

The Serpent vs. The Seed of the Woman

Opening Hymn: #300—“Light After Darkness”

Gen. 3:15 And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.

The Serpent

How do people react to Genesis chapter 3? Most Christians probably think it means just what it says: Adam and Eve were happy in the Garden of Eden until the day a snake got Eve alone. Although snakes can't talk, this one was different. It spoke with Eve and convinced her to eat an apple, something she had been told not to do.

Although this is the majority view, there are problems with it. Put yourself in Eve's place. You're happy with your husband in this garden of the Lord. You can do anything you wish with one exception: Don't eat apples (or whatever the fruit was—Genesis doesn't say). You know animals don't talk. No matter how good this tree looks to you, I doubt that you'd believe anything said by a snake.

There's another problem. Gen. 3:14 condemns the snake to go on its belly and eat dust. The evidence is that snakes have always moved on their bellies and to this day, they do NOT eat dust.

When Christians talk this way about the snake, Eve, and the apple, two things can happen: 1) The picture is so absurd a non-Christian might dismiss it as a myth; 2) One concentrates on the trivial aspects of the picture while completely overlooking what's really important. So before we go on, let's take a closer look at this serpent.

This was not a literal snake that talked with Eve. We say this even though the Hebrew word translated *serpent* in Gen. 3:1 is used throughout the Old Testament to describe literal snakes. But this snake was not literal. It was Satan himself, who appeared in the glory and beauty of a higher being. Consider:

2 Cor. 11:3 But I fear lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. [vs. 14] Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light.

Paul tells us the serpent that beguiled Eve through subtlety can also corrupt the church. How? Through false apostles and deceitful workers. He refers to the Genesis 3 narrative and equates the “serpent” with Satan who transformed himself into an angel of light. (But of course Satan was only impersonating such a being.)

Think how convincing a materialized angel would be to Eve. Although she has been told what she can and cannot do, here is a higher being in front of her. And he appears to be a friend. Is it any wonder that Eve was fascinated, even enchanted.

There's more about who the snake really was in Ezekiel:

Ezek. 28:12 Son of man, take up a lamentation upon the king of Tyrus and say unto him, Thus saith the Lord God; Thou sealest up the sum, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. Thou hast been in Eden the garden of God.

This is not a literal king in Ezekiel's day. This is a description of Satan.

Ezek. 28:14 Thou art the anointed cherub that covereth; [vs. 15] Thou wast perfect in thy ways from the day that thou wast created till iniquity was found in thee.

A cherub is not an animal; the opening verse of Genesis 3, is not talking about animals:

Gen. 3:1 [Amplified] Now the serpent was more subtle and crafty than any **living creature** of the field which the Lord God had made. And he [Satan] said to the woman, Can it really be that God has said, You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?

Living creature is a frequent and correct translation for the Hebrew word translated *beast* in the King James. The use of this term is like the four beasts of Rev. 4. We all know a better English word is *living creatures*, not beasts.

Calling someone an animal doesn't make him a literal animal:

Luke 13:32,33 ...Herod will kill thee. And [Jesus] said unto them, Go ye and tell that fox, Behold...

The curse of Gen. 3:14 on the serpent—"On thy belly thou shalt go; dust thou shalt eat"—is not a literal statement, implying that the serpent previously traveled some other way. It is a curse of prostration. This belly is no more literal than the "heel" that the serpent is to bruise.

Ezek. 28:17,18 ... I will cast thee [King of Tyrus] to the ground, I will lay thee before kings that they may behold thee ... I will bring thee to ashes upon the earth ...

Psa. 72:9 They that dwell in the wilderness shall bow before him; and his enemies shall lick the dust.

At the end of our Bibles, in the book of Revelation, we read [in 20:2] "And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan..." Satan is that "old serpent" because he was the original serpent of Eden. "Serpent" is one of his titles, much as we might call a deceitful person a "snake in the grass."

The Hebrew word NACHASH is applied to literal snakes, but we believe that came after the experience in Eden. Snakes, like Satan, seem to enchant and beguile their prey, so NACHASH is the name that came to be applied to them.

The Seed

Gen. 3:15 is the first use of the word "seed" in the Bible with the meaning of offspring. It is the Bible's first great promise of hope to mankind, though it is not clear Eve understood what this promise really meant. The promise of a seed was reiterated by God again at a later time.

Gen. 21:12 For God said unto Abraham ... in Isaac shall thy seed be called.

