

Bruising, Crushing, or Striking: The Translation of שׁוּשׁ and the Promise of Victory in Genesis 3:15

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Scholars throughout the past century have engaged in debate regarding the meaning and significance of Genesis 3:15 and particularly the identity of the offspring of the woman.² One element of the verse that has received somewhat less attention is the meaning of the Hebrew word שׁוּשׁ, often translated “bruise.” The primary purpose of this paper is to determine how שׁוּשׁ should be understood in Genesis 3:15 and to determine what exactly the serpent and the woman’s offspring will do to one another. In arriving at this understanding of 3:15, three concerns will be addressed. The first concern is the English translation of the Hebrew term שׁוּשׁ. The second matter is whether Genesis 3:15 expects either the serpent or the woman’s offspring to be the victor in their conflict. The third concern is more specific, and it relates to whether Romans 16:20 is alluding to Genesis 3:15, though Paul uses συντριβω, which means “to crush,” instead of τηρέω, which means “to keep/guard,” as the LXX does. If Genesis 3:15 is indeed “the foundation of the Old Testament”³ and “the chief promise of the new covenant itself,”⁴ then it is critical to understand this part of the verse correctly.

This study is necessary because of the continuing confusion regarding the term “bruise” in Genesis 3:15 and the lack of thorough treatment of the term in the scholarly literature. In modern English, the verb “to bruise” means “to injure by a blow which discolours the skin but does not lacerate it or break any bones; to cause to develop bruising.”⁵ C. John Collins, however, uses “bruise” as his default translation of שׁוּשׁ, without discussing any alternative options.⁶ He then argues that Romans 16:20 cannot refer to Genesis 3:15, since the latter “speaks of ‘wounding’ or ‘bruising’ rather than ‘crushing.’”⁷ Collins, though, does believe that Genesis 3:15 represents “a promise that God will

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² See Jonathan M. Cheek, “Recent Developments in the Interpretation of the Seed of the Woman in Genesis 3:15,” *JETS* 64/2 (2021): 215–36.

³ John Owen, “The Beauty and Strength of Zion,” in *The Works of John Owen*, ed. Thomas Russell (Edinburgh: Johnstone & Hunter, 1850), 16:396.

⁴ Idem, *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1967), 95.

⁵ *OED*, s.v. “bruise, v.,” accessed March 30, 2021, <https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/23908?rskey=53inAA&result=2&isAdvanced=false>.

⁶ *Genesis 1–4: A Linguistic, Literary, and Theological Commentary* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2006), 153–56.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 158. Similarly, Derek R. Brown presents several arguments against the idea that Romans 16:20 alludes to Genesis 3:15. One is that Paul “employs the more violent συντριβω (‘to crush’ or ‘to break’)” instead of τηρέω (LXX) or a word translating the Hebrew שׁוּשׁ, which Brown glosses as “to bruise.” “‘The God of Peace Will Shortly Crush Satan Under Your Feet’: Paul’s Eschatological Reminder in Romans 16:20a,” *Neotestamentica* 44/1 (2010): 6. See also Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the Supernatural Worldview of the Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2015), 242–43.

act for the benefit of mankind by defeating the serpent.”⁸ It is difficult to understand how “bruising” would refer to the defeat of the serpent if “bruising” refers to a non-deadly blow, as modern English usage of the term suggests. Other scholars continue to use the word “bruise” in relation to 3:15 in spite of their confidence in the promise that this “bruising” accomplishes the defeat of the serpent.⁹

Other scholars assume “crush” is the best translation of שׁוֹף, particularly in relation to the woman’s offspring’s action toward the head of the serpent.¹⁰ The same Hebrew term, though, is used to refer to the action of both the woman’s offspring and the action of the serpent. It is difficult, however, to understand how a serpent would crush a person’s heel. Some scholars resolve the difficulty by assigning different senses to the two uses of שׁוֹף. For example, Victor P. Hamilton cites “bruise” and “crush” as the options for translating שׁוֹף. He opts for translating שׁוֹף as “crush” in both uses in 3:15, understanding the crushing of the woman’s offspring’s heel as “a temporary and healable injury” and the crushing of the serpent’s head as “a fatal injury.”¹¹

It is necessary, then, to examine the use of שׁוֹף in the OT to discern the sense of the word. Because the OT uses the word שׁוֹף only four times (2x in Gn 3:15; Jb 9:17; Ps 139:11) and the lexical and etymological evidence for the meaning of שׁוֹף outside of the OT is disputed and almost entirely unhelpful, some scholars believe it is impossible to understand the actual sense of the word.¹² This paper, however, will argue that it is possible to examine the use of שׁוֹף in each of its OT contexts and come to a reasonably certain idea of its meaning. The result of this study will not necessarily result in

⁸ Collins, 157.

⁹ For example, see Meredith Kline, *Kingdom Prologue: Genesis Foundations for a Covenantal Worldview* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2006), 144–46, and T. Desmond Alexander, *From Eden to the New Jerusalem: An Introduction to Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2008), 105. James M. Hamilton Jr., cites “bruise” and “cover” as the possible glosses for שׁוֹף, though he does argue that it refers to the “crushing” of the skull of the serpent. “The Skull Crushing Seed of the Woman: Inner-Biblical Interpretation of Genesis 3:15,” *SBJT* 10 (June 2006): 34. Allen P. Ross assumes that the use of שׁוֹף in Psalm 139:11 refers to “bruising,” presumably because he believes it means “bruise” elsewhere. *A Commentary on the Psalms* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2016), 3:813n13.

¹⁰ Some scholars use “crush” in relation to Genesis 3:15 with no discussion of the meaning of שׁוֹף. For example, see Eugene H. Merrill, *Everlasting Dominion: A Theology of the Old Testament* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2006), 509; John R. W. Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2006), 224; James M. Hamilton Jr., *God’s Glory in Salvation through Judgment: A Biblical Theology* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010), 76–77; Kevin S. Chen, *The Messianic Vision of the Pentateuch* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2019), 53–55; Andrew David Naselli, *The Serpent and the Serpent Slayer* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2020), 69–103.

¹¹ *Handbook on the Pentateuch*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 44. However, Hamilton had previously argued that “crush” was not an appropriate translation, preferring “strike at.” *Genesis 1–17*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 197–98. William F. Cook III and Chuck Lawless take a similar view, referring to Christ “crushing the serpent’s head after Satan bruised his heel.” *Spiritual Warfare in the Storyline of Scripture: A Biblical, Theological, and Practical Approach* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2019), 12. Similarly, Walter C. Kaiser Jr., argues that the difference “between crushing the head and bruising the heel is the difference between a mortal blow to the skull and a slight injury to the victor.” *The Messiah in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 41n8. William D. Reyburn and Euan McGregor Fry recommend using “crush” for the action to the head and “bite” for the action to the heel. *A Handbook on Genesis*, UBS Handbook Series (New York: UBS, 1998), 92.

