

## THE "SEED OF A WOMAN": A KERNEL OF DECEPTION<sup>1</sup>

### I. INTRODUCTION

The doctrine of the "Virgin Birth" is a foundational "building block" of Christian theology since it "touches" the other important doctrinal elements of Christianity by virtue of the fact that, for Christians, it establishes the deity of Jesus and confirms his identity as the divine "Son of G-d", i.e., "G-d manifest in the flesh".

According to Christian missionaries, the Christian messianic vision starts near the beginning of the Christian "Old Testament" in the Christian Bible, at Genesis 3:15. They use this passage as one of several so-called "proof texts" of the "Virgin Birth" of Jesus, and with which they attempt to create a Christian messianic scenario that includes a Messiah who is sinless and divine, and who will eventually defeat Satan and kill him, thereby purging all evil from the world.

In this essay, Genesis 3:15 is subjected to a detailed analysis, which will demonstrate that this is not a "messianic prophecy", and that such claims are false.

### II. THE VERSE GENESIS 3:15

Table II-1 shows side-by-side English renditions and the Hebrew text of the verse Genesis 3:15. The King James Version (KJV) translation includes references to two relevant passages in the New Testament. [These referential notations are from the New American Standard Bible (NASB). The corresponding passages quoted below the table are from the KJV.]

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<sup>1</sup> Transliterations of Hebrew terminology into the Latin alphabet will follow these guidelines:

- Transliterated terminology is shown in ***bold italicized*** font
- The accented syllable in transliterated terminology is shown in ***SMALL CAPS*** font
- Latin vowel-sounds, A – E – I – O – U, are used (not the English versions thereof!)
- Distinct Hebrew letter that have ambiguous Latin letter sounds are transliterated according to the following rules:
  - A vocalized letter א is transliterated as the equivalent Latin vowel
  - A vocalized letter י is transliterated as the equivalent Latin vowel with an added underscore
  - The letter ה is transliterated as "h̄"
  - The letter ח is transliterated as "ch"
  - The letter כ is transliterated as "k"
  - The letter ק is transliterated as "q"
  - A vocalized **SHVA** (וְ אֵי וְ) is transliterated as a superscripted "e" following the consonant
  - There is no "doubling" of letters in the transliterations to reflect the **dagesh** (emphasis)

**Table II-1 – Genesis 3:15 in Hebrew text, Jewish translation, and KJV translation**

Source	Passage Citation	Text
תנ"ך [T <sup>e</sup> NACH – Hebrew Bible]	בראשית ג, טו	וְאֵיבָהּ אֶשְׂיֵת בֵּינְךָ וּבֵין הָאִשָּׁה וּבֵין זְרַעְךָ וּבֵין זְרַעָהּ הִיא יִשׁוּפְךָ רֹאשׁ וְאַתָּה תִּשׁוּפְנָהּ עֵקֶב:
Author's Translation from the Hebrew	Genesis 3:15	And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between <b>your seed</b> and <b>her seed</b> ; <b>they [literally he]</b> will strike your head, and <b>you</b> will strike their <b>[literally his]</b> heel.
King James Version "Old Testament"	Genesis 3:15	And I will put enmity <sup>(i)</sup> between thee and the woman, and between <b>thy seed</b> and <b>her seed</b> ; <b>it</b> shall bruise thy head <sup>(ii)</sup> , and <b>thou</b> shalt bruise his heel.

(i) Revelation 12:17(KJV) - And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.

(ii) Romans 16:20(KJV) - And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen.

In general, the two English translations are consistent. Several corresponding key terms and phrases in the three versions are shown in **highlighted** form and are discussed in detail in the analysis that follows. [It is interesting to note that the woman's seed is referred to in the neuter gender, i.e., as an "it", by the KJV.]

### III. THE CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE ON GENESIS 3:15

According to the Christian point-of-view, this verse is special because it points to Jesus as being the **seed of a woman** (Eve), i.e., the reference here is to a "spiritual child" rather than to a biological descendant, and that he will defeat (i.e., kill) Satan (of whom the serpent is the metaphorical representation). This interpretation originates in the writings of the apostle Paul, who (incorrectly) expounds on the word "seed", as shown in the following example:

**Galatians 3:16(KJV) – Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ.**

The Christian missionaries concede the fact of nature that it is the man, not the woman, who passes on the seed, and genealogies in the "Old Testament" are listed through the man, but they point out how Genesis 3:15 specifically refers to the "seed of a woman". They claim this situation must have special significance, and that it can only point to Jesus, who was the "seed of a woman", since he had no earthly father per the accounts in the New Testament. According to the Christian view, the Creator placed the primary responsibility for the disobedience in the Garden of Eden on the man, thereby also making the man the one who passes the sinful nature to his progeny. Thus, being conceived of the Holy Ghost and born of a virgin was the only way for Jesus to be born sinless and without the sinful nature.

