

The nāḥāš in the Garden of Eden (Gen 2:4b-3:24): Malevolent or Benevolent?¹

○ nāḥāš no Jardim do Éden (Gn 2,4b–3,24): malévolo ou benévolo?

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Abstract: Traditionally, the serpent (Hebrew nāḥāš) has been interpreted as a negative symbol, in some sources as the vehicle used by the tempter to cause the fall of mankind. This negative view of the serpent has been questioned recently again. Two main points are raised in relation to the narrative of Genesis 2-3. First, in the literature and iconographic material of the Near East, snakes function as positive symbols of life and wisdom. Second, it is argued that the narrative of Genesis 2-3 gives no indication that the serpent should be interpreted negatively. The present article argues against this recent stance and shows that both from the perspective of the Near Eastern material and the narrative itself, the snake is best interpreted as a negative symbol.

Keywords: nāḥāš; Eden narrative; Fall; Ancient Near East Literature; Genesis 3:1-6, 13.

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Resumo: Tradicionalmente, a serpente (hebraico nāḥāš) tem sido interpretada como um símbolo negativo, em algumas fontes como o veículo usado pelo tentador para causar a queda da humanidade. Essa visão negativa da serpente tem sido questionada recentemente de novo. Dois pontos principais são levantados com relação à narrativa de Gênesis 2–3. Primeiro, na literatura e no material iconográfico do Antigo Oriente Próximo, serpentes funcionam como símbolos positivos, de vida e de sabedoria. Segundo, argumenta-se que a narrativa de Gênesis 2–3 não oferece indicações de que a serpente deva ser interpretada de modo negativo. O presente artigo argumenta contra essa postura recente e mostra que, tanto da perspectiva do material do Antigo Oriente Próximo e da narrativa própria, a serpente é melhor interpretada como um símbolo negativo.

Palavras-chave: Nāḥāš, *Narrativa do Éden, Queda, Antiga Literatura do Próximo Oriente, Gênesis 3,1–6,13.*

1. Introduction

The nāḥāš in the Garden of Eden narrative has been traditionally seen in negative terms. A cursory look at its early history of interpretation in both Jewish and Christian sources will provide a picture of the nāḥāš as a deceiver, destroyer, and as the devil.

The view of the serpent as a deceiver is prevalent and it is based on the woman's reply to YHWH's probe: "the nāḥāš deceived me" (Gen 3:13). The Old Greek version of Genesis used the verb ἀπατάω, "to lead astray,"² to translate the *hiphil* of nāša' "to deceive." A number of early sources will use ἀπατάω or its cognates in connection with the nāḥāš. For instance, Sib. Or. 1:39-41, dated to the "turn of the century,"³ refers to the serpent as "terrible" (αἰνός) and one that "treacherously deceived (ἐξαπατάω)" Adam and Eve to "go to the fate

² See Muraoka, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint*, 66.

³ See Collins, *The Sibylline Oracles*, 1:331. Book 1:387-400 is viewed as belonging to a Christian redaction (see Collins, *Oracles*, 1:331).

