

## Is Work the Result of the Fall? A Note On Genesis 2:15

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Genesis 3:23 reports that God evicted man from the Garden of Eden “to work the ground [לְעַבֵּד אֶת־הָאֲדָמָה] from which he had been taken.” Accordingly, it has sometimes been argued that work in general, or at least agricultural work in particular, is a consequence of the Fall.<sup>1</sup> Genesis 2:15, however, appears to contradict this perspective, implying that agricultural work was already part of the prelapsarian arrangement: “Yahweh God took the man and placed him in the Garden of Eden [בְּגֵן־עֵדֶן] to work it and take care of it [לְעַבְדָּהּ וּלְשָׁמְרָהּ].” To resolve this tension one approach that has been suggested by U. Cassuto, J. H. Sailhamer, and others involves a slight repointing of the text of Genesis 2:15 so that it reads, “and placed him in the Garden of Eden [בְּגֵן־עֵדֶן] to worship and to obey [לְעַבְדָּהּ וּלְשָׁמְרָהּ].”<sup>2</sup> These forms are then interpreted as alternative infinitive constructs.<sup>3</sup>

Four arguments have been advanced in support of this conjecture. First, it is claimed that the noun גֵּן, “garden,” is nowhere else construed as a feminine and so the feminine suffixes in the MT on לְעַבְדָּהּ, “to work *it*,” and לְשָׁמְרָהּ “to take care of *it*,” are problematic.<sup>4</sup> This difficulty is eliminated, however, if the text is repointed as suggested.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf., e.g., U. Cassuto, *Genesis I, From Adam to Noah* (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, ET 1972 [1961])122; J. H. Sailhamer, “Genesis,” *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, Vol. 2, F. E. Gaebelin, ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990) 45; S. Hafemann, “Notes on Gen. 2:15” (n.p., n.d.) 1.

<sup>2</sup> So Sailhamer, citing Cassuto in support of this rendering. Sailhamer offers “to serve him and to obey him” (p. 47, n. 15). According the reuses of these verbs in 3:23f. is thought to be an ironic reversal -- where before man was to “serve [עָבַד]” God, now man would “serve [עָבַד]” the ground, where before he was to “obey [שָׁמַר]” God (i.e., “keep” his commands), now he would be “kept [שָׁמַר]” from the garden.

Cf. also J. H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992) 100f.

<sup>3</sup> For this form Sailhamer (47f., n. 16) cites GKC §45d and Joüon §49d.

<sup>4</sup> Cassuto, *Genesis I: From Adam to Noah*, 122, claims that גֵּן is “invariably masculine.”

Second, it is argued that the two verbs עבד and שמר, when used in close proximity as they are here, everywhere else have a cultic orientation.<sup>5</sup> Hence, the renderings “to worship” and “to obey” are more congruent with the pattern of the usage of these terms elsewhere, than the more ordinary renderings, “to work it” and “to take care of it.”<sup>6</sup>

Third, it is noted that a few MSS read a *mater* ך in these verbs rather than final consonantal ך.<sup>7</sup> In any case, such an emendation, involving only the smallest detail in the vocalization of the text, must be deemed very minor.

Fourth, the proposed interpretation has the support of some of the Targumim and later rabbinic thought.<sup>8</sup>

As attractive as this proposal may seem, however, it is not without its own difficulties.

1) First, with respect to the claim that the term גן is everywhere else construed as a masculine, on closer inspection “everywhere else” turns out to be only one clear example, Song 4:16, and a handful of other less certain examples, but all of which are confined to the Song of Songs.<sup>9</sup>

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For this reason Skinner, *Genesis*, ICC, 66, says that “Since גן is nowhere fem., it is better to point לשמר ך לעבד ך (see Albrecht, *ZATW*, xvi. 53)”

V. P. Hamilton, *Genesis 1-17*, 171, n. 1, expresses a preference for a reference to the ground since “nowhere else is *gān* treated as feminine.”

<sup>5</sup> So, e.g., G. K. Beale in a private communication.

<sup>6</sup> Certainly there may be some allusion to sanctuary symbolism here as pointed out by G. J. Wenham, “Sanctuary Symbolism in the Garden of Eden Story,” *Proceedings of the World Congress of Jewish Studies* 9 (1986) 19-25.

