—the grapes and the dragon. Both are portrayed in the vision, yet neither is mentioned in the explanation. We will begin with the second. It may be that the author of the Apocalypse assumes his audience will make the connection between the dragon and the name Azazel, but the text is not explicit. If Azazel is the dragon, there exists a discrepancy between the narrative of the vision and its explanation. While, in verse 7, the dragon is depicted behind the tree (and therefore behind the couple who stand under the tree), in verse 11, Azazel is located between the couple. According to the explanation of the vision, Azazel is identified with the activity, the desire of the couple, not the beast feeding the couple.

The grapes are likewise absent from the explanation, but may provide an answer to the difficulty mentioned above. If Azazel is the dragon feeding the couple grapes while they are locked in an embrace, it may be that the author is identifying Azazel also with the grapes. For this fruit appears to be the means by which the couple is being influenced by an outside force. Azazel, though standing behind the couple, places himself between them in the form of the grapes, thus influencing the couple’s behavior. Nevertheless, the difficulty remains. If the fruit of the tree is the impious behavior caused by the influence of Azazel, why is Eve singled out as one seduced?

The Apocalypse of Abraham does not satisfactorily answer this question, and we are forced to look elsewhere for solutions to the puzzle. If the Apocalypse was the only text to implicate Eve in such a suggestive manner, one might be able to dismiss the text as corrupt or simply the fantasy of a quirky author. Fortunately for commentators, and possibly unfortunately for Eve (and for women in general), the author of the Apocalypse is not alone in ascribing to Eve the sin of sexual promiscuity.

**Excavating the traditions**

Some readers may find it surprising to learn that Eve is never mentioned in the Hebrew Scriptures after Genesis 4:25. Outside of Genesis 1–4, even Adam is mentioned by name only a handful of times. It is not until one engages literature written between the close of the Old Testament canon and the writing of the New Testament (i.e., the “second temple” or “intertestamental” period, approximately 300 B.C.E.—A.D. 200) that the characters of Adam and Eve reappear and redouble in significance. Space does not allow us to examine all the literature tracing the transformation of Eve’s deception, so we will limit our discussion to Jewish writings just before and after the period of the Apocalypse’s probable composition: between the fall of Jerusalem (A.D. 70) and the end of the first century A.D. 7 Greater space will be given to the older texts, in this case, the literature of 1 Enoch.

While the average Christian may be unfamiliar with 1 Enoch and other intertestamental literature, Bible scholars believe many of these stories were well known at the time of Jesus. Jesus and the writers of the New Testament may have pulled from images and stories found in this literature to support their own teaching and preaching. If Christian bookstores had been common in that day, 1 Enoch and the other texts that follow would have been easily found among the bestsellers.

**Eve in 1 Enoch**

First Enoch is made up of five different books, written and revised by different authors between 175 B.C. and the first century A.D. The earliest surviving witness to Eve after Genesis 1–4 occurs in the oldest portion of 1 Enoch, chapters 1–36, known as “The Book of Watchers.” The Enoch literature is of particular relevance to the Apocalypse of Abraham because it is also the first witness to the mysterious character, Azazel, spelled Azazel in E. Isaac’s translation of 1 Enoch.

Eve appears with Adam toward the end of “The Book of Watchers,” in 1 Enoch 32. In this chapter, Enoch (rather than Abraham) is given a heavenly vision of the “garden of righteousness” and comments on the beauty of the trees there. One tree in particular catches his eye, similar to “the carob tree, its fruit like very beautiful grape clusters, and the fragrance of this tree travels and reaches afar.” Enoch’s angelic guide, Raphael, reveals the identity of the tree:

> This very thing is the tree of wisdom from which your old father and aged mother, they who are your precursors, ate and came to know wisdom; and (consequently) their eyes were opened and they realized that they were naked and (so) they were expelled from the garden.

Kelley Coblenz Bautch in her study of Eve within Enochic literature notes that, while the Enochic writer knows the Genesis 2–3 narrative, he nevertheless softens the portrayal of Eve (as well as Adam), making no reference to a prohibition, serpent, deception, divine reproach, or additional punishments beyond expulsion from the garden. Bautch contends that, given the emphasis placed upon wisdom in “The Book of Watchers,” Eve (and Adam) should be seen as a “progenitor of wisdom” rather than “misled or as uniquely disobedient.”