of death and receive knowledge of good and evil.” Later in lines 59-64, the serpent is considered the “cause of the deceit” (ἀπάτη). In the Apocalypse of Moses, dated in between 100 B.C. and 200 A.D.,⁴ Eve refers to the serpent as “our enemy” (ὁ ἐχθρὸς ἡμῶν) the one who “deceived (ἀπατάω) us” (Apoc. Mos. 15:1). This document goes on to relate how the “devil” (ὁ διάβολος) induced the serpent to “deceive” (ἐξαπατάω) Adam through his wife (see Apoc. Mos. 16:1-5). In this composition, the serpent is an instrument in the hands of the devil – (see “the devil answered me through the mouth of the serpent” in Apoc. Mos. 17:4) – the one who “enticed” (δελιάζω) Eve (see Apoc. Mos. 19:1). Later on, Eve acknowledges that the serpent “deceived” (ἀπατάω) her (Apoc. Mos. 23:5). In the scene of divine sentences, God accuses the serpent of “misleading (πλανάω) the weakened of heart” (Apoc. Mos. 26:1) and of “enticing” (δελιάζω) Adam and Eve (Apoc. Mos. 26:3). The Latin version of the same document, known as the Life of Adam and Eve, lacks Eve’s retelling of the story of the Fall⁵ but it does contain Adam’s version of that story. Whereas in the Greek version the nāḥāš is called an “enemy,” in the Latin version he is termed “the adversary, the devil” (*adversarius diabolus*), the one who seduced Eve (see *L.A.E.* 33:1-2; see also 10:1-4). Besides, the Latin version contains an account of the devil’s motivation against the humans. Because of his refusal to worship Adam, who had been created in YHWH’s image, the devil was expelled from his “glory.” His motivation was to have Adam expelled from the “bliss” of paradise (see *L.A.E.* 12:1-16:3). In 4 Maccabees, dated somewhere in between 63 B.C. and 70 A.D.,⁶ the serpent is referred to as “destructive and deceitful” (λυμῶν ἀπάτης) and one who was not able to lead the “mother” to defile her chastity

⁴ For this dating, see Johnson, *Life of Adam and Even*, 2:252.

⁵ See Johnson, *Life of Adam and Even*, 2:249. The Latin text is estimated to have been produced anywhere from 100 B.C. to 400 A.D, see Johnson, *Life of Adam and Even*, 2:252.

⁶ For this dating, see Anderson, *4 Maccabees*, 2:533.

(4 Macc 18:8).⁷ The Wisdom of Solomon, which some scholars date to the reign of Caligula in 37-41 A.D.,⁸ identifies the serpent of Gen 3 with the devil (διάβολος; see Wis 2:24).⁹ In NT sources, the serpent is said to have “deceived” (ἐξαπατάω) Eve (see 2 Cor 11:3; 1 Tim 2:14). In the somewhat later, Christian composition of the Apocalypse of Ezra, dated in between the 2nd and 9th centuries A.D., the theme of the serpent as “deceitful” also appears (see Gk. Apoc. Ezra 2:16).¹⁰ This brief summary of early sources shows that the serpent was, by and large, seen in a negative way, sometimes being represented as an animal that was an instrument in the hands of the devil (see Apocalypse of Moses) while at other times being the devil itself (see Wisdom of Solomon and Life of Adam and Eve).

This negative view of the nāḥāš has been recently challenged anew. In her 2012 book, *The Storyteller and the Garden of Eden*, for instance, Ellen A. Robbins argues that the serpent should not be seen as a villain in the story as the history of interpretation has made him to be.¹¹ For her, the snake acted, at best, as an enabler, leading to the humans increased capabilities.¹² She also finds no villainy in the Garden of Eden story as there was no villain: “No one is particularly good or evil; the categories of good and evil are irrelevant. We can’t even say that each of the characters acts out of self-interest. God is

⁷ See Charlesworth, *The Good & Evil Serpent*, 21.

⁸ For this dating, see Vriezen and van der Woude, *OudIsraëlitische & VroegJoodse Literatuur*, 1:417: “Het werk is mogelijk in de laatste decennia vóór het begin van onze jaartelling ontstaan..., maar waarschijnlijker tijdens de regering van keizer Caligula (37-41 n. Chr.)”

⁹ Charlesworth, *The Good & Evil Serpent*, 490 n. 71, credits the Wisdom of Solomon with the first identification of the serpent with the devil. On the other hand, Robbins, *The Storyteller and the Garden of Eden*, 107, credits the Life of Adam and Eve as the first document to make that equation.

¹⁰ For the dating, see Stone, *Greek Apocalypse of Ezra*, 2:563.

¹¹ See Robbins, *Eden*, 105-109.