<sup>7</sup> So Cassuto.

<sup>8</sup> Though the Targumim are notoriously difficult to date, Targum Pseudo-Jonathan appears to incorporate readings from Targum Onqelos and, accordingly, may be judged to be later and less useful for text critical purposes. Fragmentary Targumim. Neophyti (dated to 1st-5th centuries AD).

<sup>9</sup> Gender determination for Hebrew nouns, as is illustrated in the present case of גן, is more complicated than is often supposed. Joüion-Muraoka §134a note that “biblical texts allow us to determine the gender of only about half of the nouns.”

According to Even-Shoshan the term גֵּן appears 41 times in the Old Testament. These are Genesis 2:8, 9, 10, 15, 16; 3:1, 2, 3, 8 (*bis*), 10, 23, 24; 13:10; Deuteronomy 11:10; 1 Kings 21:2; 2 Kings 21:18 (*bis*), 26; 25:4; Nehemiah 3:15; Song 4:12, 15, 16 (*bis*); 5:1; 6:2 (*bis*); 8:13; Isaiah 51:3; 58:11; Jeremiah 31:12 (Even-Shoshan says 31:11); 39:4; 52:7; Lamentations 2:6; Ezekiel 28:13; 31:8 (*bis*), 9; 36:35; Joel 2:3.

Unfortunately, 35 of these examples provide no evidence whatsoever to indicate the gender of גֵּן. Possible evidence for the posited masculine gender of גֵּן is found in Song 4:12, where the expression גֵּן אֶלְעוּל "a locked garden," appears. גֵּן אֶלְעוּל appears to be a Qal passive participle. If it is being employed here as an attributive adjective, its masculine singular form would be decisive evidence for the masculine gender of גֵּן. Because these terms are anarthrous, however, it is possible that גֵּן אֶלְעוּל should be understood as a construct phrase. In this case Song 4:12 offers no indication of the gender of גֵּן. Favoring this interpretation, every other similar collocation of גֵּן involves a construct phrase. Compare "garden of Eden [גֵּן עֵדֶן]" in Genesis 2:8, 15; 3:23, 24; Ezekiel 36:35; Joel 2:3; "garden of Yahweh [גֵּן יְהוָה]" in Genesis 13:10; Isaiah 51:3; "garden of vegetables [גֵּן הַיֶּרֶק and גֵּן יֶרֶק]" in Deuteronomy 11:10 and 1 Kings 21:2; "garden of Uzzah [גֵּן אֶזְזָא]" in 2 Kings 21:18, 25; "garden of the king [גֵּן הַמֶּלֶךְ]" in 2 Kings 25:4; Nehemiah 3:15; Jeremiah 39:4; 52:7; "garden of his house [גֵּן בֵּיתוֹ]" in 2 Kings 21:18; "garden of moisture [גֵּן רֻחָה]"<sup>10</sup> in Isaiah 58:11; Jeremiah 31:12; "garden of his fence? [גֵּן שֹׁכֵן]," probably a textual corruption, in Lamentations 2:6; and "garden of God [גֵּן אֱלֹהִים and גֵּן הָאֱלֹהִים]" in Ezekiel 28:13; 31:8 (*bis*), 9.

Perhaps more helpful evidence for the posited masculine gender of גֵּן are three instances in Song of Songs where the masculine plural form גֵּנִים, "gardens," is attested (Song 4:15, 6:2, and 8:13). This evidence is not decisive either, however, since a significant number of grammatically feminine nouns employ the masculine plural form

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<sup>10</sup> The parallelism within Isaiah 58:11 supports the assumption of a construct phrase here rather than the alternative analysis of רֻחָה as an attributive adjective.

(according to a study by A. Cohen, this is the case for a little over 10% of all feminine nouns -- cf. Joüon - Muraoka §90a; cf. also GCK §87p).

The only compelling evidence for the masculine gender of גַּן is found in Song 4:16 (*bis*), “Awake, north wind, and come, south wind! Blow on my garden [הַפִּיחֵי גַּנִּי], that its fragrance may spread abroad [וַיִּזְלֹגוּ בְשִׁמְיוֹ]. Let my lover come into his garden [וַיָּבֹא דוֹדִי לְגַנּוֹ] and taste its choice fruits [וַיֵּאָכֵל פְּרֵי מְגֻדָּיו].” The pronominal suffixes on “its fragrances [בְּשִׁמְיוֹ]” and “its fruits [מְגֻדָּיו]” implies a masculine gender for their common antecedent, “my garden.”

