

SATAN IS STILL A SNAKE!

by **David Lee Burris**

THE GREAT DRAGON

called the Devil and Satan

Revelation 12:9



Knowing-Jesus.com



It was Eve, not Adam, he “deceived” (1 Timothy 2:14 2 Corinthians 11:3). Eve probably did not sense the serpent’s danger or see through his false argument.

We cannot be sure why Satan took the form of a snake to tempt the first woman, but there are good possibilities. Genesis 3:1 says, “Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the Lord had made.” He knew what he was doing; maybe he became a serpent in order to be positioned right in the tree of the knowledge of good and evil so as to speak to Eve.

But there is probably more to it. Snakes have the appearance of being very fascinating, but also of being very tricky and smart. Plus, people generally think that snakes look interesting. Perhaps Satan felt that he could capture Eve’s attention best by looking like a snake.

In the New Testament we read that the Devil walks about the Earth “like a roaring lion” (1 Peter 5:8).

Whatever form he is in, Satan is dangerous. . .

- Apologetics Press

The serpent did not tempt Adam & Eve to steal or to kill; he simply tempted them to question God's Word first. And the doubting of God's Word brought sin, evil, curse, death and destruction into this world. And Satan still uses the same strategy today with everyone as he whispers, 'Yea hath God said'...



"Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said unto the woman, YEA, HATH GOD SAID, YE SHALL NOT EAT OF EVERY TREE OF THE GARDEN? And the serpent said unto the woman, YE SHALL NOT SURELY DIE: FOR GOD DOTH KNOW THAT IN THE DAY YE EAT THEREOF, THEN YOUR EYES SHALL BE OPENED, AND YE SHALL BE AS GODS, KNOWING GOOD AND EVIL".

Genesis 3:1, 4-5 KJV.

The Ruthlessness of Satan by Tom M. Roberts

Many do not like to watch “nature shows” on television wherein predators stalk, capture, and disembowel their prey even while they kick, struggle, and scream. The food chain has many links, but from the top down, each devours the other. As one commentator said, *“There is neither vengeance nor remorse in the Kalahari.”* Eating is simply a matter of survival and those high on the food chain are not angry or embittered at those whom they eat. Hunger motivates the chain, parents must feed their off-spring to survive, and so the life and death struggle continues day after day, ageless millennia, from Eden until now.

However timid some may feel about the process, there is a fascination about watching a lion single out a lone animal from a huge herd, stalk it until the prey is within reach of a quick charge, then spring out and, without conscience or guilt, dispatch it ruthlessly. Once the prey is chosen, neither pity from the devourer nor terror from the one about to be devoured will change anything. Without remorse, merciless, pitiless and unforgiving, the hunter takes the game. There’s a lesson in this about Satan that we often fail to appreciate.

**Never once has Satan said, “Enough, no more, I’m satisfied.”
*Not once has Satan allowed a sinner to get away out of pity.***

“The Devil Is A Roaring Lion”

Among many of the descriptions of Satan, Peter spoke of him as a lion. We are the prey, and we are warned, “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Peter 5:8). When Peter uses an analogy to describe our enemy, it is for the very reason that Satan has features like a lion. But the analogy breaks down in that the real lion eats only to live while the Devil destroys out of anger and resentment. The Devil destroys for the sake of destruction. The reason for this, the Scripture teaches, is because Satan has been cast down and he seeks vengeance. “Therefore rejoice, ye heavens, and ye that dwell in them. Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! For the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time” (Revelation 12:12). Knowing his doom, Satan seeks to drag us into eternal torment with him. He is a predator, seeking prey!

One of the more chilling things revealed in the Scripture is the statement that Jesus made to Peter just prior to Jesus’ arrest. During the Supper, while the disciples argued about who was greatest, shortly before Peter betrayed Jesus, Jesus turned to him and said, “Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat” (Luke 22:31).

What a terrible thought! Satan knew Simon Peter's name, his weaknesses, his closeness to Jesus and he wanted to "sift" Peter to see if he could withstand temptation test. This statement haunts me.

Does Satan know my name? Does he desire to sift me? You? Is Satan lying in wait and stalking us like a predator after prey? Who can deny it? Like the lion, Satan has no remorse nor conscience. There is no pity, no mercy, no fair rules of conduct. He is an "adversary" that is absolutely ruthless.

Do we need to be convinced as to Satan's ruthlessness? Look at his history among men.

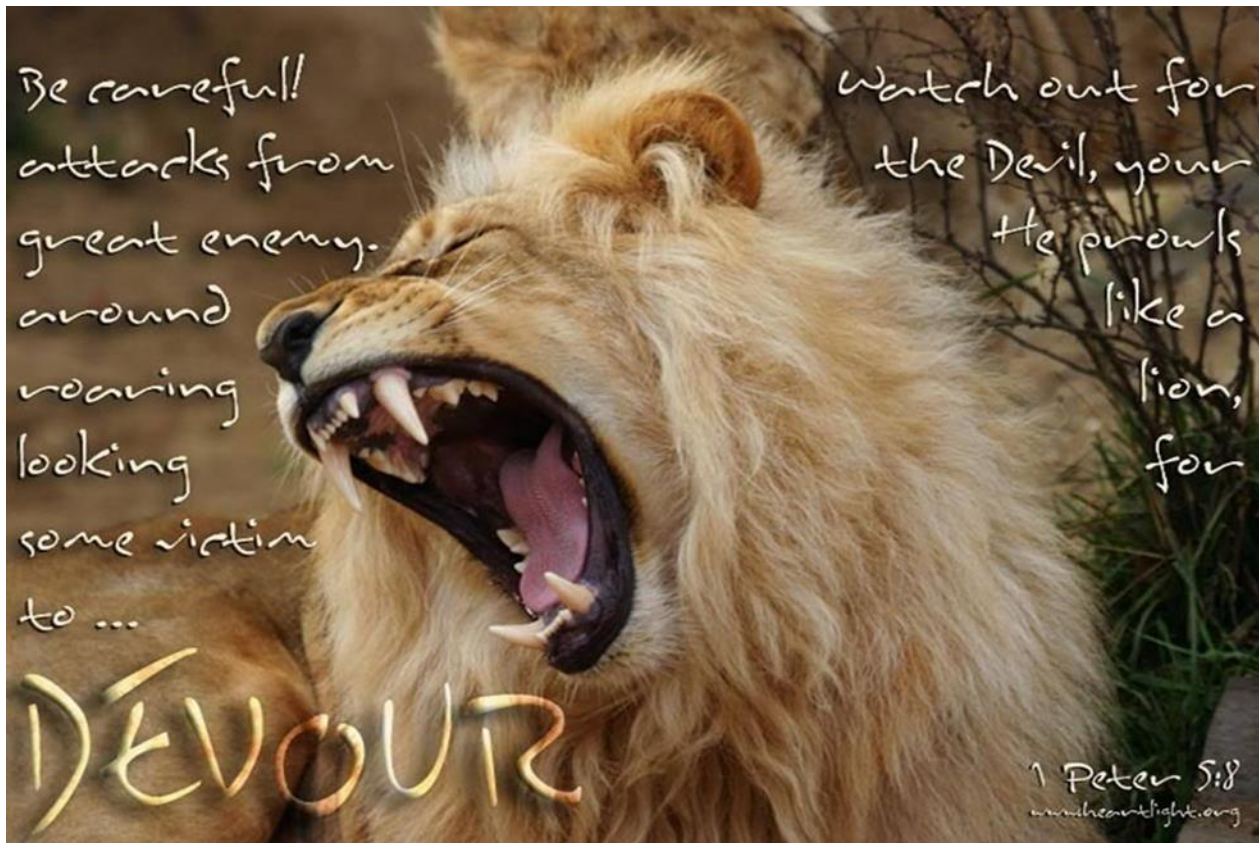
We can only imagine the beauty of the Garden of Eden and the fellowship that existed between God and man. Sin ruined Eden and man's life has never been the same. Our lives have been corrupted, shameful sin has plagued us and death is our lot. Satan, knowing all this would result, lied without compassion and said, "You shalt not surely die" (Gen. 3:4). Did Satan care that we would lose fellowship with God, be exiled from the Garden, and die physically and spiritually? No, he intended to do exactly what he did, to bring misery and destruction into the lives of mankind.

The broken trail of human error can be traced (due to Satan's influence) through Abel's death by the hand of his brother, the increase of sin until God sent the flood upon all the earth, betrayal of Esau by Jacob, the sale of Joseph by his brothers, the cruel treatment of Israel in Egypt by Pharaohs, the cycle of sin among the Judges, sins of the kings of Israel through idolatry, Israel's captivity among the nations, the slaughter of infants at Bethlehem, Jesus' death on the cross, the martyrdom of saints, and, even to this present day, the turmoil of sin in society.

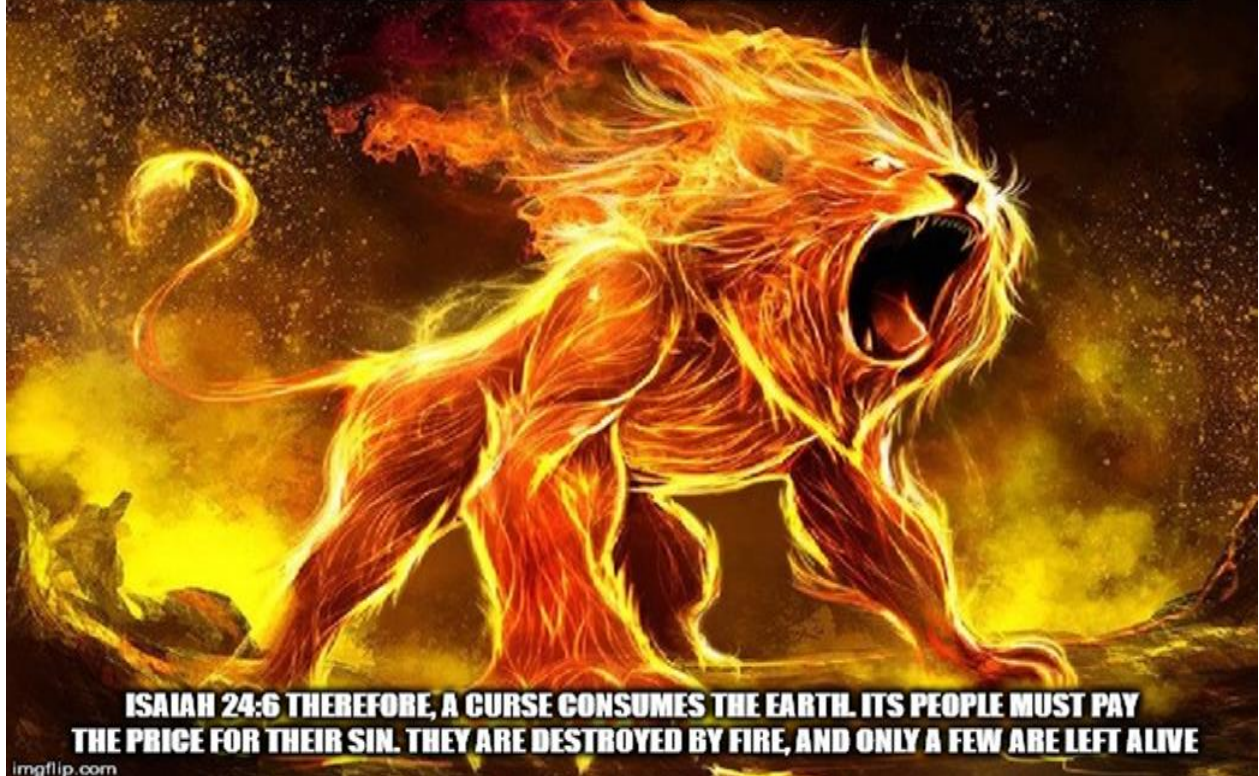
Never once has Satan said, "Enough, no more, I'm satisfied." Not one time has the Devil wished for salvation of a single individual. Not once has Satan allowed a sinner to go free out of pity. The torment of the rich man in Hades (Luke 16) did not assuage his appetite for more victims.