In terms of Christian theology, this verse is essential to the understanding of the concept that the impact of the "Fall of Man", which introduced death to mankind,

would be undone by a Messiah who is this singular "seed of a woman", and who would bring salvation to both Jews and Gentiles. Thus, according to the Christian perspective, this passage is a "messianic prophecy".

#### IV. THE JEWISH PERSPECTIVE OF GENESIS 3:15

The Jewish interpretation of Genesis 3:15 follows the plain reading<sup>2</sup> of the verse, in context, and it is based on the following ideas:

- ☆ The *woman* (Eve) is the female progenitor of mankind. [The Jewish Sages accept the notion that homo-sapiens existed before Adam & Eve, but that these were not endowed with the soul that G-d breathed into Adam's nostrils which, in a sense, renders them as being sub-humans, or of the animal kingdom].
- ☆ The *enmity* between snake and man, from mankind's perspective, stems from the fact that in general, snakes are pests, even dangerous pests. From a snake's perspective, it is an animal without the ability to reason and, thus, it acts on natural instincts – it must eat to survive, and its main job is to look for sustenance while protecting itself from predators.
- ☆ The respective references to *seed*, i.e., offspring, point to mankind relative to Eve, and the family of snakes relative to the serpent.

This is not a messianic prophecy by any stretch of the imagination. Nothing in this verse refers explicitly to מָשִׁיחַ (*mashi'ah*), **Messiah**, other than in the generic sense, that מָשִׁיחַ will be a human being who is a descendant of Adam and Eve. Other than that, this verse describes the general notion that people will have an aversion for snakes and hit them in the head, while snakes will bite people in their feet.

#### V. ANALYSIS OF GENESIS 3:15

Biologically it is, of course, a fact of nature that the male, not the female, passes the seed. The Hebrew Bible does not contain a single case where this law of nature is violated. Moreover, the concept of "seed of a woman" is not unique to Genesis 3:15; consequently, there is nothing special about the appearance of this phrase here.

The Hebrew text in Table II-1 contains four highlighted Hebrew words and their corresponding English renditions **by the author** and **in the KJV**. The first two of these Hebrew words are declined forms of the noun זֶרַע (*Zera*), and the remaining two are the Hebrew pronouns אַתָּה (*atah*), **you**, and הוּא (*hu*), **he**.

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<sup>2</sup> The methodology of Jewish biblical interpretation consists of four levels: **plain** (פְּשָׁט - *PSHAT*), **symbolic** (רֵמֶז - *REMEZ*), **homiletic** (דְּרֻשׁ - *DRUSH*), and **mystical** (סוֹד - *SOD*). These four levels are commonly referred to by their Hebrew acronym פַּרְדֵּס (pronounced as *parDES*).

## A. A primer on the Hebrew noun זרע

The Hebrew noun זרע is a compound noun, i.e., it can be used both as singular and as plural, depending on the context of a passage. This term appears in the Hebrew Bible, in various declinations and combinations, 230 times (229 Hebrew, 1 Aramaic). Table V.A-1 shows the various meanings this noun has.

**Table V.A-1 – Applications of the noun זרע in the Hebrew Bible**

Hebrew Term	Meaning	#	Sample Citation
זרע	Part of a plant's fruit from which a new plant will grow	27	Genesis 1:11
	The sowing season	2	Genesis 8:22
	Field crops and grain	11	Genesis 47:24
	<b>Progeny/Offspring</b>	<b>182</b>	<b>Genesis 7:3</b>
	Semen	8	Leviticus 15:32

An interesting fact about the way in which the noun זרע is used in the Hebrew Bible, to be illustrated later, is that, when applied in reference to generic offspring, the term is implicitly plural in context, which is similar to compound nouns in the English language, such as chicken, hair, and others. Yet, where it concerns an explicitly identified offspring, the term is used strictly in the singular context. Another interesting fact is that, when זרע is used in reference to children in the Hebrew Bible, it exclusively refers to progeny, i.e., biological descendants.

The above explanation implies that, in Genesis 3:15, the Hebrew expression זרעה, **her seed**, is a generic reference to mankind since it speaks here of Eve's descendants. Thus, a plurality is understood since there is no explicit reference to any one specific individual and, consequently, the pronoun "they" should be used instead of the pronoun "he" in an English translation of this verse.<sup>3</sup>

To facilitate the discussion of some relevant Hebrew terminology, several declinations of the noun זרע are shown in Table V.A-2. These terms are relevant to Genesis 3:15 and to the analysis that follows.