Having concluded that גַּן appears to be masculine, at least in the dialect of Classical Hebrew represented by the Song of Songs, this does not exclude the possibility that this same noun is feminine in Genesis 2:15.

The following evidence supports the possibility of the feminine gender of גַּן:<sup>11</sup>

a) Many Hebrew nouns have both genders (see GKC §87m, 122d; Joüon §§134a, g, m).

b) Nouns referring to circumscribed spaces, regions and localities are frequently feminine, even when unmarked by a final הָ or תָ (GKC §122h, i, k; Joüon §§134g,h). Cf., e.g., אֶרֶץ, “land, country,” צָפוֹן, “north,” תֵּימָן, “south,” עִיר, “city,” בְּאֵר, “a well,” שְׂאוֹל, “Sheol,” בָּבֶל, “Babylon,” צִידוֹן, “Sidon,” etc.

Many nouns of this kind exhibit both genders. Cf., e.g., אֶרֶץ, “path,” גַּיא, “valley,” כְּרָם, “vineyard,” חֲצֵר, “enclosure, court,” שַׁעַר, “gate,” מְקוֹם, “place,” הַיְכָל, “palace,” דֶּרֶךְ, “way” (GCK §122l, Joüon §134m). Indeed, GCK §122l summarizes this evidence: “In the majority of nouns denoting place the gender is variable.” If גַּן is recognized as a feminine in Genesis 2:15 it conforms precisely to this pattern.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Accordingly the standard Hebrew lexica, e.g. BDB, KB, and Holladay accept that גַּן has both genders.

<sup>12</sup> Accordingly GCK includes גַּן as a possible example of a variable gendered place noun, although the suggestion is made that Genesis 2:15 could be revocalized as לַעֲבֹדָה, etc.

c) Unfortunately, the term גַּן has not yet appeared in any extrabiblical Hebrew inscription from the classical period.<sup>13</sup> In post-Classical Hebrew, however, the term גַּן, with feminine form גַּנִּי as its only plural, exhibits both genders.<sup>14</sup> It is possible that a similar phenomenon exists in neo-/late Babylonian where the cognate term \**gannu*, “(vegetable?) garden,” likewise has a feminine plural form, *gannā tu*.<sup>15</sup>

A cognate term *gn* appears also in Ugaritic (the texts in Gordon do not permit a determination of its gender).

d) Notable is the variant feminine form גַּנִּי.<sup>16</sup> Since it is typically the case that a corresponding feminine form brings with it some distinction in meaning, the lack of any such distinction between גַּן and גַּנִּי is consistent with the assumption that גַּן may already be feminine.

e) Even if a feminine gender for גַּן is not accepted, it is possible that the expression גַּן־עֵדֶן would be feminine on the principle that the gender of the *regens* is at times determined by the gender of the *rectum*. In support cf. Waltke and O’Connor §6.4.1d and p. 104, n. 37, citing Brockelmann, *Hebräische Syntax*, 14.

Gispén I, 121, suggest feminine on infinitives to agree with Eden (so notes Wenham, *Genesis 1-11*, 47). Similar is Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, 184, citing Brockelman *Syntax* §16g: “The masc. גַּן [sic] is in conjunction with the fem. עֵדֶן used as the name of a land.”

2) A second and very serious problem with Casutto’s proposal is the speculative nature of its proposal to read עבדה and שמרה as alternative infinitive constructs. To be sure, such forms exist for other verbs in Hebrew (cf. GKC §45d and Joüon §49d). They

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<sup>13</sup> Based on G. I. Davies, *Ancient Hebrew Inscriptions. Corpus and Concordance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

<sup>14</sup> So, according to M. Jastrow, *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature* (New York: Traditional Press, n.d.) s.v.