Eve appears again in the section of 1 Enoch (chs. 85–90) entitled “The Animal Apocalypse.” An exact date for the composition of this section of 1 Enoch is still debated by scholars, though G. W. E. Nickelsburg suggests a date of final composition no later than 160 B.C. “The Animal Apocalypse” records a dream given to Enoch in which biblical history is pictured in symbolic form. Here, Adam is depicted as a white cow emerging from the earth, followed by a female calf [Eve] and “two other calves, one of which was dark and the other red.” After a symbolic retelling of Cain’s murder of Abel, in which “the dark calf gored the red calf and pursued it over the earth,” Eve is presented as a grieving mother who searches for her son, but weeps and laments because she cannot find him.

This presentation of Eve is also more favorable than that found in Genesis 2–3, as there is no reference to a prohibition, transgression, or punishment. Bautch notes that the lengthy de-
scription of Eve's grief renders her "a sympathetic figure," as does her association with the line of Seth. Eve's name is not mentioned in the lineage of Seth found in Genesis 5:1.14

The final reference to Eve occurs in "The Book of the Parables" (1 Enoch 37–71), probably written around the time of Christ.19 This section of 1 Enoch is significantly later than the two portions cited above. In some ways, "The Book of the Parables" stands as a rewriting of themes in the earliest section of 1 Enoch, "The Book of Watchers."20

The legend of the Watchers is an ancient story of fallen angels who came to earth and seduced human women and had children by them. Some scholars see a connection between this legend and Genesis 6:4: "There were giants on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of men and they bore children to them. Those were the mighty men who were of old, men of renown" (NKJV).

In chapter 69 of "The Book of the Parables," the names of the Watchers are listed in a scene of heavenly judgment. Among those listed is one named Gader'el, who, in addition to being charged with teaching humans how to make weapons of war, is also accused as the one who "misled Eve."21 Here we find a more familiar portrait of Eve—a woman misled—yet in an unfamiliar context: the story of fallen angels consorting with humans.

Bautch makes several comments on Eve's quick mention in the earlier parts of 1 Enoch are omitted. Second, the presentation of Eve without Adam "has the effect of exculpating the first man."22 She notes that this accords with other extrabiblical texts that have tended to downplay Adam's disobedience,23 though it should be noted that there are other writings from this period that place all or more of the blame on Adam.24 Bautch sees in this depreciation of Eve evidence of an important shift. Instead of blaming fallen angels for the origin of evil, the blame begins to be shared by fallen angels and human beings.25

**Who is Azaz'el?**

Azaz'el is named first in 1 Enoch 8 as the angel who taught humans how to make weapons of war and decorative cosmetics. He is one of the Watchers who intermarried with human women (ch. 9) and was bound and imprisoned within the earth (ch. 10). He has armies with him, all of whom will be brought to justice at the last judgment (ch. 54). His name shows up again in the judgment scene of chapter 69, where he is listed tenth and twenty-first (last) in the same list.

As was noted above, it is in 1 Enoch 69 that Eve is also mentioned, though associated not with Azaz'el, but Gader'el. Little is known about Gader'el, but the careful reader will notice Gader'el and Azaz'el are indicted for almost the same set of crimes (teaching humans how to make weapons of warfare) excepting one: the deceiving of Eve.26

While the true identities of these fallen angels remain shrouded in the mists of time, I would like to suggest that the author of the *Apocalypse of Abraham* has drawn on both early and late stories of Azaz'el to rewrite his own account. Our author smoothes over the difficulty of two angels with similar characters by combining them into one so that Azaz'el becomes the answer to the elusive question posed to Abraham: "Who is the one who seduced Eve?"