¹² For example, John Skinner says of the word שׁוֹף in 3:15, “A perfectly satisfactory interpretation cannot be given.” *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis*, ICC, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1930), 80. Similarly, Gerhard von Rad concludes, “Philologically the verb *šup* cannot be explained satisfactorily.” *Genesis: A Commentary*, trans. John H. Marks (Philadelphia, Westminster, 1961), 90.

a unique translation of שׁוּף; instead it will provide a thorough argument for ruling out inadequate translations of שׁוּף and for choosing the best translation of שׁוּף. The paper will then discuss the ramifications of this translation for biblical theology.

English Translations of שׁוּף

English Bible versions translate שׁוּף in a variety of ways in each of its instances. Table 1 displays some of this variety.

Table 1. Translation of שׁוּף in the OT

Reference	ESV	LXX	Other English Versions
Gen. 3:15 (1)	“He shall <i>bruise</i> your head.”	τηρέω (“to keep, guard, watch”)	“breake” (Geneva) “bruise” (AV, NASB, ESV) “attack” (NET) “strike” (HCSB, NRSV) “crush” (NIV)
Gen. 3:15 (2)	“You shall <i>bruise</i> his heel.”	τηρέω (“to keep, guard, watch”)	“bruise” (Geneva, AV, NASB, ESV) “attack” (NET) “strike” (NIV, NRSV, HCSB)
Job 9:17	“He <i>crushes</i> me with a tempest and multiplies my wounds without cause.”	ἐκτρίβω (“to ruin, destroy”)	“destroyeth” (Geneva) “bruise” (NASB) “crush” (NIV, NRSV, NET, ESV) “break” (AV) “batter” (HCSB)
Ps. 139:11	“Surely the darkness shall <i>cover</i> me, and the light around me be night.”	καταπατέω (“to trample underfoot”)	“hide” (Geneva, NIV, HCSB) “cover” (AV, NRSV, NET, ESV) “overwhelm” (NASB)

In general, English versions tend to use the same term for both uses of שׁוּף in Genesis 3:15. Table 2 displays how different versions translate שׁוּף in each use in the OT.

Table 2. Translation of שׁוּף in English Versions

	Gen. 3:15 (1)	Gen. 3:15 (2)	Job 9:17	Ps. 139:11
Geneva	breake	bruise	destroyeth	hide
AV	bruise	bruise	breaketh	cover
ASV	bruise	bruise	breaketh	overwhelm
RSV	bruise	bruise	crushes	cover
NASB	bruise	bruise	bruises	overwhelm
NIV	crush	strike	crush	hide
NKJV	bruise	strike	crushes	fall on
NRSV	strike	strike	crushes	cover
NLT	strike	strike	crushes	hide
ESV	bruise	bruise	crushes	cover
NET	attack	attack	crushes	cover
HCSB	strike	strike	batter	hide

Among English versions, “bruise” is the most common translation in Genesis 3:15, with five of the listed versions using “bruise” in both instances. The NKJV uses “bruise” in the first instance only, and the Geneva Bible uses “bruise” in the second instance only. A total of three versions use different terms for the uses in 3:15 (Geneva, NIV, NCV). The more recent versions (NRSV, NLT, NET, HCSB) seem to be moving away from “bruise,” with the ESV as the notable exception. Recent versions are tending toward “strike,” but scholarly literature has not provided a strong defense of this translation.

Categories of Meaning

A review of these English versions reveals that the words used to translate שוף fall into two categories of verbs. The first category includes verbs expressing the action of an attack without implying a corresponding result of the attack. These words include “strike,” “attack,” and possibly “batter.” For example, if a report says that the army “attacked” its enemy, or if the President ordered the Air Force to “strike” the enemy, the result of the action is unknown without more information being provided. The air strike may have missed the target or may have struck the target with insufficient corresponding results—but the Air Force still made a strike. Additionally, if a boxer strikes a person in the face—and the strike does hit its target—the result of the strike is still unknown. Was the strike strong enough to cause damage? Was the boxer knocked out? With these terms, the result of the blow is indefinite.

The second category includes verbs that express an action and an associated definite result. These words include “crush,” “destroy,” and probably “bruise” and “overwhelm.” For example, if a report says that the army “crushed” its enemy or that the Air Force “destroyed” its target, the result is clear. Therefore, the translation of שוף in Genesis 3:15 does affect whether the reader understands the attack from each party to be successful. If an interpreter chooses a word such as “crush” or “destroy,” it is difficult to argue that he should use a weaker word for the action of the seed of the serpent than for the seed of the woman. However, the NIV indicates that the seed of the woman “crushes” the serpent (implying a definite result) whereas the seed of the serpent merely “strikes” the seed of the woman (implying an unknown result or a result of lesser severity). This translation seems difficult to support.

The Use of “Bruise”

The use of “bruise” to translate שוף reflects an outdated understanding of “bruise.” According to the *OED*, to “bruise” originally meant “to injure, batter, or crush (a person, animal, body part, etc.) with a heavy weight or blow.”¹³ The *OED* also indicates that the sense of bruise meaning “to break, to smash, to destroy or damage by breaking or smashing” is obsolete.¹⁴ In modern usage, though, to bruise someone means specifically “to injure by a blow which discolours the skin but does not lacerate

¹³ “Bruise, v.”

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

it or break any bones.”¹⁵ It is likely that by using “bruise” in 3:15 the AV translators were conveying the (now) obsolete meaning of the word, which would be translated more suitably as “crush,” “smash,” or “destroy” in modern English. Modern English versions that use “bruise” are likely replicating the use of “bruise” in the AV, but the use of “bruise” in modern English does not convey the same meaning that “bruise” originally conveyed in the AV. If a translator ignored the uses of “bruise” in the earliest English versions, it is impossible to believe that modern English translators would even consider “bruise” as a possible translation of this word.