But let's make this personal. Satan has no mercy, Satan is ruthless. Have you lost a dear relative to death unprepared for eternity? The Devil devours the lost. The Devil rejoices. He has "asked to have them." He has "asked to have you." His hatred knows no limits.

Look at the havoc created among churches by the evil action of Satan. Fellowship is destroyed, friendships are ruined, the cause is made a "hiss and a byword," and the Devil's happy!



1 PETER 5:8 STAY ALERT! WATCH OUT FOR YOUR GREAT ENEMY, THE DEVIL. HE PROWLs AROUND LIKE A ROARING LION, LOOKING FOR SOMEONE TO DEVOUR



Nature has gone awry due to the curse of sin on the earth. Prey being taken by the predator is the result of Eden's loss.

Modernism says that the fear of Satan described above is paranoia or mental sickness. That, dear friend, would be a relief. But Satan is real, and very much at work on Earth.

It is only in Christ we have any hope of winning this battle. Each of us has felt the power of Satan each time we sin. We all have been "wretched" as Paul was, under the curse of sin (Romans 7:24), wondering "Who shall deliver me from this body of death?" This "roaring lion" has claimed us all as victims (Romans 3:23). But Paul rejoiced in victory: "I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord" (v. 25).

By God's grace and man's obedient faith (Ephesians 2:8-9), by the remedial power of the blood of Christ, Satan can be, and has been, conquered. Jesus changed the dynamic by coming in the flesh, enduring temptation, overcoming sin and death, and setting us free. (Hebrews 2:14-15).

The hapless gazelle has little chance against the prowling lion, but we have Jesus on our side. When he warned Peter about Satan "desiring to have you," Jesus also said, "But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail, and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren" (v. 32).

SLAUGHTERHOUSE DRIVE

*Why You're on the Verge of Wrecking Your Life
(Especially If You Don't Know It)*

There was something rhythmic, almost soothing about the soft clatter of it all. The soothing repetition sounded kind of like a summer thunderstorm coming up from the coast or a rickety old midnight train off in the distance. I had no idea that what I was listening to was the rhythm of cattle marching to a slaughterhouse. It turns out what I'd happened upon, kind of randomly driving in my car, was a public radio program about factory farming. The broadcast was about how to kill cows, but with kindness.

Actually, it wasn't really about the cows. They were just sort of the backdrop. The segment instead profiled a scientist who had learned through research how to register which stimuli produce which animal sounds and how to track what scares or stresses livestock. It turns out that the beef industry was willing to pay for this information, and not entirely due to their humanitarian goals. High stress levels in animals can release hormones that could downgrade the quality of the meat.

Some of the largest corporations in the world hired this scientist to visit their meat plants with a checklist. She said her secret was the insight that **novelty distresses cows**. A slaughterhouse, then, in order to keep the cattle relaxed, should remove anything from the sight of the animals that isn't completely familiar.

The real problem is novelty. “If dairy cattle are used to seeing bright yellow raincoats slung over gates every day when they enter the milking parlor, there’d be no problem,” she counsels. “It’s the animal who’s seeing a bright yellow raincoat slung over a gate for the first time at a slaughter plant or feedlot who’s going to balk.”

Workers shouldn’t yell at the cows, she said, and they should never ever use cattle prods, because they are counterproductive and unneeded. **If you just keep the cows contented and comfortable, they’ll go wherever they’re led. Don’t surprise them, don’t unnerve them, and above all, don’t hurt them** (well, at least until you slit their throats at the end).

Along the way, this scientist devised a new technology that has revolutionized the ways of the big slaughter operations. In this system the cows aren’t prodded off the truck but are led, in silence, onto a ramp. They go through a “squeeze chute,” a gentle pressure device that mimics a mother’s nuzzling touch. **The cattle continue down the ramp onto a smoothly curving path. There are no sudden turns. The cows experience the sensation of going home, the same kind of way they’ve traveled so many times before.**

As they mosey along the path, they don’t even notice when their hooves are no longer touching the ground. A conveyor belt slowly lifts them gently upward, and then, in the twinkling of an eye, a blunt instrument levels a surgical strike right between their eyes. **They’re transitioned from livestock to meat, and they’re never aware enough to be alarmed by any of it.**

Indeed the safest
road to **HELL** is
the gradual one:
the gentle slope,
soft underfoot
without sudden
turnings,
without milestones,
without signposts.



Quotes from
C. S. Lewis



The pioneer of this technology commends it to the slaughterhouses and affectionately gives it a nickname. She calls it [“the stairway to heaven.”](#)

Jesus knew, long before the meat industry, that livestock are better led by voice than by prod (John 10:3). And Jesus knew that the leading voice must be familiar, not novel; gentle, not yelling. Alarmed livestock run (John 10:5). Jesus also knew these principles don't apply just to farmed animals but to human beings as well. This is why, picking up on the prophets before him, he used the imagery of humanity in general and Israel in particular as sheep, a flock needing feeding and protection and direction. Jesus likewise warned there would be those who would “shepherd” in a way that leads to death.

Here's what this has to do with your temptation. Sometimes the Bible uses the language of predator and prey to describe the relationship between tempter and tempted, but often the Scripture also speaks of temptation in the language of rancher and livestock. You are not just being tracked down—you are also being cultivated (e.g., Ezekiel 34; Zechariah 11; John 10). Those headed toward judgment are spoken of as lambs led to the slaughter (e.g., Ps. 44:22; Jer. 5:26; 50:17).

Perhaps the most striking biblical use of this imagery is found in the book of Proverbs. A father describes for his son the slow progression of lust. The reader is given an almost aerial view of the scene, as the son wanders closer and closer to the edge of temptation (Prov. 7:6–21).



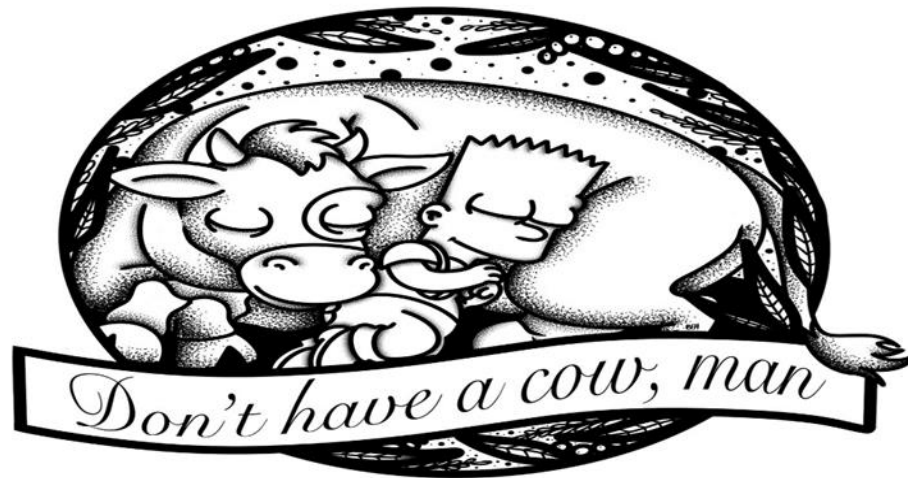
The father says this is like a bird being trapped or an ox being led to the slaughter (Prov. 7:22–23). Later the book pleads with the wise to rescue those who are “stumbling to the slaughter” (Prov. 24:11). The path of temptation is gradual and intelligent, not as sudden and random as it seems.

Jesus’ brother James knew the language of the slaughterhouse. “You have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter,” he thundered (James 5:5). James knew this partly from personal experience.

James knew what it was like to live in an illusion, and what it was like to wake from it. He warned the little Christian assemblies dotting the landscape in the generation after Jesus’ resurrection that they would need spiritual wisdom in order to see where temptation lurks and to recognize the path it takes (James 1:5). The awful truth is that we are fallen creatures, and as such are in constant danger of being “lured” (James 1:14). Temptation—for the entire human race, for the people of Israel, and for each of us personally—**starts with a question of identity, moves to a confusion of the desires, and ultimately heads to a contest of futures. In short, there’s a reason you want what you don’t want to want. Temptation is embryonic, personality specific, and purpose directed.**

Something is afoot out there that’s deeper and older and scarier than we can contemplate. The Christian Scriptures propose an answer to the question, What’s wrong with me? Before you wrestle with temptation in your life, you’ll need to see the horror of what it is.

Jesus walked through the cycle of temptation for us, and does so with us. Like “a lamb that is led to the slaughter” (Isaiah 53:7), he walked out into the wilderness and onto the stairway to hell.