Abraham undoubtedly saw this promise as applying to his son as an earthly inheritor. But Paul quotes this text in Romans to make it clear that it has nothing to do with earthly inheritance. It applies to a spiritual seed:

Rom. 9:7,8 Neither because they are the seed of Abraham are they all children: but, in Isaac shall thy seed be called. That is, They which are the children of the flesh, these are **NOT** the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed.

In Galatians Paul returns to this point, and conclusively identifies the seed:

Gal. 3:16,29 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. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise.

[4:28] Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise.

Clearly this “seed” in Genesis is Christ, and those who are Christ's. The church is counted in as a part of this special seed that will, in due time, bruise—crush—the serpent's head. They do not crush a literal serpent, but that old serpent, Satan.

Note that the Genesis scripture called this the “seed of the woman.” It is not the seed of the man **and** the woman. That's because the seed is produced without the involvement of any man: “Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son” [Isa. 7:14].

The Prophecy

Genesis 3:15 says that the serpent will bruise the heel of the seed of the woman. We have seen how this seed is Christ and those that are Christ's. Clearly this is not talking about anyone's literal heel. Nor does it have anything to do with the **feet members** of Christ, those now living at the end of the Gospel Age. Every footstep follower of the Master will have been attacked by Satan no matter when they lived.

This is picture language. The heel is at the lowest part of the body. Any damage to the heel, although painful, would not cause permanent damage. It tells us that Satan will be able to inflict only temporary sufferings upon both Christ and **ALL** those who are his.

Notice another use of the word “heel”:

Psa. 41:9 Yea, mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, Hath lifted up his heel against me.

These words were quoted by the Lord [in John 13:18] as applying to Judas. Certainly Judas had done nothing with his literal heel. It is picture language. It means one who had been accepted as a friend was now acting like an enemy.

The promise of Gen. 3:15 says that the seed of the woman will bruise the head of the serpent. Once again this is not the literal head of bone and brain of some literal serpent. It is symbolic language: the most vital part of the body will be crushed. Satan and his works will ultimately be destroyed. And we have scriptures that say that directly:

Heb. 2:14 ...that through death He [Jesus] might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil.

Rev. 20:10 And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone [a symbol of total destruction]

The Battle from Satan's Viewpoint

It is hard to know just what Satan expected would happen once he got Eve to do what he wanted. Perhaps he thought God would never let his creation die. But once he saw that death was a reality, he had to adopt a new strategy. He must, at all costs, destroy the “seed” before it could destroy him. The history of the past 6000 years shows where Satan has tried one scheme after another to eradicate that seed. Initially he tried to corrupt the entire human race.

Jude 6: And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation ... [Less than 1000 years after Eden, Enoch uttered the prophecy in vs. 14] The Lord cometh with ten thousand of His saints, to execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed ...

With the materialization of these angels the world became so corrupt God destroyed them all in a flood, except for Noah and his house. If everyone had died, Satan would have successfully killed the seed.

Subsequent attempts to destroy the seed were focused on the line through which the seed would come. God in Gen. 21:12 said that the seed would come through Isaac [and by extension, through Jacob and his 12 sons and their families]. Satan attempted to kill off the Israelites by famine. But that plan also failed and Jacob and his family were fed from the stored grain of Egypt:

Gen. 50:20 But as for you [my brothers], ye thought evil against me [Joseph]; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive.

So Israel settled in Egypt. But soon there arose a Pharaoh that “knew not Joseph” and enslaved the people. Satan's next attempt to interfere with God's plan is recorded in:

Exod. 1:22 And Pharaoh charged all his people, saying, Every son that is born ye shall cast into the river...

Moses, of course, was not only saved from certain death, he became a great leader. There were many experiences in leaving Egypt, in the wilderness, and in entering the promised land that seemed to spell the doom of Israel, through which the seed was to come. But they survived. The next threat to the entire nation is recorded in:

Esther 3:13 And letters were sent by posts into all the king's provinces, to destroy, to kill, and to cause to perish, all Jews, both young and old, little children and women, in one day ...

Satan was behind this diabolical scheme of Haman's. And like all the other attempts to interfere with God's plan, it failed.

We come to the New Testament. Mary is with child, but not by Joseph. Since Joseph tries to live in strict conformance with the law, what is he to do? Satan suggests to his mind that he should have Mary stoned for fornication. [Deut. 22:22]

Matt. 1:20 Behold an angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit.

Mary was not stoned. But when the baby was born, Satan entered the heart of Herod:

Matt. 2:16 Then Herod ... sent forth and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem ... from two years old and under.

Once again, the promised seed was safe from Satan's harm. Any hurt he directed to the seed was only a temporary hurt, a bruising of the heel as it were. Jesus grows to maturity. Satan, in a particularly cunning suggestion, tries to make Jesus destroy himself:

Luke 4:9 And he brought him to Jerusalem, and set him on a pinnacle of the temple, and said unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down from hence: for it is written, he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee.