In addition to the obsolescence of “bruise” in the sense expected in Genesis 3:15, “bruise” is inadequate in describing the serpent’s action toward the offspring of the woman, as “crush” or “smash” would be as well. John Skinner acknowledged this nearly one hundred years ago: “We may speak of a serpent *striking* a man (as in Lat. *feriri a serpent*), but hardly of *bruising*.”¹⁶ Similarly, it is difficult to think of a serpent “crushing” or “smashing” a person’s heel. When a person thinks of a snake attack, he most likely thinks of fangs and poison rather than a bruise—a blow that causes temporary discoloration of skin. Additionally, the offspring of the woman “bruising” the serpent’s head would seem to do little good, since it implies a mere injury. To kill a serpent, one must do more than merely injure the serpent’s head. Therefore, “bruise” is an inappropriate English translation for שוף.

The Translation of שוף in the LXX

The translation of שוף in the LXX presents additional challenges. In Psalm 139:11 the LXX uses καταπατέω (“to trample underfoot/tread upon”) to translate שוף. It is odd to think of darkness trampling upon a person. The LXX uses καταπατέω thirty-eight times to translate a variety of Hebrew words. Most instances of καταπατέω occur in contexts describing hostile and destructive action against an object. Most often (9x), καταπατέω translates רמס, which refers to trampling upon or crushing (e.g., Is 41:25; Dn 8:10). An interesting use of καταπατέω in the LXX is in Psalm 90:13, in which a serpent will be “trampled underfoot.” The remaining uses of καταπατέω translate twenty-one different Hebrew words.

In Job 9:17 the LXX uses ἐκτρίβω, which BDAG glosses as “to cause removal by irritation, ear out, drive out” or “to obliterate (as by rubbing), ruin, destroy.”¹⁷ Other lexicons also supply the idea of “rubbing out.”¹⁸ The LXX uses ἐκτρίβω forty times, translating twenty-five different Hebrew verbs, often in contexts conveying the idea of something being hidden or annihilated (e.g., Gn 34:30; Ex 9:15; Jo 7:9).¹⁹

¹⁵ Ibid. Similarly, as a noun, a bruise refers to “a surface injury in which the skin or flesh is not broken, usually when struck by a blunt instrument.” Reyrburn and Fry, 92.

¹⁶ *Genesis*, 80.

¹⁷ BDAG, s.v. “ἐκτρίβω.”

¹⁸ “Rub out. . . . rub constantly, wear out.” LSJ, s.v. “ἐκτρίβω.”

¹⁹ The LXX uses ἐκτρίβω to translate the following Hebrew verbs: שמד (6x), כרת (4x), כחד (4x), שחת (3x), כלה (2x), as well as various other verbs one time each.

For both instances of שׁוּף in Genesis 3:15, the LXX uses τηρέω (“to keep/watch”). This rendering seems quite inconsistent with the other translations of שׁוּף in the LXX. It is possible to see some correspondence between καταπατέω and ἐκτρίβω, and it would be much more natural to see either ἐκτρίβω or καταπατέω for at least one use of שׁוּף in Genesis 3:15 instead of τηρέω. Perhaps “treading on” something and “rubbing an object in order to remove it” are overlapping concepts. How these terms would overlap with τηρέω is not clear. Perhaps τηρέω reflects the idea of “watching” or “guarding” against an attack; therefore, because of their mutual enmity both sides would be forced to watch for or guard against an attack by the other.²⁰ Though this is not impossible, the LXX remains enigmatic in using τηρέω in Genesis 3:15 as well as καταπατέω in Psalm 139:11.

The Use of שׁוּף in the OT

This section will examine the use of שׁוּף in each of its four occurrences in the OT. Some scholars argue that the two uses of שׁוּף in 3:15 actually derive from different Hebrew terms or that the Hebrew term שׁוּף derives from a cognate שאַף.²¹ Such attempts seem subjective and without a strong linguistic basis. Recent scholars agree almost unanimously that יְשׁוּפֶךָ and תְּשׁוּפֶנּוּ in 3:15 both derive from שׁוּף.²² Gordon J. Wenham correctly concludes that in relation to שׁוּף in 3:15, the “etymology makes little difference to the understanding of the passage.”²³ Since the usage of a word, rather than its etymology, determines the meaning of the word, this paper will examine the way the OT uses שׁוּף in each instance in the OT.

²⁰ DCH lists “spy (on), watch” as a possible gloss for שׁוּף, which would provide a rationale for the use of τηρέω in 3:15. However, no evidence is given for this reading outside of these three OT texts. Instead DCH seems to be offering a possible interpretation of Psalm 139:11, suggesting “even in the darkness he watches me” or “the darkness watches me.” S.v. “שׁוּף.”

²¹ Hermann Gunkel argues that שאַף is likely the original word instead of שׁוּף due to *scriptio defectiva*. The use of שאַף, then would convey a “dual meaning” of “to snap” or “to trample.” *Genesis*, trans. Mark E. Biddle (Macon, GA: Mercer UP, 1997), 20. KBL suggests that two different Hebrew terms are in view in Genesis 3:15, arguing that the first use (יְשׁוּפֶךָ) is from שׁוּף but that the second use (תְּשׁוּפֶנּוּ) stems from שאַף (“to snap at” or “to snatch”). U. Cassuto argues that the words likely derive from different senses of the same Hebrew root words (שׁוּף as a cognate of שאַף), the first having the sense “to trample” (cf. Am 2:7) and the second meaning “to crave, desire.” *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis*, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1961), 1:161. Claus Westermann argues that both instances in 3:15 use a wordplay on the same Hebrew word (שׁוּף). The first use of שׁוּף in 3:15 is equivalent to the Akkadian *šapu* (“crush”), whereas the second use of שׁוּף in 3:15 is ‘a by-form of שאַף’ (“snap at”). *Genesis 1–11*, CC (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1984), 260. Walter Wifall follows Westermann in this conclusion. “Gen 3:15—A Protevangelium?” *CBQ* 36 (1974): 364. Other scholars appear to allow for the possibility of this view. For example, see Marten H. Woudstra, “Recent Translations of Genesis 3:15,” *CTJ* 6/2 (1971): 201, and Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, NAC (Nashville: B&H, 1996), 245n203. Victor P. Hamilton notes that the Vulgate renders the first as *conterero* (“to crush, bruise”) and the second as *insidiar* (“to lie in wait”), leading some older interpreters to believe that the latter reflects the Hebrew שאַף instead of שׁוּף. *Genesis 1–17*, 197.

²² Hamilton rejects the connection with שאַף as well as *šapu*. *Genesis 1–17*, 197n13, 198. Other scholars reject the idea that שאַף is in view. See Cornelius Van Dam, “שׁוּף,” *NIDOTTE*, ed. Willem A. VanGemeren (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 4:67; John H. Walton, *Genesis*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 226; Bruce K. Waltke and Cathi J. Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 94; Tremper Longman III, *Genesis*, The Story of God Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 66.