<sup>15</sup> So AhW. CAD expresses some uncertainty about the singular form offering *gannatu* or *gannu*, with the suggestion that the term may be a loan word from Aramaic.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Akkadian practice in this respect discussed in Moscati, *Comparative Grammar* §12.34. See also Waltke and O’Connor §6.3.2.c.

are, however, by no means common. Furthermore, these posited forms are unattested for either of these verbs which happen to have very well-attested normal infinitive constructs (Even-Shoshan lists 34 occurrences of עָבַד/עָבַדְתִּי and 53 occurrences of שָׁמַר). In light of such a well-established pattern of usage for both verbs, the burden of proof rests on Casutto to demonstrate the existence of his postulated forms in Classical Hebrew.

3) The LXX offers valuable support for the MT in Genesis 2:15: ἐργάζεσθαι αὐτὸν καὶ φυλάσσειν.<sup>17</sup> The agreement of the LXX with the MT has been challenged, but without foundation. The presence of the masculine pronoun αὐτὸν, rather than a feminine pronoun as in the Hebrew text, presents no difficulty because its gender is determined by its masculine antecedent in Greek, τῷ παραδείσῳ.<sup>18</sup> Such required variations in pronominal gender between the LXX and the MT are well-attested and unavoidable (e.g. Genesis 2:3; 6:17; 23:9; etc.). Similarly, the ellipsis of the second pronoun in the LXX is stylistic and unremarkable. A parallel example is found in Genesis 19:33, where the MT reads וּבְקִוְיָהּ וּבְשֹׂכְרָהּ, but the LXX renders ἐν τῷ κοιμηθῆναι αὐτήν καὶ ἀναστῆναι (cf. also Genesis 6:15; 19:35; etc.).

Targum Onqelos, perhaps the earliest and least interpretive of the Targumim, likewise supports the MT: לְמַפְלְחָהּ וּלְמַטְרָהּ, “to till it and watch over it.”<sup>19</sup>

4) Cassuto observes that some MSS lack the *mappiq* in the final ה' in וּלְשָׁמְרָהּ וּלְעֹבְדָהּ. Given the variability of such orthographic features in the MSS, this evidence is not compelling. Moreover, it is widely recognized that there was a tendency in Hebrew for final consonantal ה' to weaken over time. Hence, for example, the directive ה', which

<sup>17</sup> The ellipsis of the second object in the LXX is insignificant.

<sup>18</sup> Contra S. Hafemann, who asserts that the LXX “exercises the liberty of changing the feminine pronoun to the masculine in order to solve the grammatical problem [created by the assumed masculine gender of ]גַּן” (“Notes on Gen. 2:15” [n.p., n.d.] 1).

<sup>19</sup> M. Aberbach and B. Grossfeld, *Targum Onkelos to Genesis* (Center for Judaic Studies, University of Denver and Ktav Publishing House, Inc., 1982) 30f. Cf. Emanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press and Assen/Maastricht: Van Gorcum, 1992) 150.

was originally consonantal, had uniformly become a *mater* ה in the MT.<sup>20</sup> Gesenius-Kautzsch-Cowley note in particular that the 3 feminine singular suffix הַ, frequently exhibits this weakening (§§23k, 58g, 91e, 103g).<sup>21</sup> The opposite tendency to create a consonantal ה out of a *mater*, however, is nowhere observed.<sup>22</sup>

5) The claim that עבד and שמר invariably have a cultic reference when used in close proximity (hence supporting the proposed renderings, “serve [God]” or “worship” and “obey”) fails to take account of two important qualifications.<sup>23</sup> First, the only examples where שמר may mean “obey” are those where it is accompanied by one of several direct objects (e.g. אֶת־הַדָּבָר, as in Exodus 12:24<sup>24</sup>; cf. also Deuteronomy 12:28; אֶת־מִשְׁפָּטֵי, as in Leviticus 25:18; מִצְוָה, as in Ecclesiastes 8:5 [the only passage translated by “obey” in the RSV and NRSV], cf. also Leviticus 26:3; Deuteronomy 13:5 [ET 4], 19 [ET 18]; אֶת־מִשְׁמֶרֶת יְהוָה, as in Numbers 9:19, 23) or when it is accompanied by an explanatory infinitival phrase (such as לַעֲשׂוֹת אֶת־כָּל־הַמִּצְוָה in Deuteronomy 6:25;

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<sup>20</sup> Joüon-Muraoka §93c. Interrogative מה offers a similar example, based on the evidence of Ugaritic *mh* (Joüon-Muraoka §37c).