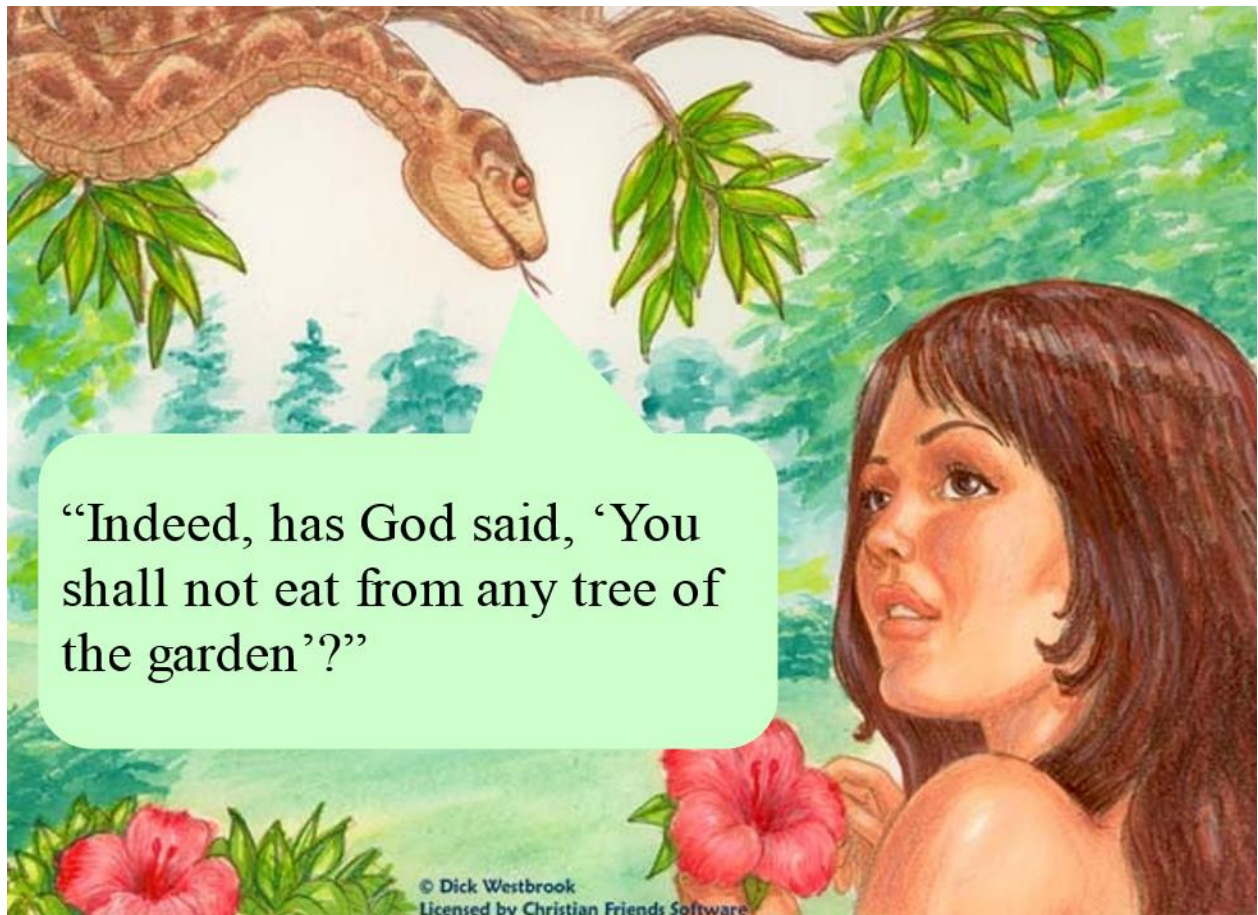


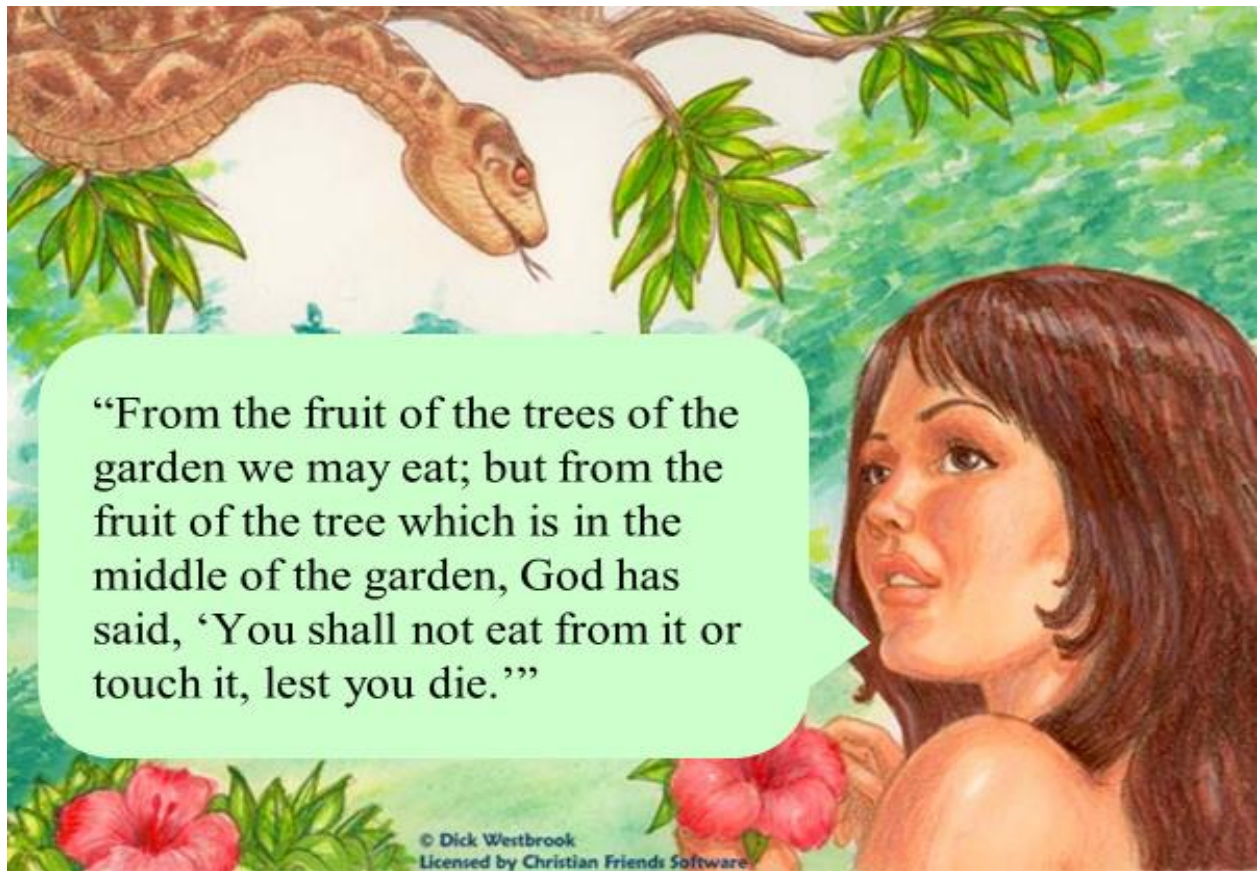
Who Are You?

The first step in the cycle of temptation is the question of your identity. James told the poor and the beaten down to “boast in his exaltation” and told the prosperous and the up-and-coming to glory “in his humiliation” (James 1:9–10). Why? James understood that temptation begins with an illusion about the self—a skewed vision of who you are. The satanic powers don’t care if your illusion is one of personal grandiosity or of self-loathing, as long as you see your current circumstance, rather than the gospel, as the eternal statement of who you are.

Temptation has always started here, from the very beginning of the cosmic story. When the Bible reveals the ancestral fall of the human race, it opens with a question of identity. The woman in the Genesis narrative was approached by a mysterious **serpent**, a “beast of the field” that was “more crafty” than any of the others (Gen. 3:1). And that’s just the point. The woman, Eve, and her husband were created in the image of God (Gen. 1:26–27). They were living signs of God’s dominion. This dominion was exhaustive, right down to “every creeping thing that creeps on the earth” (Gen. 1:26).

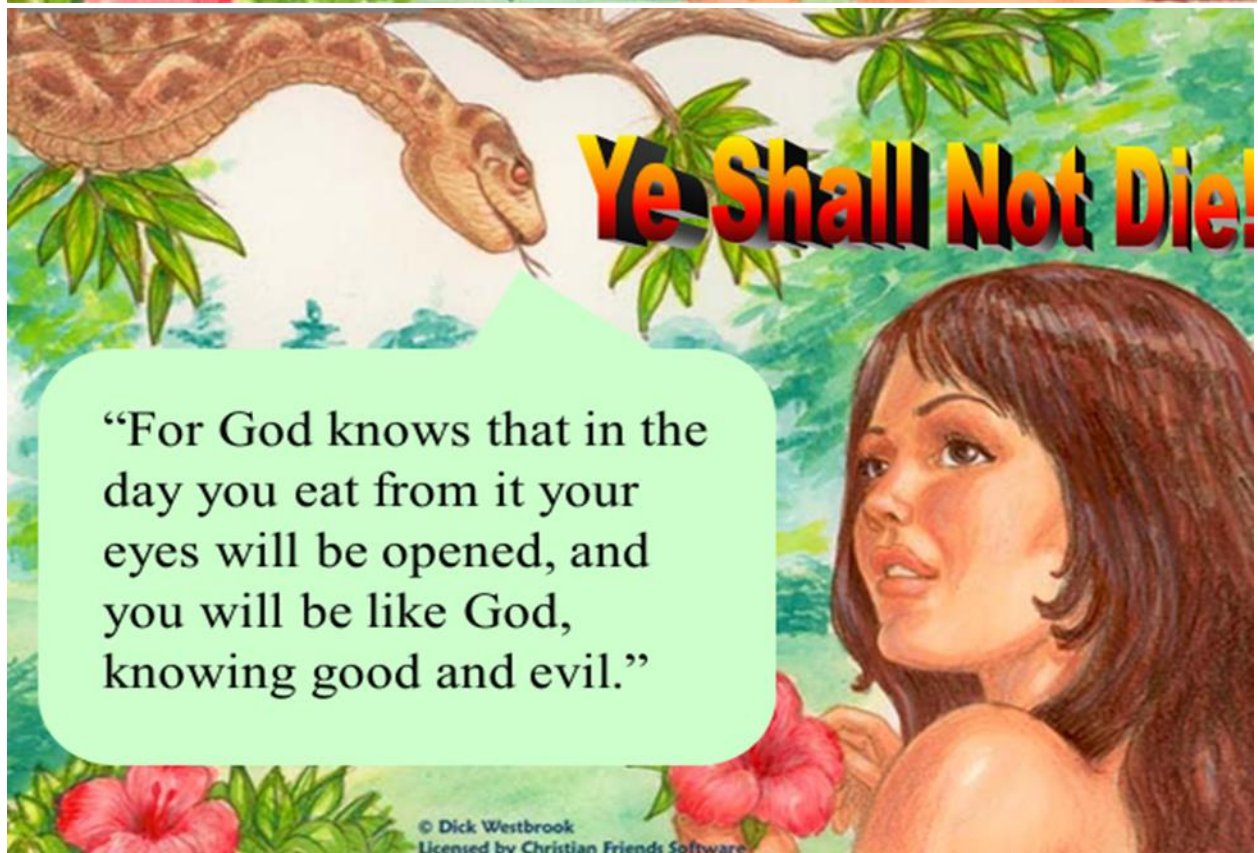
She was being interrogated by a “beast of the field” that questioned God’s commands and prerogatives.