²³ *Genesis 1–15*, WBC (Dallas: Word, 1987), 80.

שוף in Genesis 3:15

Genesis 3:15 uses the verb שוף two times, referring to the reciprocal actions of the offspring of the woman and of the serpent. Lexicons suggest “bruise,”²⁴ “snap at, snatch,”²⁵ “crush,”²⁶ and “spy (on)”²⁷ as possible translations of שוף in 3:15.²⁸ The immediate context does not necessarily specify the nature of the action. Three factors from the context, though, shed some light on the meaning of שוף. First, this statement is part of the divine curse on the serpent, representing the final word of divine judgment on the serpent. It would be reasonable to expect that the statement of punishment on the serpent would conclude with the defeat of the serpent. The use of שוף here, then, likely describes how the serpent will meet his end.

The second contextual factor to discuss is the term “enmity.” The beginning of 3:15 speaks of “enmity” that God has appointed between the woman and the serpent and between the woman’s offspring and the serpent’s offspring. The verb שוף represents the outworking of the enmity. The verb “enmity” (אִיבָה) is related to the Hebrew word “enemy” (אֵיב). The word “enmity” (אִיבָה), in particular, conveys an intense hatred that often results in murder. Numbers 35:21–22 differentiates between murder committed with אִיבָה or without אִיבָה. Murdering with אִיבָה is associated with shoving someone “out of hatred” and “lying in wait” for someone (Nm 35:20–21). The Philistines display אִיבָה toward Israel with vengeance and “malice of soul” in their effort to destroy Israel (Ez 25:15). Edom displays אִיבָה toward Israel in giving “over the people to the power of the sword at the time of their calamity” (Ez 35:5). Thus, in each use אִיבָה “signifies hostile intent, of such severity that it can lead to murder.”²⁹

The final factor is the location of the שוף action. Ronning notes that the meaning of the verb “may be based not on the verb itself, but on the subject of the verb and the part of the body that is struck.”³⁰ One factor that receives less attention than it should in recent literature is the double accusative constructions used with שוף in Genesis 3:15. English translations typically translate 3:15 with each instance of “your” appearing to be a possessive pronoun relating to the accusatives “head” (“your head”) and “heel” (“your heel”). The Hebrew construction, though, attaches “you” as a pronominal suffix to the verb שוף in each instance. The result is two double accusative constructions: “He will bruise you [in reference to] the head, and you will bruise him [in reference to] the heel.” In this construction, “the second accusative sometimes more closely determines the nearer object by

²⁴ BDB, s.v. “שוף”; HALOT, s.v. “שוף.” It seems noteworthy that DCH does not list “bruise” as an option. S.v. “שוף.”

²⁵ HALOT, s.v. “שוף”; Van Dam, 4:66.

²⁶ Van Dam, 4:67; DCH, s.v. “שוף.”

²⁷ DCH, s.v. “שוף.”

²⁸ Van Dam cites a later usage of שוף relating to “rubbing with incense and ointment” and also to “crushing and stamping under foot” (4:67). See also DCH, s.v. “שוף.”

²⁹ John D. Currid, *A Study Commentary on Genesis: Volume 1: Genesis 1:1–25:18* (Darlington, England: Evangelical, 2003), 128.

³⁰ John L. Ronning, “The Curse on the Serpent (Genesis 3:15) in Biblical Theology and Hermeneutics,” (PhD diss., Westminster Theological Seminary, 1997), 112.

indicating the part of members specifically affected by the action.”³¹ The first accusative, then, is the more general object (“you”), and the second accusative denotes the “members specifically affected by the action.”³² The “head” and “heel” are accusatives “whereby the place of the action is more distinctly marked out.”³³

Therefore, the enmity of the serpent toward the woman’s offspring will cause him to perform a **שוף** action to the heel of the woman’s offspring out of enmity with the intent of killing him. The only rational assumption for the action of the serpent is that the serpent would “bite” the heel of the woman’s offspring. A serpent would be unable to act on a person’s heel in any other way. The woman’s offspring, on the other hand, will perform a **שוף** action to the head of the serpent. Based on the double accusative construction, a word like “crush” or “attack” might seem a bit odd here: “He will crush/attack you on the head” compared to “He will strike you on the head.” The latter seems to be the better choice here. Therefore, the two sides will act forcefully against each other’s respective head and heel out of enmity with the intent of killing each other. What is not necessarily clear from the context are the precise nature of the mutual attacks and the success and subsequent result of the attacks. These topics will be addressed below.

שוף in Job 9:17

The next use of **שוף** is in Job 9:17, which says, “For he crushes [**שוף**] me with a tempest and multiplies my wounds without cause” (ESV). William David Reyburn argues that the English term “crushes . . . may imply total physical destruction,”³⁴ but total destruction is not in view in Job 9:17. Reyburn instead suggests, “He blows against me with a storm” or “He makes a storm strike me down.”³⁵ The idea, then, is that an “attack” or a “strike” from a dangerous and hostile storm is in view but not necessarily a “crushing”—and certainly not a mere discoloration of the skin (“bruising”). The synonymous parallelism in the verse indicates that the general idea of “crushing with a tempest” is similar to the general idea of “multiplying wounds without cause.” Perhaps the multiplication of wounds indicates that the action of the tempest is a repeated action. In this case, “batter” might be the best translation, and it may fit more vividly in the context of Job’s ongoing suffering. The action of the tempest, though, consists in moving against the object with violent force.

³¹ E. Kautzsch, ed. *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar*, trans. A. E. Cowley, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1910), sec. 117l. Gesenius cites Genesis 3:15 and other noteworthy examples of this construction such as Psalm 3:8, which says, “For you strike all my enemies on the cheek,” and 2 Samuel 3:27, which says, “He struck him in the stomach.”

³² *Ibid.*

³³ E. W. Hengstenberg, *Christology of the Old Testament*, trans. Theod. Meyer and James Martin (1872; reprint, Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1956), 1:26.

³⁴ *A Handbook on the Book of Job*, UBS Handbook Series (New York: UBS, 1992), 188. David J. A. Clines agrees: “It is somewhat inappropriate to speak of a tempest ‘crushing’ someone.” *Job 1–20*, WBC (Dallas: Word, 1989), 234.

³⁵ *Job*, 188.