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Joüon-Muraoka §25.

<sup>22</sup> It should be kept in mind that although in modern classroom Hebrew a final consonantal ה is frequently unpronounced, there is no evidence that this was the case in earlier periods. As the standard grammars insist, a final consonantal ה was pronounced as a distinct aspiration, as is indicated by the Aramaic name *mappiq* = “pronounced” (Gesenius-Kautzsch-Cowley §§14b,c and Joüon-Muraoka §11)

While modern scholarship correctly eschews “masoretic text fundamentalism,” the tenacity of the oral tradition to maintain in the absence of graphemic representation such pronunciation distinctions over the millenia is well-attested and should caution the modern critic against an overly facile emendations. For example, consider the extraordinary accuracy of the שׁ / שׂ distinction as confirmed by cognate evidence (cf. Joüon-Muraoka §5m).

<sup>23</sup> S. Hafemann simply

<sup>24</sup> Deuteronomy 12:28 is similar in that שמר shares an object with שמע which follows: הָאֱלֹהִים  
שָׁמַר וְשָׁמַעְתָּ אֵת כָּל־הַדְּבָרִים.

לַעֲשׂוֹת כְּכֹל־הַתּוֹרָה in Deuteronomy 11:32; וְאֶת־הַמְּשָׁפְטִים לַעֲשׂוֹת in Joshua 1:7; or simply לַעֲשׂוֹת in Deuteronomy 6:3<sup>25</sup>).

Second, both עֲבַד and שָׁמַר occur in the immediate context of Genesis 2:15, where they bear their customary senses, “serve” and “guard” or “keep,” and refer to actions with respect to the ground/garden of Eden.

Genesis 3:24, “He drove out the man; and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim, and a sword flaming and turning to guard the way to the tree of life [לְשָׁמַר אֶת־דֶּרֶךְ עֵץ הַחַיִּים].”

Genesis 4:9 “Then the LORD said to Cain, “Where is your brother Abel?” He said, “I do not know; am I my brother’s keeper [הַשָּׁמַר אָחִי אֲנֹכִי]?”

Genesis 2:5 “... when no plant of the field was yet in the earth and no herb of the field had yet sprung up—for the LORD God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was no one to till the ground [וְאָדָם אֵין לְעֲבַד אֶת־הָאֲדָמָה]....”

Genesis 3:23 “... therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground [לְעֲבַד אֶת־הָאֲדָמָה] from which he was taken.”

Genesis 4:2 “Next she bore his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a tiller of the ground [וְאֵין הָיָה עֲבַד אֲדָמָה].”

Genesis 4:12 “When you till the ground [כִּי תַעֲבַד אֶת־הָאֲדָמָה], it will no longer yield to you its strength; you will be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth.”

The Targumim and Bereshit Rabba xvi 5 (cited by Cassuto, p. 122), accordingly, have to add these objects in order to allow Genesis 2:15 to have the alleged sense.

6) Finally, on the traditional view, the Fall introduced an element of frustration into the process, as the ground would now yield thorns and thistles and so resist man’s efforts at cultivation (Genesis 2:17-19), but the underlying mandate to work was

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<sup>25</sup> לַעֲשׂוֹת may involve an encapsulation, the content of which is clear in the context of the more explicit expression in Deuteronomy 6:2, לְשָׁמַר אֶת־כָּל־חֻקֵּי תִּוְרָתוֹ וּמִצְוֹתָיו.

unchanged. This understanding finds support in an analogy with the other effects of the curse with respect to mankind. It is apparent that procreation was not a result of the fall, but pain in the process was. Genesis 3:23 may therefore be intended merely as reprimoligation of the creation ordinance of work (similar to the renewed creation ordinances in Genesis 9:1-7 following the flood). Alternatively, the point of Genesis 3:23 might be to specify a changed locus for man's work -- no longer would he enjoy the privileges of guarding and tilling (working) the garden of Eden, now it would be the ground from which he had taken (i.e., not Eden since man was created from the ground and only subsequently placed in the garden). Further supporting this forfeiture of privilege, the cherubim are now assigned the task of "guarding" the garden -- to protect it from the defiling presence of man, just as man should have done so with respect to the defiling presence of Satan.