“From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat; but from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, ‘You shall not eat from it or touch it, lest you die.’”

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Ye Shall Not Die!

“For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”

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Without even a word, the serpent led the woman to act as though he had dominion over her instead of the other way around. He persuaded her to see herself as an animal instead of as what she had been told she was—the image-bearing queen with power over the beasts.

At the same time the serpent was treating his queen as a fellow animal, he also subtly led her to see herself as more than an empress—as a goddess. He auditioned her for her role as deity by leading her to act like a god, distinguishing autonomously between good and evil, deciding when she and her fellow were ready for maturity, evaluating the claims of God himself. The snake prompted her to eat the fruit of the tree God had forbidden to her. The tree somehow carried within it the power to awaken the conscience to “the knowledge of good and evil” (Gen. 2:17). The serpent walked the woman along to where she could see herself as if she were the ultimate cosmic judge, free from the scrutiny of her Creator’s holiness. At the very beginning of the human story was a question: Who are you?

The same is true when God started his redemption plan by forming a new people, a tribe from the line of Abraham through whom he promised to save the world. The story of Israel opened with a temptation narrative. *Israel*, after all, is a name that started with one man, the grandson of Abraham, and it means “God wrestler.” Jacob wasn’t to be the father of a great nation; that calling was reserved for his slightly older twin brother, Esau.

Jacob became the father of Israel because he tricked his brother into exchanging his birthright, his inheritance, for a meal. As with the temptation of Eve, the Bible prefaces this act with a questioning of identity. From the start, Esau was foreshadowed for ominous things. He was born red and covered with hair—like an animal—and was thus given a name that means “red.” Both the animalistic appearance and the red color would show up, in horror, later in his life. Esau was born to be the firstborn, to be trained toward the responsibility of leading the tribe. He is defined in the Genesis text as a “hunter” (Gen. 25:27), and this identity that would follow him all the days of his life is further defined: he was trained to be a hunter for his father.

Jesus walked into both of those stories, and into ours. “Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil,” the Gospel accounts tell us (Matt. 4:1). The word “then” is crucially significant here. It is only “then” that Jesus went into the desert—that is, after his identity was publicly marked out by his Father.

The Scriptures tell us that Jesus started his public ministry by finding his cousin, a prophet named John who was baptizing out in the wilderness, and requesting baptism. If you had watched from the hillside, you might have noticed a long awkward conversation as the prophet and his cousin seemed to be discussing something—no, debating something. The baptizer was waving his hands, shrugging his shoulders, but then he stopped and walked with his cousin out into the river.

What you would have seen is what the Gospels record as John reluctantly doing what Jesus asked him to do—to baptize him. John’s dismayed confusion is appropriate. To hear Jesus’ request to be baptized would have felt to John the way it would feel to you to hear your spouse announce an interest in being listed on a registry of child molesters. Yet it was necessary, Jesus told him, “to fulfill all righteousness” (Matthew 3:15). Jesus was not disputing John’s assessment of his identity; he was confirming it.

As you observed the scene, you would have noticed a tumult run through the crowd as the cousins came up out of the water. A strange presence would have shot down from somewhere above you—what you would later be told was the Holy Spirit coming down, like a dove, on this Jesus (Matthew 3:16). Even more astounding, there would be a thunderous voice coming from the skies announcing, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased” (Matt. 3:17).

It is impossible to understand the temptations without seeing the baptism. Water is wild. Your body is made mostly of it, and you need it to live, but it can drown you. It can sweep away your life in a flood. In the early moments of creation, we’re told that the “formless and void” wild earth was covered with water, “and the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters” (1:2).

Here, in the water, Jesus identified himself with us, and God identified himself with Jesus.

The baptism was an inauguration of Jesus' kingship, and it was a declaration of war.

Jesus, God's voice said, was "beloved" and "Son." That was who he was (and is). So, what does it mean, for him and for you, that Jesus is the "Son of God"?

We know from the Bible that a child learns who he or she is in relation to his or her father. That's why persons in the scriptural story are known as "Joshua the son of Nun" or "John son of Zebedee." **Our personal identities are shaped after a cosmic pattern, a Father from whom fatherhood in heaven and on earth is named** (Eph. 3:14–15). **We reflect a Father-Son dynamic in which a Father God announced, "You are my Son; today I have begotten you"** (Psalm 2:7).

Jesus' sonship isn't just about the truth that he is of the same nature as God (although that's certainly true). His sonship includes his humanity. Luke, particularly, emphasizes this. Right in the middle of the story—between the baptism and the temptations—Luke recounts Jesus' genealogy, tracing his ancestors in the typical biblical fashion—"the son of . . . the son of . . . the son of . . . the son of . . ."—right back to Adam. Adam is not, though, the end of the genealogy. (Luke 3:38).

Because Jesus' mission was to restore the world to the way God intended it, under the rule of men and women who themselves are under the rule of Christ, Jesus must live out a life as both ruled (under his Father's lordship) and ruler (with dominion of everything under his feet).

In order to do this, the eternal Word took on flesh (a human nature) and everything this entails. Jesus was not just a human nature; he was a human being. He was a man. He was the Son of God.

At baptism Jesus also identified himself particularly with God's covenant people. Moses said to the Egyptian tyrant, "Thus says the Lord, 'Israel is my firstborn son, and I say to you, 'Let my son go that he may serve me'" (Ex. 4:22–23). When the ruler refused to let the Hebrews go from his domain, God retaliated by striking dead the firstborn sons of all the Egyptians, including that of Pharaoh (Ex. 4:23; 12:29–30).

God demonstrated who his son was by leading Israel safely through the waters of the sea, waters that he brought down on Pharaoh's armies in drowning judgment. The apostle Paul called this passing through the waters the 'baptism' of Israel (1 Corinthians 10:2).

Israel experienced such a "baptism" not only at their exit from slavery but also at their entrance into the land they were promised. God told Moses' successor, Joshua, "Today I will begin to exalt you in the sight of all Israel, that they may know that, as I was with Moses, so I will be with you" (Josh. 3:7). He does so by parting the waters of the Jordan River for Joshua, just as he had done with the Red Sea for Moses.

At the Jordan River, John the Baptizer warned called the crowds away from their confidence in their ethnic identity. "And do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father, For I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham.'"

Jesus at the waters recapitulates the history of Israel. As in the exodus, he bears the verbal announcement of identification by God, is brought through the waters of judgment, and sees a visible demonstration from the sky of God's presence with him. As Israel did in the conquest, he goes through the water in order to face his enemies and, ultimately, receive his inheritance. His name is Jesus, literally in the original Hebrew language, Joshua. And the river he comes to is the Jordan. He is the Son of God.

At his baptism Jesus is shown to be David's long-awaited heir. The prophet—John who is in the spirit of the prophet Elijah—is there to recognize his selection by God. But instead of anointing and announcing through a prophetic go-between, God's voice directly announces Jesus as the royal Son and anoints him with the Holy Spirit himself. He was the Son of God.

Now what does Jesus' sonship, declared by baptism, have to do with whatever you're drawn toward right now? In his baptism Jesus identified himself with you, and God identified himself with Jesus. Here was a new man, a new Israel, a new king—a new start. That's why the serpent wanted to question his identity, as he questioned ours in the garden and yours where you are.

His Father is well pleased with him. But the first question the Devil asked was hidden, wrapped up in the first clause of an offer: *"If you're the son of God."*

This is precisely the opening salvo the demonic powers launch to this very day. **The factory farm wants the cows to see themselves as pets or as companions, or as simply “free” and alone. What they don’t want the cattle to recognize is that they are future meat. Identity confusion is the reason people are able to affirm one thing and do another.**

It’s not that we are deficient in the cognitive ability to diagnose the situation. It’s instead that we slowly grow to believe that our situation is exceptional (“I am a god”), and then you find all kinds of reasons why this technically isn’t theft or envy or hatred or fornication or abuse of power or whatever (“I am able to discern good and evil”). Or you believe you are powerless before what you want (“I am an animal”) and can therefore escape accountability (“I will not surely die”).

You’ve forgotten who you are. You are a creature. You are also royalty. You are not a beast, and you aren’t a god. That issue is where temptation begins!

If you had stood there by the Jordan River, watching the scene at the baptism of Jesus, you might have braced yourself for a shock wave of glory. You might have waited to watch this new king unleash his Spirit power. Instead, though, you would see him shake out the water from his hair, look at the mud on the bank, and then walk off toward the desert. You might have heard him talk to himself, something about crushing a snake’s skull. Our Savior knows who he is. So, who do you think you are?

What Do You Want?

The second step in temptation is the confusion of desires. James of Jerusalem told his flock that they'd certainly face the sting of temptation and that they'd be tempted to blame it on God. "Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am being tempted by God,'" James wrote, "for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one" (James 1:13).

This probably does not seem like a problem for you.

But the danger is that we might see our temptations as a normal part of the fabric of the universe, as the way things are supposed to be. That's true for both believers and unbelievers. We must recognize that "each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire" (James 1:14). The human story, after all, starts with a man who blames God ("the woman whom you gave to be with me") for the fact that he fell to his own twisted desires.

When God created humanity, he didn't design us to be blank and passionless. There was a mission to undertake, a mission that required certain drives. In order to live, we must have a drive to eat. In order to be fruitful and multiply, we must have a drive to copulate. In order to subdue the earth, there must be a drive for creativity. That's perfectly—I mean, literally, perfectly—human.

When the serpent attacked Eve, he did so by appealing to desires that God had created within her, desires that were, in and of themselves, like the rest of creation: "very good" (Gen. 1:31). Eve was designed to long for that which is "good for food" (Gen. 3:6) because God had created a savory array of foods in the trees around her to eat.

She was designed to recognize beauty. After all, the text leading up to the temptation account celebrates the beauty of the creation, describing the majesty of the universe and the lushness of the garden in lyrical detail. It's no accident then that she is lured along by the fact that **the forbidden fruit was “a delight to the eyes”** (Gen. 3:6). She was designed to want to be wise, to be like God. She was, after all, crafted in God's image and was to represent him in ruling the creation as God does, by wisdom (Prov. 8:22–31). Is it any wonder she found it tempting that the fruit could make her wise?

The snake knew not to question the goodness or the sovereignty of God outright, at first. Instead, he let her ponder what she wanted, and then ponder why she didn't have it. **He pulled her craving along to envy and her envy along to action.** Lured by her own desires, she became the serpent's slave.