The author of the *Apocalypse* does more than simply combine two angelic figures into one; he also develops the character of Azaz'el beyond that presented in 1 Enoch. In chapter 13 of the *Apocalypse*, Azaz'el is denounced as "the deceiver" in a narrative where he is unable to tempt Abraham because of the patriarch's righteousness.27 This passage, when set against chapter 23, reinforces the negative portrayal of Eve by insinuating that Azaz'el is able to tempt Eve because she is not one of the righteous.28

**Eve and Azaz'el as the answer to the problem of evil**

Walking through these texts, we can see a shift in certain Jewish answers to the origin of evil. While the oldest stories ("The Book of Watchers") focus the blame on fallen angels and "The Book of the Parables" opens the door to human culpability, the *Apocalypse of Abraham* retells the story in such a way that swings the pendulum completely. The origin of evil is placed squarely on the shoulders of humans who chose evil.

What is not clear from these sources is why greater blame comes to rest on Eve, rather than being shared equally by the first parents. To answer this question, we are forced to look elsewhere. According to two other scholars, the place to look is not within Judaism alone, but at its wider context: the imposition of Greek language and culture on Palestine—a process known as Hellenization.

**The impact of Hellenization**

Gary Anderson and William Phipps have put forward persuasive arguments that the impact of Hellenization is principally to blame for the shift in Eve's portrait among Jewish and Christian interpreters.29 The process of Hellenization began in the fourth century b.c. when Alexander the Great conquered Palestine, introducing and imposing Greek language and Greek culture upon the conquered peoples. It is the impact of these two factors, language and culture, that forms the basis for the arguments to follow.

**A translation problem**

Gary Anderson has argued that the alteration in Eve's portrait began with a simple linguistic shift, when the Hebrew word for "deceive," found in Genesis 3:13, was translated first into Greek and later into Latin.30 A straightforward translation of Genesis 3:13 reads: "... The serpent deceived me, and I ate."31 The Hebrew word in this passage32 has two basic definitions: (1) to lend [money or other items], and (2) to trick or deceive,33 and can be found throughout the Old Testament. What the dictionaries do not say is that, in every occurrence of this form of the verb, the idea of deception is used within the context of entrapment, i.e., deceiving people into thinking they are safe when destruction (either military or divine judgment) is coming.34 In all of these examples, there is no hint of sexual seduction, only trickery that will lead to destruction. Given this use, one could reasonably translate Eve's statement in Genesis 3:13 as, "The serpent convinced me I would be free from punishment, so I ate."
The difficulty, according to Anderson, begins when one moves from the Hebrew to the Greek translation of the Old Testament (the Septuagint). The Greek word for “deceive” also allows the possible translation “to seduce.” Moving from Greek to Latin provided no improvement, for it is from the Latin Bible's (the Vulgate’s) rendition, seducta, that the English finds its own root. Anderson writes:

The Greek and Latin Bibles allow us to construe the verse as an act of sexual seduction. This fateful accident of overlapping semantic fields allowed for the creation of a far more pernicious picture of the deed Eve had wrought. Not only did she consume the forbidden fruit but she was seduced by the Evil Serpent and engendered the demonic figure of Cain.

Anderson goes on to document the pervasiveness of this version of Eve in the writings of early church fathers, and the religious art and literature of Western Christianity. Still, more was needed than a simple translation problem to allow for the idea of Eve's seduction to be so easily received by Jews and Christians. Though the Greek word allows one to consider seduction, it is not used by any translation of the Old Testament to indicate sexual seduction. It is not until one encounters religious writings of the Hellenistic Era that the word is used within a sexual context.

The cultural shift

At this point, Anderson's thesis needs to be supplemented by the argument of William E. Phipps, who has made a strong case for the impact of the larger cultural process of Hellenization as the cause of Eve's demise. Phipps believes that the widespread misogyny of Greek culture, influenced in part by the perpetuation of the myth of Pandora, served as a major catalyst for the transformation of Eve's deception. Phipps writes to disabuse his readers of the common notion that the myths of Eve and Pandora arose from a shared protonarrative.