God's voice from heaven had just been heard to say clearly that Jesus was his beloved son. Now, as in Eden, Satan calls God's clear statements into question by saying, "**If** thou be the Son of God." But Jesus was not interested in what Satan had to say.

If Jesus wouldn't kill himself, perhaps Satan could inspire a crowd to do it:

Luke 4:28,29 And all they in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath, and rose up and thrust him out of the city, and led him unto the brow of the hill whereon their city was built, that they might cast him down headlong.

Jesus passed harmlessly through their midst. A few chapters later Satan tried to use a great storm on the lake to take his life:

Luke 8:23,24 But as they sailed he fell asleep: and there came down a storm of wind on the lake and they were filled with water and were in jeopardy. And they came to him and awoke him, saying, Master, master, we perish.

Satan probably thought they all would perish, but he was wrong again. Finally, at the cross, Jesus, the promised seed, was dead and Satan had the victory that had up until then eluded him. What harm could a dead seed ever do to him? None, of course. Which is why God raised his son from the dead.

Ever since the resurrection of Jesus, Satan has continued his attempt to interfere with God's plans and has been directing his enchantments against the church. How has he done that? Perhaps one of the most cunning enchantments has been his establishment of a false church.

Rev. 17:5,6 Mystery, Babylon the Great, the mother of harlots and abominations of the earth. And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus ...

If Satan got everyone into the false church, there would be no true church. He would thus successfully frustrate the plan to have the seed consist of "those who are Christ's." Bloody persecutions and the inquisition were designed to force everyone to join themselves to this "woman" of Revelation. Although it did bring about a time we all call the "dark ages" where the light of truth almost went out, Satan has been unsuccessful at doing any permanent injury to the church. Any harm done to those who are walking in the footsteps of Jesus is only temporary, no more serious than a "bruising of a heel."

The Battle from God's Viewpoint

When we look at this battle from God's viewpoint, it is no contest. Every attempt Satan makes to frustrate God's plan seems like it is going to succeed, but at the last moment something goes wrong.

Psa. 2:4 He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision.

Of course the battle is already over. Jesus has triumphed over Satan and over death itself. And he invites us to do the same:

Acts 26:15,17,18 And I [Paul] said, Who art thou, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest. [vs. 17] I now send thee unto the Gentiles to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance ...

Consequently Satan's efforts are directed against us, trying as always to change the execution of the sentence pronounced in Gen. 3:15. But it is only a question of a little more time before even this battle is over:

Rom. 16:20 And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly.

The Greek word translated *bruise* means to *crush completely*. When this happens, it will be the complete fulfillment of Gen. 3:15.

What Can We Learn From This Study?

There are great many lessons for us in this study of the serpent and the seed. Here are a few that appeal to my mind:

1. *Satan's strategy has always been to misrepresent God's word.*

When we see the word of God being misrepresented, we are seeing Satan at work. He asks Eve, "Did God really say that?" He asks Jesus, "Are you really the son of God?" "Isn't it also written that..." Although we don't debate Satan face-to-face, we should recognize that he always misrepresents God. And that leads us to lesson #2.

2. *Our test is simple: Whom do we believe, the "serpent" or God?*

When put this way, the answer is easy. But it is never put this way. The wonderful creature who talked with Eve seemed to make so much sense. The suggestions to Jesus in the wilderness appeared to come from a friend. If this were not the case, there would be no deception. So we must never doubt God's word. He is faithful that promised.

3. *When we know some "fruit" is not for us, it is not for us. Period!*

Eve got into trouble because she didn't like being deprived of what she wanted. The same thing could happen to us. We can be convinced by the world around us that there are no restrictions, that we can have whatever we want. That just is not so:

Matt. 16:24 Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. [vs. 26] For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?

When Adam has to explain himself to God, he says that the woman tempted me, and ... and what? It isn't necessary to say, and I gave into the temptation. This sentence can be completed several ways. Let us hope we recognize temptation when we see it, and that we resist it.

4. *The narrative of Gen. 3 is not a myth.*

A snake is not talking. The misery that resulted from Eve's disobedience came from an outright lie, from the father of liars, and from a real personality called Satan. Adam, his fall, and his need for a ransom are at the foundation of our entire faith structure.

2 Peter 3:17,18 Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness. But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever. Amen.

Closing Hymn: #310—"Triumphant Zion" [first and last verses]

[First given in Los Angeles, February, 1987]