A similar account is found in Israel's first temptation narrative. The story of Jacob and Esau climaxes in the perfect orchestration of events (from demonic vantage). Esau, the firstborn, was “exhausted” and starving after coming in from the fields, when he approached his brother Jacob cooking some “red stew” over a pot near the tents. “Let me eat some of that red stew, for I am exhausted,” Esau barked (Gen. 25:30). Now this was hardly what most of you would consider alluring. If you were to smell this—probably a combination of goat meat and lentils—you might have to suppress the urge to vomit.

Even for Esau, this was probably fairly pedestrian fare. It was not the delicacy of the meat he'd gone into the woods to track down. But in his weakness he craved it. Everything seemed so matter-of-fact, even in the rapid style in which the narrative ends: “. . . and he ate and drank and rose and went his way. Thus, Esau despised his birthright” (Gen. 25:34). **It was just a moment, as long as it takes a famished hunter to gobble down the red stuff. He was lured away by his desires, lured to death.**

Now when we consider how Jesus walked into the conflict for our desires, we must remember James's warning not to confuse temptation with God's action. That seems kind of hard to do, though, since the Scripture clearly tells us Jesus was “led” into the wilderness by the Spirit “to be tempted by the devil” (Matthew 4:1).

Is God leading Jesus into temptation? Isn't that precisely what Jesus taught us to pray against: “Lead us not into temptation”? Doesn't it seem as though God and Satan are linked in common endeavor against a common enemy? God forbid. Jesus was both tempted and tried.

Here in the desert we see in narrative form precisely what James taught about the nature of temptation. **We are not—and Jesus is not—tempted by God** (James 1:13). To be tempted is to be enticed toward evil. “God is light, and in him is no darkness at all” (1 John 1:5). **We are, however—and Jesus joins us in this—tested by God.**

James wrote, “Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life” (James 1:12). **The difference between testing and tempting is no trivial matter. The goal of tempting is evil; the goal of testing is “that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing”** (James 1:4).

The ancient book of Job gives us some insight into the interplay between God’s testing and Satan’s tempting. The text tells us of a righteous man who is living in the fear of his God. Satan, after “going to and fro on the earth, and walking up and down on it,” approached God in the heavenly places to accuse Job of obedience based only on self-interest. Job’s God allowed Satan to come after the man, but only to a God-decreed boundary: Satan could not take his life (Job 1:6–2:10). Satan, seeking to incite Job to curse God, intended evil. God, seeking to demonstrate the integrity of his servant, intended righteousness.

The apostle Paul recounts a similar scenario when he writes to the church at Corinth about a mysterious thorn in the flesh that plagued him. **Paul said this was “a messenger of Satan to harass me”** (2 Cor. 12:7). **But Paul also wrote that this satanic burden was to keep him from “becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations” he had been given.** Did the apostle mean that Satan, who is by definition a force of pride and self-exaltation, wished to sanctify Paul by cultivating his humility? No. But what Satan meant for evil, God worked together for good (Gen. 50:20; Acts 2:23–24; 4:27–28; Rom. 8:28).

God's testing and Satan's tempting may coincide in the same event, but they are radically different, with different motives and different intended outcomes.

In the desert Satan sought to subdue Jesus' desires, that he might condemn the world. Jesus' Father had in mind something else entirely.

We've already seen what the satanic powers have done to lure away humanity in general from God's reign. That's our universal human story. Jesus reorders human desire by joining the race as a desiring human being. After all, part of what binds the human race to the wicked is that in our fallen state our desires mirror those of Satan. **Who Jesus is must be tested by what he wants.**

Jesus as the new humanity went to the same testing ground as our ancestors. The wicked powers—seeing the Lord Jesus in human flesh as were Adam and Eve—believed him to be vulnerable to the same deceptions as the primeval couple. As he stood where Adam stood, he reclaimed what Adam lost. The first Adam was tested in the God-blessed garden and fell. The second Adam was tested in the God-cursed desert, and won.

The fact that Jesus is in the desert forty days is not accidental. Jesus is, after all, not only reliving the universal human story—he is reliving the story [of the chosen people]. After Israel was “baptized” in the Red Sea, they too were led by the Spirit out into the wilderness to be tested. God was not doing evil to them there. He was instead carrying them through the wilderness, “as a man carries his son” (Deut. 1:31).

Almost immediately the Israelites start asking themselves, “Are we really the sons of God?” They are tested there, and they turn and test God by the criteria of their desires for provision, protection, and exaltation. After enduring plagues of the same sort that fell on their enemies in Egypt, Israel refuses to be disciplined, refuses to conform to the will of God to do good to them. And so the vast majority of them are left in the wilderness, cut off from the land of promise (1 Cor. 10:5). Not even Moses—the meekest man who had ever lived—was meek enough to inherit the land (Deut. 3:23–29).

Of the entire exodus generation, only Caleb and Joshua, who had believed God’s promise from the beginning and remained true to his Word, were allowed to enter the land of inheritance. **Joshua led into the land the “little ones” (Deut. 1:39), those who had not been old enough to know good from evil when their parents rebelled.**

Israel was never a matter of mere marking in the flesh. Those corpses in the desert all had been circumcised. The issue is instead a circumcised heart—whether one’s desires conform to the desires of God (Deut. 10:16; Rom. 2:29). Jesus was heart tested in the desert by the same tests that had felled his fathers, as to whether he is the true Israel of God, that holy nation that walks in the way of the Lord. He, as the true Joshua, is the pioneer who goes ahead of the people, scoping out the opposition ahead. Jesus was tested to see if he was Israel in his heart, if he was the Son of God.

Jesus was anointed to be king in the line of David. After David's anointing, David was sent away, out into the wilderness, where he was tracked down by Saul, the king who was deposed by God but who didn't yet see his reign collapsed around him. David, protected by God and gifted with wisdom, escaped Saul's snares and traps. He survived to take the throne without becoming like his enemy in the process. God promised there would be another king, an anointed one, of whom God said, "The enemy shall not outwit him; the wicked shall not humble him" (Ps. 89:22). And here he was, in the wilderness, the demon wrestler who would be king.

In any discussion of Jesus' temptations, someone will typically ask, "Could Jesus have sinned?" To answer that, I would simply say that it depends on what you mean by "could." I'll respond with another question. Think of the person you love the most. While you have this loved one's face before your mind, let me ask you: "Could you murder that person?" Your response would probably be, "Of course not!" You would then tell me how much you love the person, what the person means to you, and so forth. You're incapable of murdering this person because the very act is opposed to everything that you're about. In your response to my question, you would be assuming "could" to mean a moral capability. But "could" here could also mean a natural ability. You tell me you "couldn't" murder your loved one, but that's no sign that you are saying you couldn't physically take this person on. You're saying you would never do such a thing.

Jesus is himself the union of God and man, with both a human and a divine nature. God is, of course, morally incapable of sinning. But Jesus, in his human nature, really desires those things humanity's been designed to desire. **Could he have sinned—is his nature one that is capable of being both light and darkness? No. Could he have sinned—was he physically capable of eating bread, of throwing himself from a temple, of bowing his knee and verbalizing the words “Satan is lord”?** Yes, of course.

It's at this point that we often further misunderstand Jesus' solidarity with us. We too often assume our current sinful status is what it means to be “real.” That's because we've never known a world in which there is no sin. Too often we dismiss as “all too human” what is not human at all; it's a satanic parasitic human imposition after Eden.

Jesus “sympathizes” with us in our temptations, the Bible tells us (Heb. 4:15). Yet we err when we think of this sympathy as some kind of psychologically motivated dismissal or minimizing of sin. We often are most able to justify the sins in others if they correspond with our own failings, because we understand them.

Jesus, the book of Hebrews tells us, is “like us in every respect” (2:17). This was an act of spiritual warfare: “Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil” (Heb. 2:14).

Jesus' solidarity with us as a human being—as “son of God”—meant that he took on everything, from sweating pores to moving bowels to firing glands.

And this humanity wasn't simply physical—“flesh” in Scripture never refers merely to the material. He also took on a human emotional, volitional, intellectual, and spiritual life. As a man, Jesus truly wanted. He could be lonely, be hungry and be exhausted. He could be angry. He experienced all as we do, except without sin.

We expect Jesus to have endured temptation as we endure temptation—and he did. But much of what we include in “temptation” isn't temptation at all. It's beyond our good, created desires being appealed to. It's instead those embryonic stages of sinful desire. Jesus' desert testing was indeed forty days of torture, but his torture was not because he, like we, longed to do the forbidden. It is because embedded with those good, natural human desires, he longed for what was good in each of the things he was (temporarily) denied.

The sympathy Jesus has for us isn't chiefly psychological (although our Christ does, of course, know our frame as dust and has experienced it firsthand). **The sympathy here is chiefly identification.** He suffered when tempted, the Bible says, and so he is “able to help those who are being tempted” (Heb. 2:18). The sympathy is about his being qualified to be “a merciful and faithful high priest” (Heb. 2:14–17)—**a human mediator before God.** It is then quite literally sympathy—a feeling alongside of, a compassion, a passion along with.

It was important for Jesus to assume human nature in all its aspects—including desire—because Jesus was here to transform human nature, to restore us back to the glory of the full radiance of the image of God. Just as **Adam had been the alpha point of the old humanity, Jesus was to “sum up” in himself everything it means to be the new humanity before God** (Eph. 1:10).

“Although he was a son,” the Bible says, “he learned obedience through what he suffered,” so that “being made perfect” he could be “the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him” (Heb. 5:8–9).

Desire is a powerful thing. We are simply attracted toward something or someone we like, and we may not even cognitively know all the reasons why. We just want what we want, and sometimes we want what we don't want to want. The pull of the passions always promises a resolution of the “burning.” Ultimately, the desires—always in search of fulfillment, never finding it—gain mastery over you (2 Pet. 2:19). Your passions, James warned the churches, “are at war within you” because you “desire and do not have,” you “covet and cannot obtain” (James 4:1–2). There is no upper limit of fame that can ever satisfy those who crave it. There is no monetary figure at which those who long for financial success will ever be willing to say, “That's enough.” As temptation moves onward and inward, you become “insatiable for sin” (2 Pet. 2:14). You're caught.

As you move along toward temptation, the demonic powers want to work in concert with, not in opposition to, what it is that you want. **There's a reason, remember, why the slaughterhouse workers want to keep the cows fed and contented and unalarmed. There's a blood room at the end of the path.** The lure of desire never shows up with suddenness. That would scare you away. **The desires have to be cultivated little by little, until you are ready to give in to them.**

Temptation is, by definition, subtle and personality specific, with a strategy to enter as larvae and then emerge in the fullness of time as a destructive animal force. This is why **James uses *embryonic language* to speak of the “lure” of desire: “Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death”** (James 1:14–15).