<sup>3</sup> At least one Jewish translation does it this way: *JPS HEBREW-ENGLISH TANAKH*, p. 6, The Jewish Publication Society [2000].

**Table V.A-2 – The noun זרע and some of its declined forms**

Hebrew Root Noun			
זרע			
Relevant Declined Forms of זרע			
Hebrew Term	Transliteration	Declination	Meaning
זרעך	zar' <u>a</u> CHA	2 <sup>nd</sup> person, singular, masculine	your seed
זרעך	zar' <u>E</u> CH	2 <sup>nd</sup> person, singular, feminine	your seed
זרעה	zar' <u>A</u> H	3 <sup>rd</sup> person, singular, feminine	her seed

As was noted above, Genesis 3:15 is not the only passage in the Hebrew Bible where the notion of “seed of a woman” is utilized. The remaining passages in the Hebrew Bible that include this concept, and which are syntactically similar to Genesis 3:15, help illustrate the dual application of the noun זרע described above. For convenience, these passages are arranged in two distinct categories.

### 1. **Category 1: Passages that demonstrate the generic application of זרע**

The passages in the Hebrew Bible that fall into this category utilize the notion of the "seed of a woman" in the generic sense, where no specific offspring or descendant is clearly identified in the surrounding text.

- ⊙ Hagar, Sarah's maidservant and Abraham's concubine, receives this blessing:

**Genesis 16:10** - And the angel of the L-rd said to her [Hagar], “I will greatly increase your seed [זרעך] and they will not be counted for abundance.”

**Context:** This verse refers to *no specific person*. Rather, the reference here is to a *multitude of people* - those emerging from Ishmael.

- ⊙ Rebecca, Isaac's future wife, receives the following blessing:

**Genesis 24:60** - And they blessed Rebecca and said to her, “May you come to be thousands of myriads, and may your seed [זרעך] inherit the gate of his foes.”

**Context:** This verse refers to *no specific person*. Rather, the reference here is to a *multitude of people* (those who will issue from Esau and Jacob). In fact, compare the wording of this verse to Genesis 22:17 below, where the same terminology (in Hebrew) is used regarding what the “seed” (of Abraham) will accomplish, clearly indicating a plurality:

**Genesis 22:17** - That in blessing I will bless you, and in multiplying I will multiply your seed [זרעך] as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and your seed [זרעך] shall possess the gate of his enemies;

- ⊙ The next example demonstrates a situation of the absence of the "seed of a woman", where a childless daughter of a priest may return to live in her father's house and partake of his bread:

**Leviticus 22:13** - But if the priest's daughter is a widow, or divorced, and has no offspring [לְאִשָּׁרָא] and has returned to her father's house, as in her youth, she shall eat of her father's bread; but no stranger shall eat of it.

**Context:** This verse refers to *a woman without children*, i.e., it refers to *the absence of offspring without specifying their number*.

- ⊙ Elkanah and his wife, Hannah, receive the following blessing from Eli the Priest to "compensate" for dedicating their firstborn, Samuel, to serve G-d:

**1 Samuel 2:20-21** – (20) And Eli blessed Elkanah and his wife, and said: "The L-rd give you seed [לְאִשָּׁרָא] of this woman for the loan which is lent to the L-rd." And they went to their own home. (21) So the L-rd visited Hannah, so that she conceived, and bore three sons and two daughters. And the child Samuel grew before the L-rd.

**Context:** Verse 20 refers to *no specific person*. Rather, the reference here is to *the five additional children* (not any specific one of them) that she bore after the birth of Samuel, as noted in verse 21.

- ⊙ A final example contains a metaphorical reference, albeit one that perfectly fits the grammatical and conceptual construct:

**Isaiah 54:3** - For you [Zion] will burst out to the right and to the left; and your seed [לְאִשָּׁרָא] will inherit nations, and they will settle desolate cities.

**Context:** This verse refers to *no specific person*. Rather, the reference here is to *an entire nation* (Israel), clearly implying a plurality.

## 2. **Category 2:** Passages that demonstrate the specific application of לְאִשָּׁרָא

This category of passages in the Hebrew Bible utilizes the concept of the "seed of a woman", but in a different way – in the singular sense, where a specific offspring or descendant is clearly identified in the surrounding text.

- ⊙ When Eve gives birth to Seth following the loss of Abel she says:

**Genesis 4:25** - And Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son and named him Seth, for "G-d has provided me [Eve] another seed [לְאִשָּׁרָא] in place of Abel, for Cain had killed him."