שׁוֹף in Psalm 139:11

The final use of שׁוֹף is in Psalm 139:11, which says, “Surely the darkness shall cover [שׁוֹף] me.” This is likely the most difficult of the uses of שׁוֹף, resulting in a significant diversity of glosses in English versions.³⁶ The use of שׁוֹף in Psalm 139:11 differs from Job 9:17 and Genesis 3:15 in that there is no explicit sign of hostility in the action of the verb against the object in the context of Psalm 139:11. In Job and Genesis, שׁוֹף seems to require a hostile or violent action of the subject toward the object, but this is not the case in Psalm 139:11. This indicates that שׁוֹף may not inherently carry a sense of hostility or violence but that it can be adapted to a context in which the action is hostile.

In the context of the psalm, the psalmist is presenting hypothetical ways he could be hidden from the divine presence—“If I ascend to heaven,” “If I make my bed in Sheol” (v. 8), if I “dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea” (v. 9). Then verse 11 says that if the darkness should שׁוֹף the psalmist, “even the darkness is not dark to you . . . for darkness is as light with you” (v. 12). The point of the statement is that darkness cannot hide the psalmist from God’s presence. On this level, a simple translation of “hide” (NIV) or “cover” (ESV) conveys the idea of שׁוֹף.

Does שׁוֹף, though, convey a nuanced sense that the typical words for “hide” or “cover” (כָּפַר, בָּחַד, כָּסָה, סָתַר) do not convey? For example, כָּסָה is used 151 times in the OT (17x in the Psalms) in a variety of ways: covering with a blanket to prevent people from being seen (Gn 9:23; Jgs 4:18), covering one’s face to prevent recognition (Gn 38:15), water covering people (Ps 105:11), or a shade covering a mountain (Ps 79:11; cf. Ex 24:15). Additionally, סָתַר (“to hide/cover”) occurs eighty-one times in the OT (23x in the Psalms), often referring to hiding one’s face (e.g., Dt 31:17-18; Ps 13:2; 69:17). Either of these two commonly used Hebrew terms would seem like ideal terms for simply stating that darkness is covering a person to prevent the person from being seen. Why choose the much more obscure שׁוֹף, which nowhere else refers to “covering/hiding” or in any sense in relation to darkness? Perhaps the choice of שׁוֹף conveys the idea that this is not a mere “covering” as with a blanket or “covering” as rain water covers the ground. Perhaps the psalmist chooses שׁוֹף because it conveys a greater intensity than other verbs.

In this case, the psalmist, with vivid poetic language, is describing the darkness as overwhelming, overtaking, pressing around—perhaps oppressing—him.³⁷ The picture may be that of darkness approaching or of the unstoppable alteration from daytime to darkness at night. Darkness

³⁶ Some scholars argue that the reading of שׁוֹף in Psalm 139:11 is not the original word. For example, Leslie C. Allen says that the etymology of the word in Psalm 139:11 is “most uncertain.” *Psalms 101–150*, WBC (Waco, TX: Word, 1983), 251. See also Kidner, *Psalms 73–150*, TOTC (Downers Grove: IVP, 1975), 501; Mitchell Dahood, *Psalms*, AB (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1970), 291; and Kaiser, 41n8. No manuscript evidence, however, exists against the reading of שׁוֹף. Therefore, the reading of שׁוֹף in Psalm 139:11 is the most likely reading of the text. For support, see Van Dam, 4:67; Daniel J. Estes, *Psalms 73–150*, NAC (Nashville: B&H, 2019), 555; Ross, 3:813n14; Victor Hamilton, *Handbook on the Pentateuch*, 44.

³⁷ “Darkness” may sometimes take on symbolic value beyond a reference to a mere absence of light. See James D. Price, “חֹשֶׁךְ,” in *NIDOTTE*, 2:312. Estes presents the possibility that “darkness in these verses is a metonymy for his evil enemies who work under the cover of darkness (cf. vv. 19–22)” (555). This seems unlikely, though, in light of the consistent use of literal contrasts in 139:7–12 between heaven and Sheol (v. 8), east and west (v. 9), and darkness and light (v. 11).

does not “cover” light as a blanket covers a body. It invades, overtakes, or overwhelms the light and moves with irrepressible intensity to overcome the light of day. In Psalm 139:11 שׁוֹף may represent the aggressive movement of immaterial but irrepressible darkness that covers and surrounds a person. Van Dam notes that Psalm 139:11 presents “the image of darkness so thick that it can crush and overwhelm.”³⁸ In this sense, “overwhelm” or “envelop” may be the most effective translation, though “cover” does convey the basic idea in English.³⁹

A Proposed English Translation of שׁוֹף in Genesis 3:15

Because of the limited usage of שׁוֹף in the OT, it is prudent to avoid dogmatism in defense of one particular English translation of the verb. In translating שׁוֹף, a key point is to differentiate between translation and interpretation. In Genesis 3:15, the translations of שׁוֹף with terms such as “strike,” “bruise,” and “attack” are less interpretive because they do not describe the specific actions of either party and do not imply a result in the conflict. This usage seems to be in line with Job 9:17, which does not appear to imply a corresponding result of the attack. Job is being “battered” by a tempest, but the reader does not know what kind of ultimate harm this tempest is causing. Lexical data on שׁוֹף is insufficient to understand whether the destruction or death of the object is in view. In each use in the OT, שׁוֹף seems to represent one entity moving with force against another. It seems best, then, to translate שׁוֹף with “strike” in Genesis 3:15.

Though “crush” does not effectively represent the double accusative construction, using “crush” to translate שׁוֹף may be an acceptable interpretive option that accurately describes what happens when a person decisively strikes a snake’s head. To “crush” a head must imply the defeat of that enemy; to “crush” a heel, however, would not necessarily imply defeat, in spite of the harm that it causes to part of a person’s body. “Crush” is an inappropriate term for what a serpent could do to a person’s heel. If “crush” is used for the first instance of שׁוֹף, a different word must be used to reflect the serpent’s attack. An alternative interpretive option would understand the offspring of the woman as “crushing” the serpent’s head, while the serpent would “bite” the heel of the offspring of the woman.⁴⁰ This option would seem to fit well if one assumes that the bite would have the same basic

³⁸ Van Dam, 4:67.

³⁹ “Overwhelm” makes good sense here; “crush,” however, does not seem to be an accurate description of the action of darkness. See also A. A. Anderson, *The Book of Psalms*, NCBC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 908. Oddly, Ross suggests that “bruise” is the idea here, partially based on the idea that bruising darkens a person: “The idea of the oppression expressed in the bruising would darken him with wounds” (3:813-14). Ross continues, “While the idea of bruising someone is difficult, in a poetic composition it is not that difficult. The ‘darkness’ may be a figure referring to what happens in the darkness (so a metonymy of subject); and perhaps bruising has the added connotation of darkening him as well” (3:825). Ross’s view seems to be forcing “bruise” on the text under the incorrect assumption that “bruise” is the correct gloss for שׁוֹף in its other texts.