You are being watched. *The demonic powers have had millennia to observe human nature.* But that's not enough. As the farmer-poet Wendell Berry notes of livestock husbandry, a competent farmer must know not just the nature of species and breeds of animals but also **“the animal's individuality.”** The spiritual powers out there are expert cosmic farmer-ranchers and are customizing a temptation plan that fits with the way your desires, particularly, work. They notice what turns your head, what quickens your pulse. The demonic beings are marking out your weak points, sizing you up so that they might “crucify” you. They'll find what you want, and they'll give it to you.

SERENDIPITY. Sometimes Christians make decisions based on seeing opportunities come open. In our spiritual lingo we often talk about “open doors” and “closed doors” and “seeing where God is at work” in circumstances, as evidence of God’s leading us to do something or other. There’s a sense in which that’s wisdom, observing the situation around us in order to make a decision. But sometimes people will assume the “open doors” in their lives are all signals to go forward. How could it not be right when everything just seems to be fitting together perfectly? But what if something wicked is just ahead of you, opening those doors for you?

Ask yourself that question now. Imagine you could do anything, you could make it happen exactly as you wish, and could then go back and reverse time so that it had never happened—no consequences for your life, your work, your family, or Judgment Day. What would it be? Whatever comes to mind might be a pretty good insight into where it is your desires are being farmed.

Jesus endured the desert island test. He was indeed in a deserted place, with no one around, and no one—no one of flesh and blood anyway—would ever know if he’d yielded to temptation. But he stood there, trusting and obeying, for himself and for you. Tempted and found obedient to God in his desires, Jesus is an able High Priest and head of a new humanity. He is able, through the Spirit, to conform our desires to his own, being other directed toward God. In the meantime, there are voices all around you asking, **“What do you want?”**

Where Are You Going?

The slaughterhouse consultant that was interviewed sometimes gave tours of the plants she inspects, teaching people about how they get their meat. These can go terribly awry, she says. One woman on a tour accidentally walked, right at the start, into the blood room where the slaughters happen. Seeing the carnage everywhere, she was nauseated and traumatized. The scientist helped her calm down by taking her to an overhead catwalk where she could observe the quiet calm scene of the cattle walking quietly toward their end. With her mind off the blood she'd seen, the slaughterhouse tourist came down off the catwalk and said, "Not so bad now." **Seeing the final stage in isolation from the lead-up to it was a horror.** Imagine how it would seem to the livestock themselves, if they could be conscious of it.

Temptation only works if the possible futures that are open to you are being concealed. **Consequences, including those of Judgment Day, must be hidden from view or outright denied.**

The first temptation we see in Scripture is a contest of visions of the future. God had given humanity a picture of blessing (a fruitful universe under the rule of humanity) and a picture of curse (a universe under the reign of death). God said to the man and the woman, "Of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die" (Gen. 2:17). God created within humans a drive for life. A grasping of spiritually poisoned food isn't natural at all.

In order to herd Eve along to that point, the serpent needed to offer his own vision of the future: “You will not surely die” (Gen. 3:4). He offered Eve an alternative future of godhood apart from submission to the Creator.

The serpent did not wish to conceal judgment from Eve permanently, but only until she could fall and lead her husband to do the same. **Ultimately, after all, the serpent wasn't concerned with the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. He was concerned with the tree of life, the source of the man's and the woman's continued existence from God. The dragon knew that if they became like him, they would be separated from communion with God and in judgment would be exiled from God's sanctuary, from the presence of that life-giving tree.**

Now the powers stand over humanity as accusers, they were murderers from the beginning (John 8:44), and as far back into history as we can smell now reeks of rotting corpses and spattered blood.

In Israel's primal temptation, the future was likewise shielded from view. What Esau lost was not simply his. It belonged to his entire family line, all the offspring after him. Based on his place in the order, he was to be one of the patriarchs of the people of promise, the children of “Abraham, Isaac, and Esau.” But his momentary appetite derailed himself and his children. This would eventually dawn on Esau—long after he had forgotten those momentary stomach pangs and that momentary salivation for food. Yet he “found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears” (Hebrews 12:17).

Here is perhaps the most critical part of Jesus' testing in the wilderness for us. Jesus went out, remember, into "the wilderness." In the biblical world, the desert was dangerous at the most primal level—dry, fruitless, lonely, untamed. In a passage many ancient Christians believed spoke of the fall of Satan, the Bible speaks of the enemy as one who "shook kingdoms" and "made the world like a desert" (Isa. 14:16–17). God's judgment means a return to the earth's prehistoric state ("without form and void," Gen. 1:2), and seeing the end of God's wrath means beholding how "the fruitful land was a desert, and all its cities were laid in ruins" (Jer. 4:26). The desert images a place of literal desertion as "a lair of jackals" (Jer. 10:22). God's curse on the ground—"thorns and thistles" (Gen. 3:18)—is seen in its full force in the desert places, where, as we'll see, it is virtually impossible for man to bring forth bread from the ground (Gen. 3:17–19).

The wilderness in Scripture represents not only a place of testing but also a place of judgment. Jesus as the new Adam experienced in the desert the curse brought about by the first Adam. Jesus as the new Israel labored for forty days under the wandering imposed on the old Israel for their idolatry and grumbling against God. Jesus as the new king wandered in a wasteland of exile, with no people there over whom to reign.

When our ancestors surrendered their dominion to the serpent, God announced it would not always remain so. The snake-god would be toppled, and he would be toppled through the very thing the powers hated.

It would be, God said, “the offspring” of the woman who would pin down the serpent’s head (Gen. 3:15).

Israel underwent a baptism of water in the Red Sea, but they underwent a baptism of fire in the desert. They brought upon themselves God’s judgment, and the desert—intended to be a place of temporary passage — became the execution ground of their condemnation. They thought the enemy was behind them, drowned in the sea. But the enemy behind the enemy still lurked in the desert and in their own uncircumcised hearts. To be left in the wilderness is judgment.

John’s Jewish readers knew their Bibles. They understood the concept of an animal “bearing away” human sin to the desert places.

Sometimes Christians have debated whether we are saved from the Devil or from the wrath of God. Clearly, in Scripture the answer is both. It is God’s judgment that comes against rebellious humanity. The wages of sin equals death. But being handed over to Satan is a terrifying judgment of God (1 Cor. 5:1–5). God enacts the penalty of death by handing the unrighteous over to the one who has the power of death, the Devil (Heb. 2:14). **That’s why one of the most terrifying judgments God laid on the Israelites in the wilderness was that of snakes.**

In one of the episodes of Israelite insurrection against God in the desert, God “sent fiery serpents among the people . . . so that many people of Israel died” (Num. 21:6).

When some of the people cried out for mercy, God directed Moses to make a bronze image of a snake and hoist it on a pole. “Everyone who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live,” God told the people (Num. 21:8). **In order to be free of the curse that had come upon them—the curse of poisonous predators and of death itself—the people had to gaze on the curse itself, high and lifted up. Jesus said this means of escape from judgment pointed to something else, something future. “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up,” Jesus told a visiting rabbi, “that whoever believes in him may have eternal life” (John 3:14–15).**

Jesus, as the God-appointed redeemer of the world, bears our iniquities upon himself (Isa. 53:4–5). He becomes a curse for us, by bearing the penalty of the law (Gal. 3:13). His identification with that curse doesn’t start as the nails of Golgotha are driven into his hands. The identification of Jesus with our judgment starts in his baptism of repentance—for us—and as he goes for the first time “outside the camp” (Heb. 13:13) for us to meet the holder of our ancient curse.

Jesus in the wilderness is preparing himself for sacrifice as both the one who is offering and as the offering itself. As the offering, he is tested and found to be without spot, without blemish. As the High Priest, he is found to be worthy of entering the presence of God to offer blood that is his own.

Like every high priest, though, he must be one of the people he represents (“chosen from among men . . . to act on behalf of men in relation to God”), and he must be chosen by God (“no one takes this honor for himself”) (Heb. 5:1, 4).

Here in the desert what is foreshadowed is the cross and the resurrection to come. The presence of the Spirit before and after the temptation narratives cannot be overemphasized (Luke 4:1, 14). Even in the desert, God was so present with Jesus that we see a picture before our eyes not just of God’s future judgment but also of God’s future peace on the other side. “And he was with the wild animals, and the angels were ministering to him” (Mark 1:13). Unlike his ancestors, Adam and Israel, Jesus is not prey for the predatory beasts.

As you and I trek through the wilderness, the tempting powers will attempt, as they did with our ancestors and with Jesus, to distort the way we see our future. A loss of future perspective makes you crazy.

You can convince yourself—or be convinced—that it will work for you. You’re special, after all. That’s the way temptation functions. We put consequences out of our minds, both temporal and eternal consequences.

When it comes to God, we convince ourselves that God doesn’t see (Ps. 10:11; 94:7) or that he’ll never call us to account (Ps. 10:13), but in order to do that we have to quiet our God-designed conscience that points continually to the criteria by which we’ll be judged before the Creator’s tribunal (Rom. 2:16).