**Context:** This verse refers specifically to **Seth**.

- ⊙ Hannah prays to be able to bear a son:

**1 Samuel 1:11** – She [Hannah] made a vow and said, “L-rd, Master of Legions, if You take note of the suffering of Your maidservant, and You remember me, and do not forget Your maidservant, and give Your maidservant **male offspring** [זָרַע אֲנָשִׁים, *Zera anaSHIM*], then I shall give him to the L-rd all the days of his life, and a razor shall not come upon his head.”

**Context:** This verse refers specifically to *the (future) prophet Samuel*, who is named later in the same chapter:

**1 Samuel 1:20** – And in due course, Hannah conceived and bore a son, and she called his name Samuel, "For I have asked him of the L-rd".

### 3. What about Genesis 3:15?

*Into which of these two categories does Genesis 3:15 fit?* In other words, does Genesis 3:15 belong in the group characterized by the applications of the noun זָרַע in Genesis 16:10, 24:60, Leviticus 22:13, 1 Samuel 2:20-21, and Isaiah 54:3 – verses that clearly and unambiguously (at least in the Hebrew text) refer to unidentified multitudes of humans? Or, does Genesis 3:15 belong in the group characterized by the applications of the noun זָרַע in Genesis 4:25 and 1 Samuel 1:11 – each of which clearly and unambiguously (at least in the Hebrew text) refers to a specific individual (Biblical personality) that is identified, by name, nearby?

The examples given above clearly demonstrate that the verse Genesis 3:15 belongs in Category 1, along with the other examples in which the application of זָרַע is in the generic plural sense.

**Conclusion:** The verse Genesis 3:15 belongs in Category 1. Therefore, the respective applications of the Hebrew noun זָרַע to the woman (Eve) and to the serpent are references to their generic descendants and do not serve as “pointers” to any specific person or entity.

### B. A common Christian claim

Christian missionaries use the wording of Genesis 3:15, where the singular pronouns “he” [הוּא; in reference to Eve's seed] and “you” [אַתָּה; in reference to the serpent's seed] are applied, to defend the Christian perspective.

✝ **Missionary Claim:** The text shows that the verse speaks of an individual in each case – the “he” (“it” in the KJV) refers to the Messiah, and the “you” refers to Satan.

✧ **Jewish Response:** This would have been a reasonable argument against including Genesis 3:15 in Category 1, were it not for the ubiquity of the two pronouns, הוּא and אַתָּה, in the Hebrew Bible, and the fact they are used interchangeably in both the singular and plural context, i.e., as “he” and

(singular) “you” as well as “they” and [plural] “you”. Although the singular applications are the most common ones found for both pronouns, the plural applications are present throughout the Hebrew Bible as well. This is demonstrated with the following examples.

Examples (from the Torah) of אִתְּךָ in the plural context are:

**Exodus 1:6,10** – (6) And Joseph died, and all his brothers, and all **that generation** [הַדּוֹר הַהוּא] (*ha'DOR ha'HU*).

(10) Come on, let us deal wisely with them; lest they multiply, and it may come to pass, that, when there would be any war, **they too** [אִתְּךָ] (*GAM-HU*) should join our enemies, and fight against us; and so get them out of the land.

Examples of אַתְּ in the plural context are:

**Exodus 33:3** - To a land flowing with milk and honey; for I will not go up in the midst of you since **you** [אַתְּ] are a stiff-necked people; lest I consume you in the way.

**Deuteronomy 9:6** - And you shall know that, not because of your righteousness, the L-rd, your G-d, gives you this land to possess it; for **you** [אַתְּ] are a stiff-necked people.

Passages such as the above clearly demonstrate the plural application of the singular Hebrew pronouns אִתְּךָ, **he/they**, and אַתְּ, **you/pl. you**, and these add credence to the correct translation of Genesis 3:15, the one using “they” and the implicit [plural] “you”.

**Conclusion: The verse Genesis 3:15 is not a messianic prophecy!**

## VI. SUMMARY

The application in Genesis 3:15 of the term זֶרְעָהּ, **her seed**, refers to Eve’s generic descendants, i.e., humanity, since, according to the account of Creation in Genesis, Adam and Eve are considered as the progenitors of all of us. To accept and believe the claim that Genesis 3:15 is a “messianic prophecy”, that the “seed of Eve” referred to therein can be distinctly and unambiguously identified as pointing to a specific individual, Jesus, requires an incredible quantum leap of faith and ignoring the facts.

Within the realm of Jewish theology, this verse could certainly be understood to eventually include מְשִׁיחַ at some point in the human chain of genealogies, since according to the Hebrew Bible he is expected to be a flesh and blood human being, a descendant of King David and, thus, a descendant of Adam and Eve as well. But this is in no way a unique identification and pointer to מְשִׁיחַ, to that specific individual whose coming is foretold in the Hebrew Bible.

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