¹² *Ibidem*, 141.

simply maintaining the order He (sic!) created...”, while humans are simply disrupting that order.¹³

Two main points have become important in the discussion of the nāhāš in Gen 2-3. First is the symbolism of the serpent in the broader Ancient Near East and, more particularly, its symbolism in the Hebrew Bible. Robbins argues that, differently from the perspective of modern readers, the ancients did not view snakes in a negative light. She cites the narrative in Num 21 in which those who looked at the “fiery snake (*sárap*)” lived. For her, the story in Num 21 functions as the origin for the *Nehushtan* in the temple in Jerusalem (see 2 Kings 18:4). She claims that this positive view of snakes reached even to NT times when the “symbolism of the snake was more associated with life than with death.”¹⁴ And, second, details about the serpent in the narrative of the Garden have also played a role. One of them is the meaning of the word ‘arūm. In Robbins’ view, there is not “... anything wrong with being ‘arūm in and of itself” and that “... it is basically a good thing... except when it leads someone to fail to take God into account...”¹⁵ The other issue is the seemingly unfulfilled threat of death in Gen 2:17. The famous scholar James Barr has argued that “it is God who is placed in a rather ambiguous light. He has made an ethically arbitrary prohibition, and backed it up with a threat to kill which, in the event, he does nothing to carry out.”¹⁶

In light of these comments, this article will first briefly discuss the symbolism of the serpent in the Ancient Near East by paying attention to selected iconographical sources. Then, it will turn to a discussion of specific details in the Eden narrative.

¹³ *Ibidem*, 142-143.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, 111-112.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, 111.

¹⁶ Barr, *The Garden of Eden*, 12.

2. Serpent Symbolism in the Ancient Near East

In his ground-breaking discussion of iconographical material from the Ancient Near East, Othmar Keel grasped well the equivocal nature of serpent symbolism:

The ambiguous nature of the lion and the bull is even more marked in the case of the serpent. The serpent incorporates the most manifold and contradictory significances... The serpent is thus a savior-deity... but also the embodiment of the primeval evil.¹⁷

Among the types of sources from which to attempt a reconstruction of the “serpent symbolism” prevalent in the ANE, this article will focus only and briefly on literary and iconographical material.

2.1. The Serpent as a Symbol of Life and Protection

Fragments of a ceramic vessel bearing a serpent with its mouth open were unearthed in Jericho. Its estimated date is around 1700 BCE. The vessel fragments were found in a chamber that “stored temples objects” and it belonged “to a group of vessels reserved for sacred use.” In a recent publication, Charlesworth accepted the interpretation of the site’s original excavator, viewing the serpent in the vessel as “an emblem of the Mother-goddess, symbolizing Life within the Earth.”¹⁸

That the serpent represents life is clear from the “Epic of Gilgamesh.” In this epic, Gilgamesh attempts to gain immortality, despite the fact that he was two-thirds god (ANET, I.ii.1).¹⁹ After the death of Enkidu, his friend (ANET VIII.ii.2), Gilgamesh sets out on a journey

¹⁷ Keel, *Symbolism*, 87. See also Stordalen, *Echoes*, 237.

¹⁸ Charlesworth, *The Good & Evil Serpent*, 63.

¹⁹ The line that demarcates the fundamental difference between gods and humans in the literature of the Ancient Near East is that gods have both wisdom and immortality, whereas humans have only wisdom. Clear evidence for this claim can be found in “The Adapa Story,” which tells the story of how the semi-divine Adapa lost the opportunity to attain immortality. For the story, see COS, 1:449 and further discussion in Mettinger, *The Eden Narrative*, 107-109.

to attain immortality. He meets Utnapishtim, the only human to have survived the flood and who was then made immortal by the gods (see tablet XI in ANET). Utnapishtim tells Gilgamesh a secret of the gods, of a plant that is capable of giving life. Although Gilgamesh seized the plant, he lost it to a snake on his way back to Uruk. The snake, upon eating from the plant, shed its skin and rejuvenated itself. It is this ability of serpents that turn them into symbols of life.²⁰ Another Mesopotamian story that is relevant here is the myth of Adapa. In it, the gods Tammuz and Gizzida (also known as Ningishzida) offer Adapa “the bread and water of life to make him immortal.”²¹ This is important because Ningishzida is a “serpent-god” and one who offers immortality to Adapa.²²