⁴⁰ Derek Kidner believes that two different translations should be used here, translating the first as “bruise” and the second as “snap at.” *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary*, TOTC (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1967), 1:75n29. However, Victor Hamilton argues, “In order to maintain the duplication of the Hebrew verb, whatever English equivalent one decides on must be used twice.” *Genesis 1–17*, 198. Carl F. Keil and Franz Delitzsch acknowledge that the same word is used for the actions of both parties “to show that on both sides the intention is to destroy the opponent.” *The First Book*

effect as the “crushing”—the death of the opponent. This type of interpretive option, speaking of the crushing of the serpent, necessitates the idea that the verse speaks of the final destruction of the serpent. However, if שׁוּף is used to refer to the death-blow to the serpent, does שׁוּף not also imply a death-blow to the woman’s offspring? The remainder of this paper will address this question.

A Promise of Victory?

The final question that remains is whether Genesis 3:15 provides a promise of victory for the offspring of the woman. To some degree, the translation of שׁוּף depends on whether one’s translation philosophy allows for a more interpretive translation such as “crush.” If the translator uses “crush” in one or both instances in 3:15, then the death of the serpent is certainly in view, but the death of the woman’s offspring may or may not be in view. If the translator uses “strike” or “attack,” then שׁוּף does not necessarily indicate victory for either side. In this case, the two entities will merely exchange blows in the outworking of their enmity toward one another.⁴¹ Several considerations must be taken into account when determining the solution to this question.

Arguments Against a Promise of Victory

Scholars have presented several arguments in support of the idea that a victory is not expected for either side in Genesis 3:15. John Walton believes that the use of the same verb for both parties indicates that a victory for one side or the other is not in view: “The verse is depicting a continual, unresolved conflict between humans and the representatives of evil.”⁴² Second, it may be noteworthy that both instances of שׁוּף in 3:15 are imperfect, which could reflect an iterative sense, conveying the idea that these are repeated attacks.⁴³ If the verbs truly are iterative and the attacks are repeated, then

of Moses (Genesis), trans. James Martin, *Commentary on the Old Testament* (1866–91; reprint, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 1:62–63.

⁴¹ Michael Maher argues, “There is no suggestion that one party in the struggle will emerge victorious. To say that victory for humanity is implied in the fact that a human being will crush the head of the serpent while the latter will only wound the heel of the other, seems to be going beyond the meaning of the text.” *Genesis* (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1982), 46.

⁴² *Genesis*, 226. Walton also explains, “If this is accurate, the verse affirms that the struggle has just begun and will continue unabated. . . . Savoring success, the influence of evil will continue to try to make headway into human existence. Thus, the battle lines are formed and the warfare begins” (233). Contra Walton, Alexander agrees that שׁוּף carries “the same sense in both clauses” but that the victory of the seed of the woman is still in view. “Messianic Ideology in the Book of Genesis,” in *The Lord’s Anointed: Interpretation of Old Testament Messianic Texts*, ed. Philip E. Satterthwaite, Richard S. Hess, and Gordon J. Wenham (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1995), 29–32, specifically 30n38.

⁴³ See Alexander, “Messianic Ideology,” 30, and Wenham, 80. According to Ronald J. Williams, “the iterative imperfect describes an action as one that is done repeatedly, customarily, habitually, or characteristically.” *Williams’ Hebrew Syntax*, 3rd ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 70. Though the iterative sense is certainly possible grammatically in 3:15, it is by no means the only possible use of the imperfect verb here. The interpreter should exercise caution in depending too heavily on the iterative sense to identify the nature of the conflict in the verse.

it is difficult to argue semantically that a victor is expected.⁴⁴ Third, the logical arrangement of the strike on the serpent's head prior to the strike against the heel in the verse may seem to imply that the former is not a final, conclusive blow.⁴⁵ The reader might have expected the blow to the serpent's head to be mentioned last if this does indeed refer to the final defeat of the serpent. Fourth, OT readers would almost certainly understand a snake bite to be fatal.⁴⁶ Since both parties, then, are issuing (potentially) fatal blows to each other, no victor is in view.

A fifth argument against a promise of victory is Westermann's form-critical argument that victory is not promised for either side because the verse is in the form of a "pronouncement of punishment," which does not allow for the inclusion of a promise of hope. Westermann argues that "it is not possible that such a form has either promise or prophecy as its primary or even as its secondary meaning."⁴⁷ Three primary considerations refute his argument. First, Westermann never precisely defines this form or explains *why* it is not possible for the curse to include a promise or prophecy.⁴⁸ Second, since this is a curse on the serpent, as Westermann admits, it must speak of the defeat of the serpent, which would undoubtedly benefit the humans.⁴⁹ Third, even if Westermann's form-critical point is granted, it would be logical to say that there can be no promise of hope for the object of the curse, the serpent. It would not necessarily follow, however, that there could be no

⁴⁴ Alexander argues that the verb is iterative but still affirms the victory of the woman's offspring: "The forces of evil, as symbolized by the serpent, will only be defeated after a lengthy conflict between the 'seed of the woman' and the 'seed of the serpent.'" "Messianic Ideology," 31.

⁴⁵ Skinner summarizes: "No victory is promised to either party, but only perpetual warfare between them: the order of the clauses making it specially hard to suppose that the victory of man was contemplated" (81).

⁴⁶ Walton comments: "While it is true that a strike to the head would appear more devastating than a strike to the heel, a serpent's strike to the heel is another matter altogether. While not all snakes were poisonous, the threat provided by some, in the haste to protect oneself, attaches itself to all snakes. Of thirty-six species of snake known to the area, the viper (*vipera palaestinae*) is the only poisonous snake in northern and central Israel. But a poisonous snake is the most aggressive, so an attack by any snake was viewed as a potentially mortal blow" (226).

⁴⁷ Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 260. H. D. Preuss also makes this argument. "Zara," *TDOT*, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 4:150. James Barr agrees, referring to Westermann's argument as a "crushing rebuttal of all such suggestions." *The Garden of Eden and the Hope of Immortality* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 140n28.