The story of Pandora was recounted by the famous Greek poet, Hesiod, whose books, Theogony and Works and Days, were written around 700 B.C. Hesiod’s first woman is not Eve, but Pandora, who was created by the gods as a “beautiful evil.” She is “an evil thing in which men will all delight while they embrace their own destruction.” Before Pandora’s fateful opening of the jar, men lived in an Eden-like state, “free from evils, harsh labor and consuming diseases,” but her curious action introduced “all kinds of miseries” onto the earth. According to Phipps, Hesiod followed Homer and “expressed a hostility toward womankind that was endemic throughout Greek antiquity.” Myths and legends have been shown to exert a powerful force upon cultures, but the legend of Pandora was not simply one of the many stories told around the campfire during the summer months:

Hesiod’s story of Pandora became a part of Greek education, and thereby formed prejudices against women. Works and Days “was widely known and taught in various parts of Greece and the Aegean and thus exerted an influence on the moral and legal ideas of the centuries following Hesiod.” It was this culture that infiltrated Jewish thought with the conquest of Palestine in the fourth century B.C., Phipps argues: “In the Israelite society prior to the Hellenistic era, there were proverbs and stories about prostitutes and nagging wives who could precipitate a calamity, but such women were usually denounced in order to heighten the contrast with virtuous women.”

It is not until the Hellenistic period that one finds evidence of the infiltration of Greek thought into Hebrew religious writings.

The book of Sirach, which was written about 180 B.C. and is included in Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox versions of the Bible, shows evidence of such influence. Sirach 25:24 states, “From a woman sin had its beginning, and because of her we all die.” Though Jack Levison has tried to argue from the larger context of the passage that Ben Sira is speaking not of Eve but about the woes brought on by an evil wife, his translation is not convincing, given the words he is compelled to add to the text: “From the [evil] wife is the beginning of sin, and because of her we [husbands] all die.”

Though the exact identification of the woman/wife cannot be pinpointed, the message of Sirach 25:23 fits with certain portraits of Eve as well as with the Greek myth of Pandora. The text is dated well within the Hellenistic period and its composition (or preservation) in Greek, rather than Hebrew, lends weight to Anderson’s linguistic thesis—cultural influence being difficult to prove. Kristen Kram, Linda Scheering, and Valarie Ziegler, in their helpful text, Eve & Adam: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Readings on Genesis and Gender, point out that Sirach 25:23 could refer to Eve, the “evil wife” or the “daughters of men” of Genesis 6:1–4. They also emphasize, “If it refers to Eve, then this is the earliest post-Genesis association of Eve with the entrance of sin and death into the world.”

The works of Philo give us a more direct window into the mindset of at least one Jew who had been heavily influenced by Hellenistic thought. Writing in the first half of the first century A.D., Philo shows that he is acquainted with the poetry of Hesiod, and most likely with the myth of Pandora. In his commentary on Genesis, woman (not man) is singled out as “the beginning of evil.” His commentary explains that the serpent chose to speak to the woman and not to the man because woman is more accustomed to be deceived than man. For his judgment, like his body, is masculine and is capable of dissolving or destroying the designs of deception; but the judgment of woman is more feminine, and because of softness she easily gives way and is taken in by plausible falsehoods which resemble the truth.

Still, it should be noted that Philo presents Eve as “deceived,” not “seduced.” Philo’s Eve is not yet the sexual partner of a fallen an-
gel, she is simply an irrational beauty overcome by sensual curiosity much in the manner of Pandora.

Fourth Maccabees 18:8, a Jewish book written around the same time as Philo’s texts,⁶⁹ seems to assume its readers are familiar with a story of Eve’s seduction by the serpent. The woman in this passage defends herself by saying, “No seducer of the desert nor deceiver in the field corrupted me, nor did the seducing and beguiling serpent defile my maidenly purity.”⁵¹ This author combines the portraits of Eve beguiled and Eve seduced into one and the same narrative.