A ceramic vessel with two serpents was found in a tomb in Jericho and its estimated date is circa 2000-1800 BCE. Because the mouths of the serpents “are directed to the opening from which water would pour out,” one scholar has interpreted them as “non-threatening” and as symbols of “protection of the contents that embody health and life.” The serpent, thus, was appealed to for protection against potential sickness lying in the elements poured out of the cup, like water and milk.²³

In an Egyptian depiction of the world (Tutankhamun (1358-1349 BCE), a central figure appears with a coiled serpent encircling both its head and its feet. This figure has been identified with the creator-god Ptah based on the hieroglyphic sign *imn wnw*t, which

²⁰ See Joines, “The Serpent”, 2.

²¹ See *ibidem*, 2. Schüle makes the important observation that serpents often appear in the environment of a tree or plant that has the power to give immortality. This seems to indicate that serpents were, at times, symbols of immortality. See Schüle, *Die Urgeschichte*, 74.

²² Ningishzida is an underworld god whose origins can be traced back to Mushkhusu, a “snake-dragon,” and the beast of the underworld god Ninazu, who was worshipped in city of Eshnunna since the 3rd millennium BCE (see Green, “Ancient Mesopotamian Religious Iconography,” 4:1841).

²³ Charlesworth, *The Good & Evil Serpent*, 62-63.

reads as “he who conceals the hours.” The function of this deity is to seize “into himself all the hours of the day and night, in order to release them again as a new creation.” This is the function of Ptah, the creator-god. Farther evidence is found on the mummy-form of the figure and a comparison with the Berlin hymn to Ptah, which refers to his feet being on the earth while his head is set in the heavens. A sign for *mḥn* “the coiled one” accompanies the serpent surrounding the head. This serpent “is an antitype of Apophis” and its function is to guard “the sun god at his setting against the monstrous, evil serpent”.²⁴

This function of the serpent as a protector of the sun-god is well illustrated in an Egyptian Papyrus of Heruben (1085-950 BCE) dating to c. 1085 BCE. In it, a coiled serpent appears on top of the head of the sun-god Re as he enters into the netherworld. Interestingly, a wavy serpent attacks Re’s sun-bark but seems to be defeated by Seth.²⁵

2.2. The Serpent as a Symbol of Chaos

In the The Tell Asmar Cylinder Seal (ca. 2350-2150), found in Eshnunna, modern Tell Asmar, in central Mesopotamia and place of Sumerian and later Akkadian city-states, there is a seven-headed dragon-serpent being killed by a divine-like figure holding a spear. Four of its heads are limb, while the remaining three remain upstretched as if still fighting against the divine figure. Scholars disagree as to whether the serpent must be identified with Ugaritic Lotan and Hebrew Leviathan or not.²⁶ Irrespective of the identification of the seven-headed serpent, the seal does portray it in a negative fashion.

In the Kudurru, limestone (12th BCE), housed at the Louvre, there are two serpents: one at the top and one at the bottom. They

²⁴ Keel, *Symbolism*, 45.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, 54-55.

²⁶ See a detailed discussion of this seal in Barker, *Isaiah’s Kingship Polemic*, 130-139. For a critical review of this monograph, see Cunha, *Review*: 197-201. On the seal, see also more briefly, Keel, *Symbolism*, 52-53.

have been interpreted as representing “the lower and upper oceans”.²⁷ The lower serpent is depicted at the bottom of a citadel-like structure. This structure has been interpreted as a representation of “the city of the nether world”.²⁸ If this is correct, then, the serpent symbolizes “the waters of Chaos”.²⁹

In literary sources, the serpent can also be portrayed negatively. In the *Enuma Elish*, Tiamat, the personification of chaos, prepares for battle against Marduk by preparing “matchless weapons”, among which are “monster-serpents, sharp of tooth, unsparing of *fang*”, filled with “venom for blood”.³⁰

2.3. Summary

This brief overview of the “serpent” symbolism in iconographical and literary sources of the Ancient Near East confirms the claim that the “serpent” is a multi-dimensional symbol. It carries with it positive and negative connotations. However, one must reject the claim that the serpent was associated “more with life than with death” as the picture one gets from the Ancient world does not allow for such a conclusion. One can better say that the serpent was overall associated with both death and life. Therefore, any assessment of the nāḥāš in our narrative will have to be based on its current literary context.

