

Saved Through Childbearing

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1 Tim 2:15

(NA 28th ed.)

(NRSV)

σωθήσεται δὲ

διὰ τῆς τεκνογονίας,

ἐὰν μείνωσιν

ἐν πίστει καὶ ἀγάπῃ καὶ ἁγιασμῷ

μετὰ σωφροσύνης·

Yet she will be saved

through childbearing,

provided they continue

in faith and love and holiness,

with modesty.

“Saved” is from *sozo* (two long o’s, pronounced SOAD-zoe). The verb is **future** and **passive**, thus she “will be saved.” Line 2 “childbearing” is from *teknon* (“child”) plus *ginomai*, as in “gen-,” think generate or engender. Line 3, “provided” is from the small word “if.” You know *agape*. Simple, right?

The preposition *dia*, like most small words, can be glossed with many English words, depending on context. What does “through” mean, anyway? Merriam-Webster Dictionary lists five major meanings, check it [out](#). Usually it overlaps with the semantic domain of *dia*. See [here](#). Its sense is the key to Paul’s intended meaning.

Also, the cultural context of the dominant religion of Ephesus is the foil for all of 1 Tim 2:8 – 15. The passage is written to speak to women over against the background of Artemis worship in Ephesus. Paul wants their behavior to be set apart from it. He also wants to encourage them to live for Christ without needless anxiety.

I am largely drawing on chapter 3 of Gary Hoag, *Wealth in Ancient Ephesus and the First Letter to Timothy* (2015). ([Email](#) me for it.) Here are some of the arguments that Hoag makes:

The city of Ephesus was organized around the goddess (see Acts 19:34). Women were conscripted into its ritual acts of worship such as festivals and processions. This involved wearing hair in a manner that Paul directly speaks against (using the exact Greek words Xenophon employs to describe it), and wearing gold and finery to conform to the Artemis cult—which Paul also directly and pointedly censures.

Of one piece with that was the outspoken way Ephesian women promoted the myth of Artemis. This included an alternative origin story, which Paul refuted by citing Genesis. He also insisted that in Ephesus, “a woman” (singular) should not mimic the priestesses by assuming a superior position of knowledge and authority over male leaders in the church. This female effrontery smacked of a particularly Ephesian brand of idolatry. (Corinth had similar issues.) Thus Paul devastatingly stamped down such a misguided woman who stridently taught and acted out aspects of the pagan ethos. That is how I understand Hoag.

Artemis was the goddess of childbearing—and of vengeance. She was dangerous. To spurn her was risky. This concerned some Ephesian Christians, so Paul sought to reassure them. In the words of Hoag, page 92,

Women who chose to serve God rather than the goddess of childbearing would put their lives at risk because of the possibility of the wrath of the goddess. In this light, 1 Tim 2:15 offered hope in place of fear for Ephesian women in God’s church, despite the tremendous social and religious pressures in this setting. They could approach pregnancies without fear of the vengeance of the goddess by placing their trust in God for salvation. Women exhibited this trust by persevering in faith, love, and holiness, with modesty.

And this brings us back to *dia*. God will preserve women *throughout* the terms of their pregnancies, so they have nothing to fear from Artemis.

Thus Phillips, “women will come safely through child-birth if they maintain a life of faith, love, holiness and gravity.” NASB, “But women will be preserved through the bearing of children.”

Praise God! But—don’t you think it’s odd that Christians needed this sort of reassurance? Didn’t they renounce Artemis when they confessed Christ, and thus had no fear of a nonexistent goddess? Well, if Hoag is correct, the answer is, “no.” Their old life still tugged at them, and they needed encouragement.

I wonder what corresponds to this in our own time and culture. What do we need reassurance about, having renounced our secular past and trusted in Christ? Hmm.

Do we need to be reassured that Christ defends us, so we need not respond in anger to an offence?

They say we need to promote ourselves to get ahead. Do we need reassurance that God blesses the meek?

Do we need reassurance that Jesus always provides for us—despite Social Security’s pending insolvency?

Do we need reassurance that Christ is our everlasting companion, so we needn’t fear being alone, even if it means walking away from a non-Christian whom we could marry?

Do we need to be reassured that our life is in his hands, so we need not fear the diagnosis or the hard years ahead?

I bet we do. Let me paraphrase Paul. “You will be sustained through whatever worries you, if you live like you trust God.” Amen, Come Lord Jesus!