While Christian apologists made use of the Pandora myth in their missionary efforts to persuade Greek audiences of the truth of Christianity,⁷⁰ rabbinic authors, probably more concerned with maintaining proper separation from Gentiles, do not tend to quote it directly. Kvam, Scharing, and Ziegler point out that, though rabbinic Judaism did not absorb Greek misogyny to the same extent as Hellenized Jews or Christian patristic authors, there is sufficient evidence among rabbinic writings from the third to seventh centuries A.D. to show a tendency to blame Eve more than Adam for the plight of humanity. The suggestion that Eve’s sin was more than mere gullibility made its way even into these circles.⁵⁵

**Competing versions of Adam and Eve**⁵⁴

While there are examples of the blame coming to rest on the shoulders of Adam, the majority of Jewish texts from this period tend to elevate Adam and indict Eve.⁵⁵ The book of Sirach, mentioned earlier as indicting the woman/wife/Eve, provides a prime example:

> No one else has ever been created on earth equal to Enoch, for he was taken up from earth. And no one else ever born has been like Joseph, the leader of his brothers, the prop of his people, his bones were honored. Shem and Seth were honored among men, but above every living creature is Adam.⁵⁶

Other stories about the first parents present Adam as a magnificently pure figure, against whom Eve appears as a mere "ape."⁵⁷

One of the consequences of this exaltation of Adam is that Jewish interpreters were forced to look elsewhere for an explanation for the origin of evil. The *Apocalypse of Abraham* did just that by combining the stories of Eden and the Watchers so that the blame fell upon Eve as one seduced into sexual relations with a fallen angel.

**The New Testament and early Christianity**

It is important to recognize that the Christian Scriptures reject the sexualization of Eve’s sin. Not only this, but biblical authors refuse to place more blame on Eve than on Adam. Second Corinthians 11:2–3 could be used to show that Paul may have been aware of the legend of Eve’s sexual sin, but Paul does not use it to disparage women. Instead, Eve’s sin is used as an exhortation for the whole church, women and men, to remain faithful to their spiritual husband, Jesus Christ.⁵⁸ Paul also rejects the Jewish tradition that exalts Adam. For Paul, Adam is not the ideal human. This position is claimed by Christ alone (Rom. 5:12–21; 1 Cor. 15:45–49).⁵⁹ Despite Paul’s rejection of the legend of Eve’s sexual sin, and his evenhandedness in blaming both Adam and Eve for original sin,⁶⁰ the tendency to blame Eve more than Adam continued to be propagated in Christian and Jewish circles.⁶¹

**Application for today**

Though the *Apocalypse of Abraham* may seem like an obscure text of little interest to contemporary Christians, it witnesses to an old, version of the story of Eve that has been preserved and retold by Christians for thousands of years. The shift in the *Apocalypse of Abraham* is subtle, but that is what makes it all the more dangerous. The author does not come right out and blame Eve for the problem of evil and sin, but tells the story in such a way that she is implicated more than Adam.

Like the author of the *Apocalypse*, Christians continue to wrestle with the problem of evil and sin and look to the third chapter of Genesis for an answer to the question: Who is to blame? Like the author of the *Apocalypse*, we add to the Genesis account through our own teachings on sin and temptation. Sometimes we do this through the stories we tell. Sometimes we do this through images we present. And, just like the author of the *Apocalypse*, we can recount the story in ways that do not reflect the evenhandedness of the Scriptures toward our first parents.

At the top of the *Florida Baptist Witness*’s article “Sex and the Bible,” one finds a picture of a red apple with the face of a young woman, a tree, and a serpent reflected on the shiny surface of the fruit.⁶² While the article goes on to talk about how men and women are both tempted to sexual sin, the image of the young woman reminds us not only of Eve, the woman tempted, but woman, the tempter—she who tempted Adam to eat the fruit and who tempts men into sexual sin. The message is subtle, but the message is the same. Eve is identified as the one tempted to sin, and her connection to sexual sin follows closely on its heels.

Few Christians today continue to argue that Eve was sexually seduced by Satan, but these subtle prejudices against women remain. Many women, single and married, testify that they feel alienated by men in their churches who cannot hold serious conversations with them lest others fear some kind of sexual relationship. Single women are particularly under-resourced because they are seen as sexual threats to the integrity of male leadership rather than as co-laborers with gifts to share with the whole church. The prejudices we find in the *Apocalypse of Abraham* persist even today. Women continue to be seen as more easily deceived than men and as sexually threatening. Both ideas contribute to the exclusion of women from teaching and leading in the church.⁶³ Christians would do well to examine our own prejudices so that we do not find ourselves perpetuating gendered myths that transform the truth of the Bible into falsehood.