3. The nāḥāš in the Garden of Eden Narrative

Important for an understanding of the depiction of the nāḥāš in the narrative of Gen 2-3 is the dialogue section between the woman and the nāḥāš (Gen 3:1-6) and the woman’s evaluation of what happened in Gen 3:13. This section will briefly analyze details in each

²⁷ *Ibidem*, 46.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, 47.

²⁹ *Ibidem*, 47.

³⁰ ANET, 65 (italics theirs).

one of these passages in order to gain a better picture of the nāḥāš in the Eden narrative.

3.1. The Dialogue (Gen 3:2-6)

The dialogue between the woman and the nāḥāš In Gen 3:1-5 are part of the narrator’s strategy to illustrate the description of the nāḥāš as ערום.³¹ The present discussion will, therefore, pay close attention to details in that dialogue.

3.2.1. לא מות תמותן (Gen 3:4)

The nāḥāš starts its dialogue with the woman with an incomplete sentence about what YHWH had said concerning the trees in the garden.³² By the use of “all the trees,” the nāḥāš makes the prohibition not to eat from one tree universal and exaggerates it,³³ while implying that such a prohibition is also “unreasonable.”³⁴ But it is the nāḥāš’s denial that the humans would not die by partaking from the prohibited tree that introduces the main tension in the narrative flow of this story.³⁵ This is even more so given the fact that the humans do not cease to exist after they both eat from the tree. This raises the question as to whether it is YHWH or the nāḥāš who speaks the truth.

³¹ See e.g. Hess, “Roles,” 16: “The first seven or eight verses of Genesis 3 provide an account of the garden incident which is as subtle as the serpent in its allusions and implications.” The fact that the nāḥāš speaks is an indication of it being described as “shrewd, clever,” see Stordalen, *Echoes*, 239.

³² See Alter, *Genesis*, 11; and, more recently, Cotter, *Genesis*, 34. The use of the first two words in the mouth of the nāḥāš, כִּי הִנֵּה, have presented problems for interpreters since ancient times. The LXX (τί ὄτι) and Vulg. (*cur*) read them as a question: “why did God say...” and many commentators have followed: “has God really said...” or similarly. See, e.g., Cassuto, *Genesis*, 1:144 (Cassuto takes the particle כִּי as the indicator of a question mark and הִנֵּה as the one marking emphasis); von Rad, *Genesis*, 88; Wenham, *Genesis* 1-15, 1:73; Coats, *Genesis*, 54.

³³ See Schüle, *Die Urgeschichte*, 74; Chaine, *Genèse*, 47.

³⁴ See, e.g., Moberly, “Interpreters,” 24.

³⁵ See *Ibidem*, 25. See also Barr, *Eden*, 8: “But still more central to our theme is the matter of *death*” (italics his).

Scholars have been divided on this issue. For instance, James Barr claims that it was the nāḥāš who “was right in such matters”. The man did not die and the divine punishment focused “in the area of *work*”, namely, making it unpleasant for humankind.³⁶ Further, Barr rejected the view that the humans were “condemned to death” when they ate from the forbidden tree. He considers this explanation as “evasion of the text and its evidence.” For him, the warning was to be fulfilled rather sooner than later or, at least, much sooner than Adam’s 930 years. In an almost comical way of putting things, Barr claims: “None of us will be deterred from evil-doing if we are told that ‘if you do this, you will be a dead man (or woman) a hundred years from now’.”³⁷ Death, therefore, is not the consequence for the disobedience, while Barr does concede that the manner of death may be.³⁸

Conversely, R. W. L. Moberly interprets the warning of “death” as metaphorical, whose main point is “alienation” from God and the “diminishing of life.”³⁹ For him, the question has to do with the genre and purpose of the story. Moberly reads the story as a parable or fable and one “whose purpose is to promote reflection and learning on the part of the reader/hearer...” It is the non-fulfillment of the threat to cease to exist that leads the reader to “construe ‘die’ metaphorically”. He points to Deuteronomy for the equation of “life” with “blessing” and “death” with “curse” and draws the conclusion “that it is the quality of Israel’s existence that is at stake”.⁴⁰ As for the nāḥāš, Moberly sees it as attacking both God’s truthfulness and trustworthiness.⁴¹ For him, God remains the one who speaks the truth as the man’s quality of life is diminished by the curses and by his alienation, while the nāḥāš assumes a malevolent role.