⁴⁸ Westermann elsewhere identifies and explains a specific form of "judgment-speech to individuals" but does not directly identify Genesis 3:15 with this form (the focus of the work is the Prophets). *Basic Forms of Prophetic Speech*, trans. Hugh Clayton White (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1967). In Westermann's examples, this form is almost always in a narrative context and directed to the king (138). In his discussion, though, Westermann uses examples that do provide an element of hope, but Westermann's discussion of each passage concludes without addressing the element of hope. The first example he gives (139–40), Nathan's pronouncement of judgment on David (2 Sm 12:7–14), provides hope for David: "The LORD also has put away your sin; you shall not die" (12:13). The next example (140) is God's pronouncement against Shebna (Isa. 22:15–25), in which the judgment on Shebna is directly followed by a statement of hope: "I will call my servant Eliakim the son of Hilkiyah. . . . And I will place on his shoulder the key of the house of David" (Is 22:20–22). Westermann's further examples function similarly, unintentionally demonstrating that a word of judgment often concludes with a word of hope, though Westermann fails to address the word of hope in each case (142–68).

⁴⁹ Collins says, "This is in fact a promise that God will act for the benefit of mankind by defeating the serpent" (157).

promise of hope for the ones whom the cursed one harmed, the humans.⁵⁰ Regarding Westermann's arguments, Ronning aptly concludes: "The question is whether the scientific findings of form critics should be allowed to nullify common sense."⁵¹

Arguments Supporting a Promise of Victory

Other scholars argue that Genesis 3:15 does give an expectation of victory for the offspring of the woman over the serpent. A critical question here is whether both parties are delivering death blows or whether only one of the parties delivers a death blow. Though the context of Genesis 3 does not clearly answer this question, in the light of fuller biblical revelation, victory for the offspring of the woman is in view.⁵² If the serpent's strike is not a death blow, then the offspring of the woman is certainly seen as the victor. If the serpent's strike is a death blow, then it is certainly possible that 3:15 anticipates, in the light of later biblical revelation, the victory of the woman's offspring over the serpent through his own death.

Some argue that the action of the offspring of the woman against the serpent is more severe because it is an action against the head of the serpent, and the action of the serpent is less severe because it is merely an attack on the heel, a "temporary and healable injury."⁵³ Kaiser comments, "The contrast between crushing the head and crushing or bruising the heel is the difference between a mortal blow to the skull and a slight injury to the victor."⁵⁴ It should be obvious that a strike to the heel, though harmful, would not necessarily cause death—unless, of course, it is a poisonous snake bite. As a corollary to this argument, numerous other OT references indicate that striking the head refers to a deadly blow resulting in defeat, whereas the Bible does not speak of "the striking of the heel" in this way.⁵⁵

On the other hand, it seems quite possible that the original readers of the Pentateuch would have expected the bite of the serpent to be venomous and likely fatal. Michael Rydelnik argues that "in the case of this animal, the Hebrew generally uses it to speak of a venomous and lethal snake."⁵⁶

⁵⁰ Westermann's example of judgment on David, though, demonstrates that a pronouncement of punishment may include a word of hope for the one being judged. *Basic Forms*, 139–40.

⁵¹ "The Curse on the Serpent," 114. He adds, "If Westermann's view were true, Balak should not have cared whether Balaam blessed or cursed Israel, but he said, 'come and curse these people . . . perhaps then I will be able to defeat them.' (Nm 22:6). It seems that Balak was not aware of this strict form-critical limit on the implied meaning of curses, for he thought that a curse on his enemies might help him prevail over them."

⁵² See Alexander, "Messianic Ideology," 32.

⁵³ Victor Hamilton, *Handbook on the Pentateuch*, 44. Many scholars argue that the victor is the one who strikes the more severe blow—the blow to the head. Mathews argues, "The location of the blow distinguishes the severity and success of the attack" (245). See also Hengstenberg, 26; Kidner, *Genesis*, 75; Wenham, 80; John H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative: A Biblical-Theological Commentary*, Library of Biblical Interpretation (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 107; Waltke and Fredricks, 93; Longman, 66; Andrew T. Abernethy and Gregory Goswell, *God's Messiah in the Old Testament: Expectations of a Coming King* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic), 13.

⁵⁴ Kaiser, 41n8.

⁵⁵ See James Hamilton, "The Skull Crushing Seed," 33–38, and Chen, 53–54.

⁵⁶ *The Messianic Hope: Is the Hebrew Bible Really Messianic?* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010), 141.

Chen notes that “the broader context of the Pentateuch suggests that the reader is supposed to understand the seed of the woman as suffering a poisonous snakebite, even a fatal one.”⁵⁷ Numbers 21:4–6 may support this argument, since it speaks of “serpents” (שׁוֹפָרִים is used in both Gn 3 and Nm 21), who “bit the people so that many people of Israel died” (Nm 21:6). Other passages in the Pentateuch speak of “the poison of serpents and the cruel venom of asps” (Dt 32:33) and the “venom of things that crawl in the dust” (32:24). Additionally, Job 20:16 refers to “the poison of cobras” and says that “the tongue of a viper will kill him.”⁵⁸

Another biblical-theological argument supports the idea that a death-blow is in view. Several interpreters understand the Cain-Abel narrative as an initial outworking of the enmity of Genesis 3:15.⁵⁹ Because Cain murders Abel, “we need not wonder anymore, then, if the serpent’s bite is poisonous, if his attack against the man, is, or may be, fatal. The death of the woman’s seed shows that it obviously can be.”⁶⁰

If the serpent’s bite causes the death of the offspring of the woman and if that offspring is the Messiah, then the work of the serpent in effecting the death of the Messiah is likely in view. It is the death (and resurrection) of the Messiah, though, that effects the final defeat of the serpent.⁶¹ From a canonical view, it is appropriate to understand that the serpent really does *kill* the Messiah; the death of the Messiah, however, is what actually accomplishes the *defeat* of the serpent (Hb 2:14; 1 Jn 3:8). Though this understanding may make Genesis 3:15 itself “anticlimactic”⁶² when isolated in its original context, the rest of Scripture unfolds the full significance of this battle. Therefore, “the ancient conflict between Eve and the serpent will be brought to a climactic end in this way through a self-sacrificing hero, the Messiah.”⁶³

⁵⁷ *Messianic Vision*, 54.

⁵⁸ Chen also notes other OT passages that refer to poisonous snakebites (Jb 20:16; Ps 58:4; 140:3; Prv 23:32), though it is unclear whether they should be understood to be fatal (54–55).

⁵⁹ Ronning, 144–78; Alexander, “Messianic Ideology,” 24; Todd Patterson, “The Righteousness and Survival of the Seed: The Role of Plot in the Exegesis and Theology of Genesis” (PhD diss., Trinity International University, 2012), 154–67; Abernethy and Goswell, 13.