The book of Genesis reveals that humans sinned when they followed the advice of the serpent rather than obeying the counsel of God. Just like Adam and Eve, men and women are capable of being deceived, particularly of believing that our misdeeds will not result in punishment. Rather than looking for a scapegoat—as Adam blamed Eve, Eve blamed the serpent, and exegetes have blamed all of the above—we would do well to examine our own
hearts: “If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.” But, thanks be to God, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:8–9 TNIV).

Careful exegesis, especially concerning the narrative in Genesis 1–3, is needed in our day. John Thompson has underscored this point particularly when it comes to stories about Eve:

A case could be made that there was no such person as Eve. Historical-critical concerns aside, in the history of the exegetis of Genesis, commentators have rarely found an Eve. They have rather found only Everywoman, which is to say that they have found not merely a woman, but the woman, the archetype of all women. One can imagine otherwise, perhaps, but exegetes have never been much interested in the first woman for any other reason than to generalize about all women.64

William Phipps agrees and writes at the conclusion of his study of Eve and Pandora,

Exoneration of one gender at the expense of another is a pernicious scapegoating procedure that has been going on all too long. Corrective exegesis in our time, done mainly by feminist scholars, will bring an end to this denigration. Male prejudice toward women is difficult to eradicate, but a fresh look at the myth of Eve provides no reinforcement for keeping it alive.65

If this excavation of the traditions behind the portrait of Eve in the Apocalypse of Abraham serves only to underscore this point, it will have been an exercise worth the effort.

Notes


5. Cf. 1 Tim. 2:14.

6. Rubinkiewicz and Lunt, 700, n. b. I am grateful for the aid of my professor, Dr. Andrei Orlov (Marquette University), in substantiating Rubinkiewicz’s translation of the Old Slavonic at this point. He showed me that the Slavonic word is “prelstivyi,” which comes from “prelest,” meaning “seduction” or “beauty,” and carries strong sexual connotations.

7. Gen. 53: 4, 5; 1 Chr. 1:1; Hos. 6:7.

8. For several helpful surveys of Eve in Western thought and culture, see Pamela Norris, Eve: A Biography (New York, N.Y.: New York University Press, 1999), and John A. Phillips, Eve: The History of an Idea (San

APPENDIX
The Apocalypse of Abraham 23


Introduction to the Vision, 23:1–3

“Look again at the picture: Who is the one who seduced Eve, and what is the fruit of the <tree> [womb]? And you will know what will be and <how much will be for your seed> [for your name among people] in the last days. And what you cannot understand, [days of the age, or how one cannot understand] I will make known to you because you have been pleasing before my face and I will tell you <what> [the things that] I have kept in my heart.”

Description of the Vision, 23:4–8

And I looked at the picture, and my eyes ran to the side of the garden of Eden. And I saw there a man very great in height and terrible in breadth, incomparable in aspect, entwined with a woman who was also equal to the man in aspect and size. And they were standing under a <tree> [plant] of Eden, and the fruit of the tree was like the appearance of a bunch of grapes of <the> [a wild] vine. And behind the tree was standing (something) like a dragon in form, but having hands and feet like a man’s, on his back six wings on the right and six on the left. And he was holding the grapes of the tree and feeding them to the two I saw entwined with each other.

Explanation of the Vision, 23:9–11

And I said, “Who are these two entwined with each other, or who is this between them, and what is the fruit which they are eating, Mighty One, Eternal?” And he said, “This is the <world> [light (phos) counsel, council] of <men> [humanity], this is Adam and this is their <thought> [intention, plan, plot, evil design, desire] on earth, this is Eve. And he who is between them is the impiety of their <behavior> [act, doing] <unto> perdition, Azazel himself [their impiety, perdition, Azazel himself].