³⁶ *Ibidem*, 8-9.

³⁷ *Ibidem*, 10.

³⁸ *Ibidem*, 11.

³⁹ Moberly, “Interpreters,” 37.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, 37.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*, 24.

This discussion raises the question as to what to do with the words of the nāḥāš: “you will certainly not die.” I wish to address this issue from the perspective of the Deuteronomistic History. In his *The Eden Narrative*, Tryggve N. D. Mettinger sees affinities with Deuteronomistic theology in the following aspects of Gen 2-3: (a) the use of divine commandment in Gen 2:16-17; 3:11, 17; (b) the use of the expression “to listen to the voice of Yahweh.” Although Gen 3:17 uses the expression שמע לקול, the Deuteronomistic phrase is שמע בקול. However, Exod 15:25-26 also has שמע לקול as a divine commandment; (c) the motif of curses (see Deut 11:26-28). Mettinger argues that “when the humans transgress the divine prohibition, they are expelled from the garden and its blessings.”⁴² And, (d), the presence of a divine test. In the light of Deut 8:1-3; Exod 16:4; 15:25-26; Gen 22; Job 1:8-9, Mettinger sees the Eden narrative as a divine test of the first couple.⁴³ He further claims that the main theme of the narrative under discussion is “disobedience and its consequences”. Whereas obedience would lead to life, symbolized by the tree of life, disobedience led to evil, which encompasses “death and the human condition at large.” As for the question as to why none of the terms for “law” appear in Gen 2-3, Mettinger advances that this was due to a universalizing spin that was given to the Eden narrative: “The law is for Israel; the commandment in the primeval garden is for humanity”.⁴⁴ Mettinger argues Gen 2-3 must be seen as a “corollary” to the Deuteronomistic History:

... the Eden narrative displays a close connection between disobedience to God’s very first commandment and the expulsion from the Garden of Bliss. The story produces a paradigmatic case. The disobedience of Israel in the Deuteronomistic History is here transformed into the disobedience of the first human couple. The consequences of this primeval act of disobedience by the first humans are understood to affect all human life. Having missed the

⁴² Mettinger, *Eden*, 51-52.

⁴³ *Ibidem*, 52-55.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, 57.

chance to attain immortality, the first man and woman succumb to the fate of having to die. In this, they are representative of the whole human race. Thus, *while DH supplies an etiology for the loss of the land, the Eden Narrative serves as an etiology for the loss of the Garden of Bliss.*⁴⁵

To Mettinger's points, I would like to add the following two: (e) the Deuteronomistic History describes the exile of Northern Israel (722BCE) and Southern Judah (587BCE) as one of being expelled from the presence of YHWH (see 2 Kings 17:18; 24:20). As such, one can say that the narrative complex extending from Gen 2:4-2Kings starts and ends of exile. And, (f), exile is in fact used as a metaphor for "death" elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible. For instance, Isa 26:19 refers to the "dead" of YHWH: "May your dead live o Lord... wake up and shout, you who dwell in the dust." Ezek 37 describes the exiled community as a "valley of dry bones." That they are as good as dead is evident in YHWH's question: "can these bones live." As such, in my view, the warning of death in Gen 2:17 is indeed fulfilled and it takes shape in the humans' expulsion from the Garden of Eden/presence of YHWH. As this garden has been seen as a place of abundant life, to be expelled from it means certain death to come.