⁶⁰ Ronning, 173.

⁶¹ Kline argues that the bruising of Messiah’s heel relates to the death of the Messiah; the serpent’s strike, therefore, is a death blow (146–48). Hebrews 2:14–15 refers to the death of Christ, which occurred “that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil.” Rydelnik argues that this verse represents “an apparent midrash on Gen 3:15” (141). Also, Chen says, “The seed of the woman will not merely be injured by the serpent but will be killed by him. In other words, Genesis 3:15, when understood in the broader compositional context of the Pentateuch, predicts that the seed’s victory will come at the cost of his own suffering and death” (55). See also D. A. Carson, *The God Who Is There: Finding Your Place in God’s Story* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010), 37; and Naselli, 41.

⁶² Chen, 55.

⁶³ *Ibid.* It is at this point that the reader must consider the divine authorship of Scripture as a significant factor. See Vern S. Poythress, “Divine Meaning of Scripture,” *WTJ* 48 (1986): 241–279. If the divine author knows what his plan is from the foundation of the world, what prevents him from pronouncing this plan at the beginning, however cryptic it may initially sound? The statement that an individual descendant of the woman would come to do battle with the serpent is not cryptic at all in 3:15. Further revelation, though, demonstrates how this defeat of the serpent is accomplished—through the death of the individual offspring of the woman.

At the very least, the reader should expect a victory of the offspring of the woman over the serpent in Genesis 3:15 simply because this is a curse on the serpent. It makes sense that the curse on the serpent would include a pronouncement of his defeat. Alexander argues that if 3:15 expects no victory over the serpent, then it represents an additional punishment on the humans as well as the serpent. It would seem fitting for the punishment of the serpent to include his ultimate defeat at the hand of the woman's seed. Alexander concludes: "Given the serpent's role as the instigator of the rebellion against God, it is surely unlikely that it received a lesser punishment than that imposed upon the human couple."⁶⁴ Therefore, in light of arguments from the immediate context of Genesis 3 and from biblical theology, it is best to understand Genesis 3:15 as a promise of the victory of the offspring of the woman over the serpent.

The Allusion to Genesis 3:15 in Romans 16:20

Most interpreters acknowledge an allusion to Genesis 3:15 in Romans 16:20, although the language of Paul's promise is not the same as the language in Genesis 3:15.⁶⁵ Some scholars have argued that the difference between "bruise" and "crush" indicates that Paul is not alluding to Genesis 3:15. For example, Collins argues that one difference between Genesis 3:15 and Romans 16:20 is that Genesis 3:15 "speaks of 'wounding' or 'bruising' rather than 'crushing.'"⁶⁶ Also, Brown presents several arguments against the idea that Genesis 3:15 alludes to Romans 16:20. One of his arguments is that Paul "employs the more violent *συντριβω* ('to crush' or 'to break')" instead of *τηρέω* (LXX) or a word translating the Hebrew *שׁוּשׁ*, which Brown glosses as "to bruise."⁶⁷ Though the works of Collins and Brown are otherwise well-researched, these arguments are based on an inadequate understanding of *שׁוּשׁ*. Since the English word "bruise" is not a valid modern translation for *שׁוּשׁ* in Genesis 3:15, the arguments presented by Collins and Brown against an allusion here based on the incongruity of "crush" in Romans 16:20 and "bruise" in Genesis 3:15 fall short. In relation to Romans 16:20, Paul does not quote the LXX, likely because the LXX translates *שׁוּשׁ* inadequately (*τηρέω*). It

⁶⁴ "Messianic Ideology," 30.

⁶⁵ Michael J. Thate comments, "It is rather difficult to deny the thematic parallel despite the lexical and linguistic difficulties." "Paul at the Ball: *Ecclesia Victor* and the Cosmic Defeat of Personified Evil in Romans 16:20," in *Paul's World*, ed. Stanley E. Porter (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 152. The majority of recent commentators support an allusion to Genesis 3:15 here. For example, see Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1993), 746–47; Robert Jewett, *Romans*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 994–95; Colin G. Kruse, *Paul's Letter to the Romans*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 581; Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, BECNT, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018), 779. Douglas J. Moo, however, expresses some doubt about a connection to Genesis 3:15, since "the language of Paul's promise is not that close to that of Gen. 3:15." *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 932n40. Additionally, Frank Thielman argues that "Paul's language is more directly indebted to Psalms 8:6 and 110:1 . . . a combination early Christians often used to describe Christ's victory over God's enemies." *Romans*, ZECNT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018), 740. Against Thielman, Schreiner argues that "Psalm 110:1 itself alludes to Gen. 3:15," which again grounds Genesis 3:15 as the basis for Romans 16:20 (779).

⁶⁶ *Genesis 1–4*, 158. Collins later refers to 3:15 as "the promise of a specific human who will do battle with the evil power that spoke through the serpent, and at cost to himself will defeat the enemy" (176). It is difficult to believe that merely "bruising" or "wounding" would cause the defeat of this enemy.

⁶⁷ "The God of Peace," 6.

is worth considering, then, whether Paul is providing his own translation of the Hebrew text of Genesis 3:15 in order to state what God will do to the serpent through the church: “The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.”⁶⁸ If this is the case, then Paul understands the “crushing” of Satan to be the intended outcome of the striking of the serpent’s head in Genesis 3:15. This also supports the idea that from a canonical perspective, it is appropriate to understand the verb שׁוּף as a “crushing” blow.

Summary

Based on this study, the most appropriate English translation of Genesis 3:15 is likely to be the English word “strike.” Though “crush” may convey the added sense of enmity, it is more interpretive than שׁוּף itself seems to allow, and it does not account well for the double accusative construction in the verse. However, a victorious strike against the serpent would likely crush the serpent’s head. Therefore, it is legitimate to speak of the “crushing” of the serpent’s head. Furthermore, “bruise” is an English word that should no longer be used in discussions related to Genesis 3:15. “Bruise” may have been an appropriate translation in the past, but modern English no longer understands the term “bruise” in the same way. Based on theological and canonical considerations, the nature of this “strike” is likely to be a death-blow for both parties, though the serpent will ultimately suffer defeat at the hands (or feet) of the offspring of the woman, who will be victorious in striking and crushing the serpent’s head.

⁶⁸ Sydney H. T. Page notes, “Though Paul’s language is quite different from the Septuagint version of Genesis 3:15, his allusion may be based on the Hebrew text.” *Powers of Evil: A Biblical Study of Satan & Demons* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 198.