BEWARE SATAN IS CUNNING



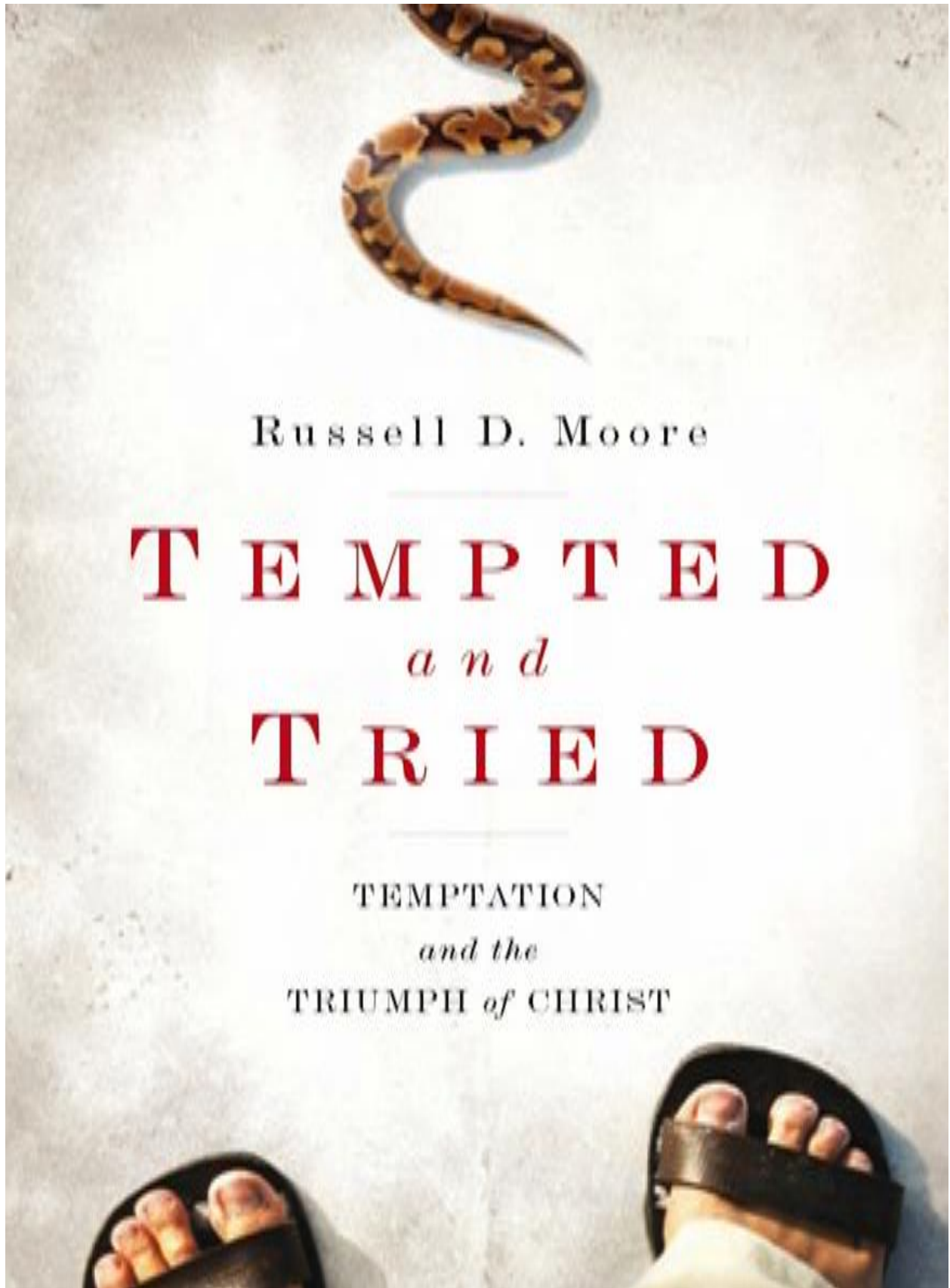
2 CORINTHIANS 11

BUT I AM AFRAID THAT AS THE SERPENT DECEIVED EVE BY HIS CUNNING, YOUR THOUGHTS WILL BE LED ASTRAY FROM A SINCERE AND PURE DEVOTION TO CHRIST

The demonic powers not only will give us what we crave, but they will assist us in covering it over, for a little while. That's precisely the irony. Often you are fueled on from one temptation to the other because you haven't been caught. This gives you an illusion of a cocoon protecting you from justice. The powers, though, don't want you to get caught—not yet, not this early in the march to the slaughterhouse. They don't have a mere seventy or eighty years to live. **They are ancient and patient and quite willing to wait until your downfall will bring with it the most catastrophic consequences—for you, for your family, for the kingdom of God, and to the image of Christ you carry. So, they'll help you cover it all up, and then they'll expose you—mercilessly. You'll never see it coming around the bend.**

Where before the invisible presences disputed the contents of the law, now they remind us of it in every jot and tittle, and how we've violated it. Where before they'd scoffed with us even of the possibility of future judgment, now they wish to hold its certainty ever before our eyes. They accuse us with our own transcribed consciences as evidence. And we know they're right.

Unlike Adam and Israel and me, Jesus always remembered his future. In the face of satanic temptation, he didn't fail, because he had nothing to hide. As Jesus said on his way to the Place of the Skull, "The ruler of this world is coming. He has no claim on me" (John 14:30). The kingdom comes by a tempted, tested, triumphant Christ.



Russell D. Moore

TEMPTED
and
TRIED

TEMPTATION
and the
TRIUMPH of CHRIST

Conclusion

The cosmic story of horror interrupts your personal story, and it's dangerous if you cannot see where. That's why, though we are "regarded as sheep to be slaughtered" (Romans 8:36). You must face reality. Don't mistake the stillness of your conscience for freedom from temptation. The Scripture says that temptation is "common to man" (1 Cor. 10:13). The issue isn't whether you're tempted, but whether you're aware of it. We are all on the verge of wrecking our lives.

Forces are afoot right now, negotiating how to get you fat enough for consumption and how to get you calmly and without struggle to the cosmic slaughterhouse floor. The easiest life for you will be one in which you don't question these things, a life in which you simply do what seems natural. The ease of it all will seem to be further confirmation that this is the way things ought to be. It might even seem as though everything is happening exactly as you always hoped it would. You might feel as though your life situation is like progressing up a stairway so perfect it's as though it was designed just for you. *And it is.*

In many ways the more tranquil you feel, the more endangered you are. As you find yourself curving around the soft corners of your life, maybe you should question the quietness of it all. Perhaps you should listen, beneath your feet, for the gentle clatter of hooves.



1

¹ Moore, R. (2011). [*Tempted and Tried: Temptation and the Triumph of Christ*](#). Wheaton, IL: Crossway.

What Is The Significance Of The Serpent In The Story Of Adam And Eve?

The serpent plays an essential role in the biblical story of Adam and Eve, found in the book of Genesis. Its appearance signifies a turning point in human history, leading the first couple towards their fateful decision.

Let us explore this story in a greater detail.

Now, the Bible depicts the serpent as the most cunning of all the creatures the Lord God had created. It was this very shrewd creature that approached Eve with a tempting proposition. The serpent enticed Eve to eat the fruit from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, even though God had explicitly and directly forbidden it. Being beguiled by the serpent's rhetoric caused Eve to question God's directive, a gesture of disobedience which would carry heavy consequences.

After succumbing to temptation, Eve then shared the fruit with Adam. This was the moment of the first sin, of mankind's original act of disobedience towards God, paving the way to their soon expulsion from the Garden of Eden.

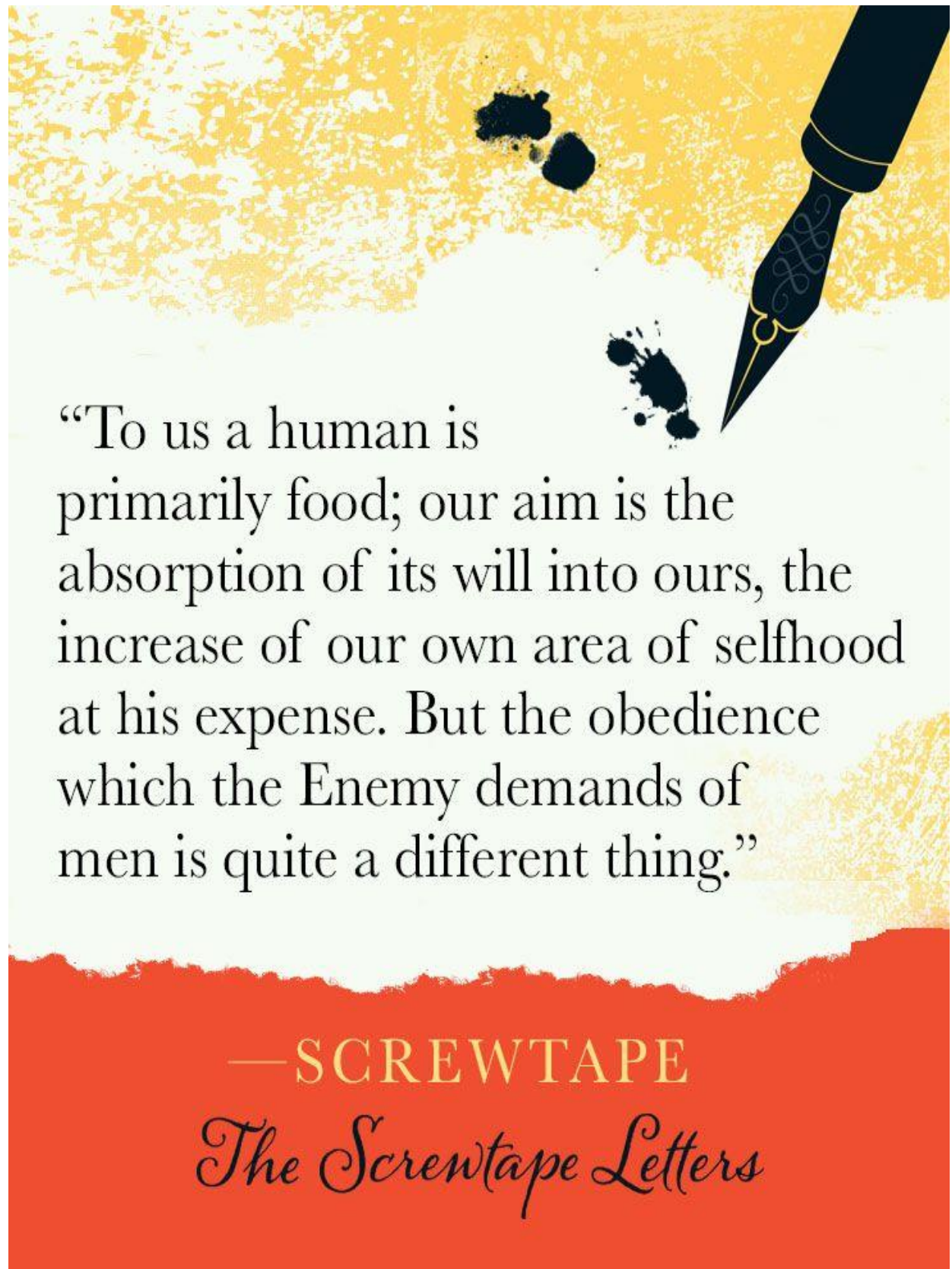
This disobedience, incited by the serpent, forever altered the history of humanity and introduced sinfulness and temporal mortality into our nature.

Notably, the serpent also faced God's consequence for its role in this debacle. Secondly, God declared that the serpent would be cursed among all livestock and all wild animals. From then onwards, it would crawl on its belly and experience enmity between itself and humanity. This curse further solidifies the biblical view of the serpent as being the embodiment of deceit and evil.

In the New Testament, especially the last book of Revelation, the serpent becomes synonymous with Satan himself, further associating it with temptation and evil. From this perspective, the snake symbolizes the force of temptation that often causes humans to stray away from God's instructions.

Summary. In the New Testament and particularly the Book of Revelation, the serpent is equated with Satan, reinforcing its symbolism of temptation and evil.