3.2. "The nāḥāš deceived me" (Gen 3:13)

As the brief overview of the reception of Gen 2-3 has shown (see above), it is the woman's declaration that the nāḥāš deceived her that led to a negative view of the nāḥāš. Recently, one scholar has argued that the woman was in fact not deceived and this "despite her protestations to the contrary."⁴⁶ Two reasons are advanced in support of this interpretation. First, the woman's attempt at "self-defense" indicates that her words cannot be taken at face value because "... taking the woman's testimony at her word is precisely what the context of

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*, 59 (italics his).

⁴⁶ Robbins, Eden, 135.

blame-shifting asks us *not* to do".⁴⁷ And, second, the woman's claim that the nāḥāš deceived her contradicts Gen 3:4-5, which records her "thought-process:" she saw, took, ate..., although one can easily say that her "thought-process" was induced by the nāḥāš.

The key to determine whether the woman was blame-shifting in her response to YHWH is the use of the expression *מה זאת עשית* "what is this that you have done?" In a recent study, Ziony Zevit argues that this type of question "... was often used rhetorically when something bad and unexpected occurred and when the details were obvious and the identity of the responsible parties was beyond dispute".⁴⁸ He points, for instance, to Gen 12:18, where Pharaoh asks Abraham as to why he did not inform him that Sarah was his wife (see also Gen 26:10 for a similar episode between Abimelech and Isaac in relation to Rebecca). See also Gen 29:25, where Jacob questions Laban after he discovered that he had given him Leah instead of Rachel. Zevit further argues that the soliciting of "actual information" was conveyed with the use of the masculine form of the demonstrative pronoun *zeh* instead of *zo't* (see, for instance, Gen 44:15; Judg 8:1; 2 Sam 12:21; Nehemiah 2:19; 3:17). As such, Zevit concludes that "God's question to the woman is rhetorical, a plaint rather than a request for information" and proposes to render such an expression as "how could you do such a thing, upsetting the order that I established". And, most importantly, he concludes that "since the question is not a true one, the woman does not respond".⁴⁹ As such, there is no blame-shifting in the woman's answer. Her words must be taken at face value and they certainly offer a window into how the narrator views the nāḥāš.

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*, 137.

⁴⁸ Zevit, Eden, 181.

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*, 182.

4. Conclusion

From this discussion, the following points are important:

- (a) While, strictly speaking, it is correct that the nāḥāš should not be identified with Satan, as it was done in some Early Jewish and Christian sources, the author(s) of this story portrays it in a rather negative way;
- (b) In my view, the main window to his views of the nāḥāš are to be found in the words he put in the woman's mouth: "the nāḥāš deceived me."
- (c) I have argued that the woman's answer is not a maneuver to shift the blame onto the nāḥāš because the expression *mah + zo't + asah* is not used in Hebrew to require unknown information. Rather, it functions rhetorically as an expression that can be translated as "how could you have done such a thing?"
- (d) I have also argued that the words of Yahweh in Gen 2:17 do indeed come to fruition in the form of the expulsion of the humans from the garden. In light of other passages in the Hebrew Bible, "exile" is equated with "death." In a sense, the humans die "on the day" they are driven out of the garden.
- (e) I have also shown that the multifaceted symbolism of the serpent in the broader literature and artifacts of the Ancient Near East does not help in the decision as to whether the nāḥāš in the garden was malevolent or benevolent. That decision must be made by paying careful attention to details in the narrative itself.

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Teologia cristã latino-americana Anotações sobre a Área de Concentração do Programa de Estudos Pós-Graduados em Teologia da PUC-SP

Latin-American Christian Theology
Notes on the area of concentration
of the Program of Post-Graduated
Studies in Theology of PUC-SP

*Antonio Manzatto**
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Resumo: Acolhendo o debate atual sobre a presença da teologia no mundo acadêmico, o estudo aqui apresentado descreve a proposta epistemológica que o Programa de Estudos Pós-Graduados em Teologia da PUC-SP faz à comunidade científica. Ao intitular sua única Área de Concentração de “Teologia cristã”, é preciso destacar o significado do termo “teologia” e, especificamente, o

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