Implications of the Vision, 23:12–14

And I said, “Eternal, Mighty One, why then did you adjudge him such dominion that through his works he could ruin humankind on earth?” And he said to me, “Hear, Abraham! Those who desire evil, and <call who I have hated as they commit> [everything I hated in those who commit] <them> [i.e. evil, or omit the pronoun]—over them did I give him dominion, and he was to be beloved of them.” And I answered and said, “Eternal, Mighty One! Why did it please you to bring it about that evil should be desired in the heart of man, because you are <angered at what was chosen by you> [mss corrupt, trans. unclear] . . . <him who does useless things> in your light [by you who are doing useless things]?”

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10. The final form of “The Book of Watchers” should be dated no later than 175 B.C. and reflects traditions that stretch back even further into history. Nickelsburg, Jewish Literature, 46.


12. 1 En. 32:4.


16. Nickelsburg, Jewish Literature, 86.

17. 1 En. 85:3.


19. Nickelsburg comments that this document is “notoriously difficult to date.” Nickelsburg, Jewish Literature, 254. Contemporary scholars suggest a date range of 50 B.C.–A.D. 117 with Nickelsburg proffering a composition around the “turn of the era”; 255.


22. Bautch, “All About Eve,” 11. In fact, she is the only human mentioned in the list—a fact that “would seem to heighten her significance in the narrative,” 16.

23. Bautch lists several examples: Apocalypse of Moses 7:2–3, 16:3; Protoevangelium of James 13:1; and the Life of Adam and Eve 18:1; 26:2; 35:2, 38; 44:2.

24. Rom. 5:12, 2 Bar. 54:15a.


26. While the name “Azaz’el” occurs more than several times in 1 Enoch, the angel Gaderel’ is attested nowhere else in the material and little elsewhere. Bautch notes that the name has been located on “an Aramaic incantation bowl from Nippur, the Sefer HaRazim (1:24) and the Zohar (Vayaqhel 202a),” but comments that the [Zohar] reference may have been influenced by 1 Enoch 69. Bautch, “All About Eve,” 12.


28. Azaz’el also appears to be shown in partnership with God in chapters 20 and 22, but John Collins and R. Rubinkiewicz both dismiss these references, believing the passages to have been interpolated by Bogomil scribes. John J. Collins, The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1998), 228. Rubinkiewicz, “Apocalypse of Abraham: Introduction,” 684.


31. The NIV, NASV, and Nkjv all supply the translation “deceived,” while the NJB offers “tempted,” and NRSV, “tricked.”

32. The Hebrew word rendered “deceived” is híshíšén—a Hiphil perfect verb in the third person masculine singular with a first person suffix from the root nsá.


34. It occurs five times in the perfect tense (Gen. 3:13; Jer. 13:10, 49:16; Obad. 1:3, 7); seven times in the imperfect (2 Kgs. 18:29, 19:10; 2 Chr. 32:15; Isa. 36:14, 37:10; Jer. 29:8, 37:9); and once as an infinitive absolute (Jer. 4:30: Then I said, ‘Ah, Sovereign Lord, how completely you have deceived this people and Jerusalem by saying, ‘You will have peace, when the sword is at our throats.’) Other than the serpent, the agents of deceit are God, the pride of the human heart, friends, Hezekiah, prophets, and the self.

35. In the Septuagint, nsá is rendered by ἐπατέσσα, an aorist active indicative verb in the third person singular, from apataō.


37. The one exception here may be the story of Samson and Delilah, but even here she is asked by Philistine henchmen to trick Samson into telling her the secret of his strength. The narrative does not give evidence for the sexual nature of that deceit.


47. Kvan et al., Eve and Adam, 65.

48. Phipps, “Eve and Pandora Contrasted,” 40, citing Philo, Questions and Answers on Genesis 1, 43 and 45.


53. Kvan et al., 73, citing Daniel Boyarin, Carnal Israel: Reading Sex in the Talmudic Culture (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1993), 92–93. The Genesis Rabbah, a collection of Jewish commentary from the 400s a.d., stands as testimony to some of these early rabbinic exegetical traditions (ibid., 76); 186 records this commentary: “Said R. Josua b. Karahah: . . . because he saw them engage in their natural functions, he [the serpent] conceived a passion for her [Eve]” (Kvan, et al., 86). Then 20:11 carries the tradition of sexual promiscuity even further by attributing it not only to Eve and the serpent, but to Adam as well: “[Commenting on the 130-year gap between the birth of Cain/Abel and Seth.
...R. Simon said: THE MOTHER OF ALL LIVING means, the mother of all life. For R. Simon said: Throughout the entire one hundred and thirty years during which Adam held aloof from Eve the male demons were made ardent by her and she bore, while the female demons were inflamed by Adam and they bore, as it is written, If he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, and with the afflictions of the children of men—Adam (2 Sam. 7:14) which means the children of the first man.” (Kvam, et al., 98, emphasis original).

54. In a response to the presentation of this material at the Marquette-Loyola University Conference in 2006, David Creech (Loyola University) suggested an alternative thesis. Creech follows Martin Hengel (Judaism and Hellenism, Wipf & Stock, 2003) when he argues that the earliest portions of Enoch are fully Hellenized and stand in continuity with later Hellenistic gnostic texts that exonerate Eve and praise her for seeking wisdom in the fruit of the tree. If this is the case, then later Enochic Jewish exegetes may have been reacting against this Hellenized Eve, bringing the tradition more in line with the Genesis account where Eve is certainly accused and punished for her sin. Nevertheless, the question remains as to why Eve is blamed more than Adam and also presented as one seduced. It may be best to suggest that, just as there was more than one Jewish perspective on the figures of Adam and Eve, there was more than one Hellenistic perspective as well. Certainly, mainstream Hellenism betrayed a terrible misogyny of which the myth of Pandora stands as a prime example, but an alternative gnostic stream may have softened the portrayal of Eve. Still, Gnosticism should not be read in a protofeminist light, as streams within Gnosticism continued androcentric biases.

55. Examples of the lesser, negative opinion of Adam can be found in Hos. 6:7, which states, “Like Adam, they have broken the covenant...”; and 4 Ezra 3:20–22, which adds, “Yet you did not take away their evil heart from them, so that your law might produce fruit in them. For the first Adam, burdened with an evil heart, transgressed and was overcome, as were all who were descended from him. Thus the disease became permanent...”


58. 2 Cor. 11:2–3 reads, “I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him. But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent’s cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ.”


60. Cf. Rom. 5 and 1 Tim. 2:14. Augustine tried to reconcile these passages by arguing that Eve sinned in ignorance while Adam sinned knowingly; therefore, while both sinned, his was the greater. For the wide-ranging influence of this interpretation, see Anderson, “Is Eve the Problem?” 96–123.

61. Anderson notes how the first-century Life of Adam and Eve and second-century Protoevangelium of James both suggest that Eve was seduced by Satan in the conception of Cain. Anderson, “Is Eve the Problem?” 96–97, n. 3. Both of these texts were widely popular throughout the early church and into the middle ages, despite the fact that Jerome rejected the Protoevangelium as “delirious nonsense.” Sally Cunneen, In Search of Mary: The Woman and the Symbol (New York, N.Y.: Ballantine Books, 1996), 74.


63. Brian Schwartely, pastor of Westminster Presbyterian Church of Waupaca County, Michigan, makes this very argument in his essay, “The Temptation of Eve.” He writes, “There is something intrinsic to the nature of women which makes them more approachable and unfortunately often more easily manipulated.” Rev. Schwartley argues, “Eve should have consulted her husband”—insinuating that Adam would have known what to do or that Eve’s is the sin of independent thought or insubordination. His exegesis bears a strong resemblance to Philo’s. Brian Schwartley, “The Temptation of Eve,” (Lansing Mich., 1999), n.p. [cited 16 Feb. 2009]. Online: http://reformedonline.com/view/reformedonline/eve.htm.

64. John Lee Thompson, Calvin and the Daughters of Sarah: Women in Regular and Exceptional Roles in the Exegesis of Calvin, His Predecessors, and His Contemporaries (Genève: Librarie Droz, 1992), 65.