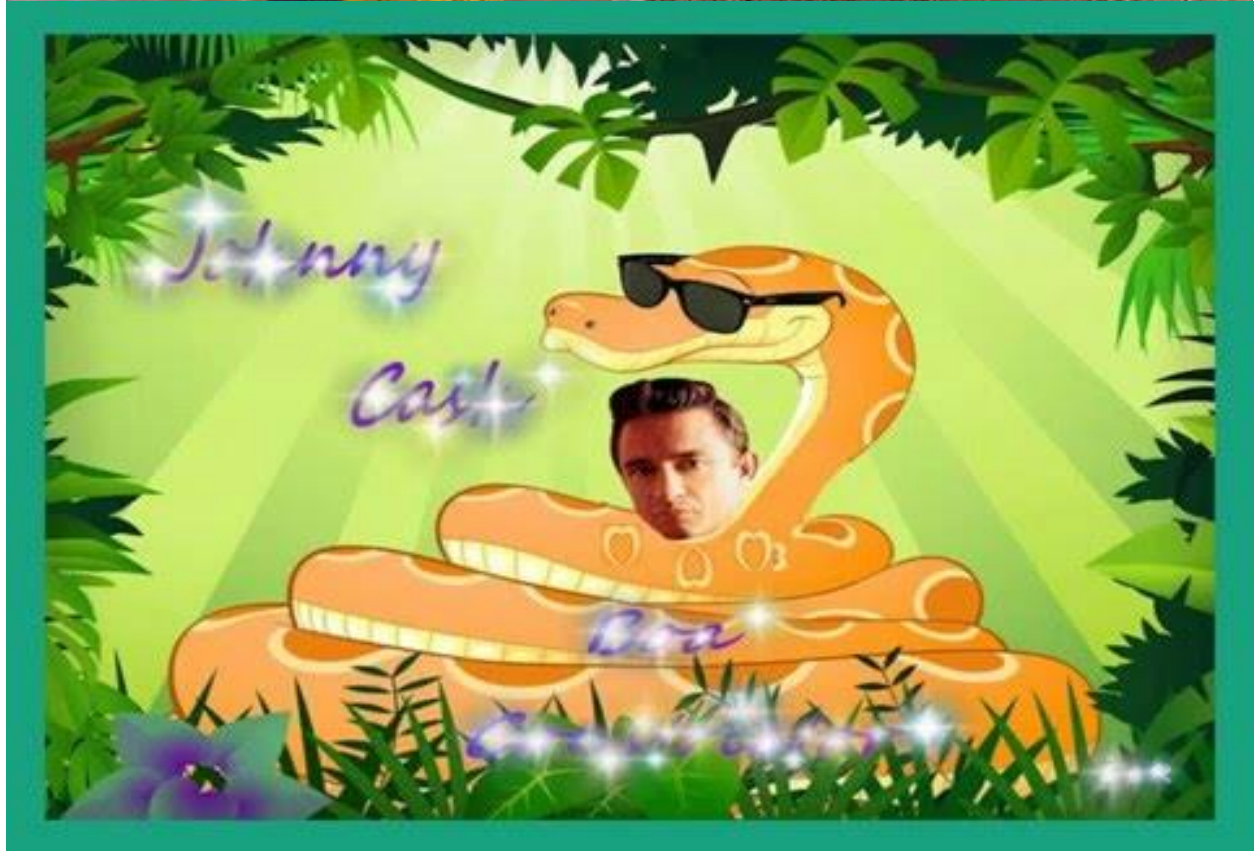
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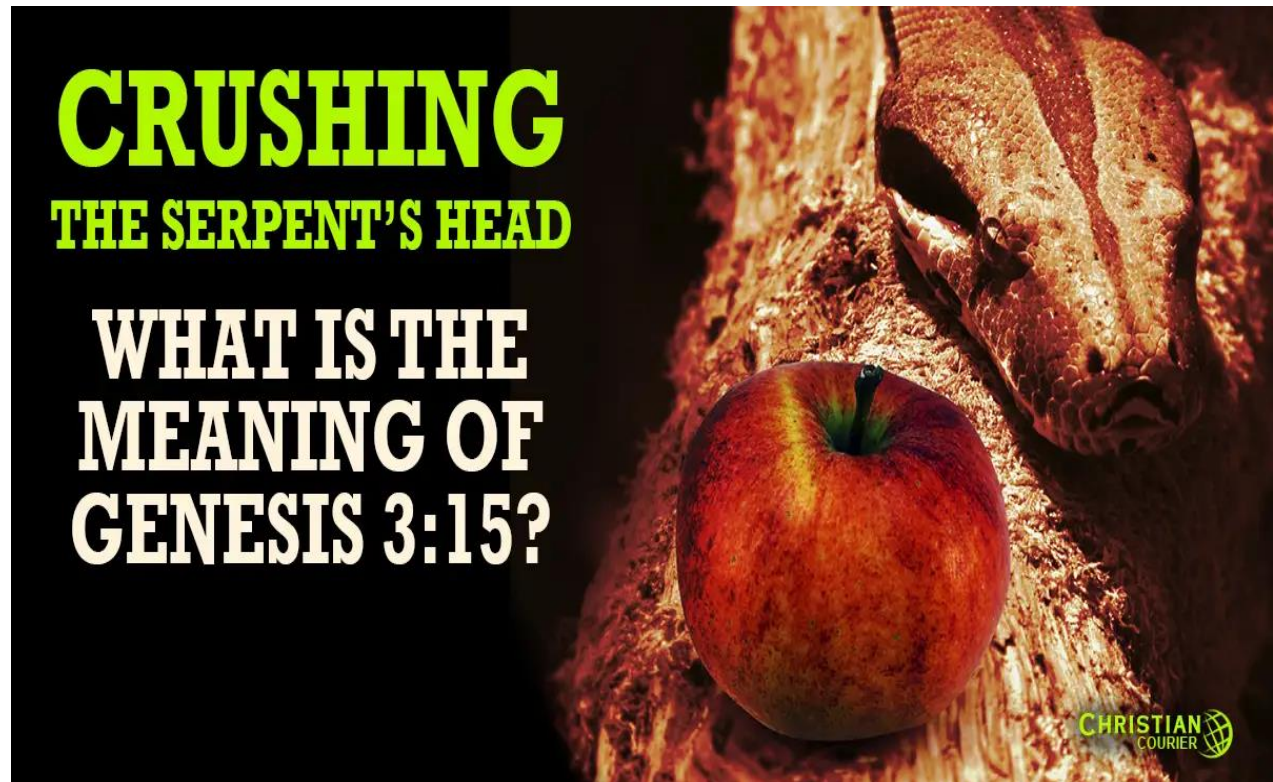


“To us a human is primarily food; our aim is the absorption of its will into ours, the increase of our own area of selfhood at his expense. But the obedience which the Enemy demands of men is quite a different thing.”

—SCREWTAPE

The Screwtape Letters





Crushing the Serpent's Head: The Meaning of Genesis 3:15

In Genesis 3:15, God announces that the serpent's head will be crushed by the seed of woman. What is the meaning of this book of Genesis prophecy?

By Wayne Jackson | [Christian Courier](#)

Genesis 3:15 is commonly called the "Protevangelium" — a term that essentially signifies the idea of "first gospel proclamation."

In the American Standard Translation, the text reads:

“and I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed: he shall bruise [crush—NIV] thy head, and thou shalt bruise [strike—NIV] his heel.”

William Beck's, *An American Translation* (4th edition), renders the passage:

“And I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your descendants and her Descendant. He will crush your head, and you will bruise His heel.”

The verse truly is fascinating, providing the very first biblical glimpse of God's plan of redemption, focusing ultimately upon the final thrusting of Satan into the eternal hell of fire (Rev. 20:10).

The Background

The passage rises from an interview in the garden of Eden between God, Adam and Eve, and, finally, with the treacherous serpent. When confronted with his transgression, Adam blamed Eve. Ultimately, Adam put the responsibility upon God himself stating, “the woman *you gave me...*”. Eve similarly rationalized, charging, “the serpent beguiled me.”

That this “serpent” was a vehicle of Satan is beyond dispute. Paul says that the “serpent beguiled Eve,” and, in the same context, he argues “Satan fashions himself into a messenger of light” (2 Corinthians 11:3).

Furthermore, John's references to Satan as "the old serpent" (Revelation 12:9; 20:2) are obvious allusions to the Genesis record.

The Spokesman

Moses designates the speaker as "Jehovah [LORD—KJV] God" (v. 14). The Hebrew term in the first instance is that of **Yahweh** — a designation of the self-existing Creator (Exodus 3:14), who will form a special covenant, redemptive relationship with the nation of Israel.

The second title is "God" — **Elohim**. Though the etymology of the term is obscure, it likely derives from a root form meaning "strong." The name appears to be used mainly of God's right to govern his world and mankind (Clark, 239).

The combined use of these names lends great force to the utterance that follows.

Components of the Text

Let's briefly consider the various participants and components of this intriguing text.

The Serpent

Jehovah's remarks in Genesis 3:15 are addressed to the serpent immediately, though to Satan ultimately (cf. Romans 16:20).

Modernists dismiss the clear import of the bible record. They allege that Satan is but a “personification of the self-accusing conscience of Israel” (Gray, IV.4298).

However, both Testaments of the sacred volume treat him as the personal, arch-enemy of Almighty God. He is the murderer of fallen humanity (Jn. 8:44; Rom. 5:12).

Following his malicious deed, this curse from Jehovah God previews the devil’s horrible destiny.

The Woman

The woman of the context is Eve. But the main focus is not upon her; rather it is upon her seed (see below).

On the other hand, while there is a brief mention of the serpent’s seed, the primary thrust is toward the destruction of the malignant force working through the serpent (i.e. Satan), rather than upon this enemy’s seed — though they will share his fate (Matthew 25:41).

The Enmity

The term “enmity” denotes a disposition of hostility, whether between individuals (Numbers 35:21-22), or between bodies of people (Ezekiel 25:15; 35:5).

Between which of the parties is there enmity, as suggested in this text?

While some see it as an abiding antipathy between humans and snakes (Owen, 13), clearly the scope moves far beyond such a trite explanation.

The language denotes the initial spirit of antagonism between Eve and her adversary (destroyer), together with the suggestion that there would be a spiritual hostility developing between the woman's seed, Christ (along with his people), and Satan and his followers.

Jehovah's Action

The text represents Jehovah as having said, "I will put enmity" How is the origin of this hostility attributed to God, who is absolutely holy (Isaiah 6:3; Revelation 4:8)?

There are two components. First, there is a standard of truth and righteousness which proceeds from the very nature of deity.

Second, rational individuals are creatures of a moral responsibility. When men (or spirit beings) exercise their volition, and rebel against the Creator, enmity is bound to result.

God, then, is author of this enmity only in the sense that he makes demands upon responsible beings — which frequently they choose to ignore (cf. Ex. 7:3ff).

Woman's Seed

Who is the woman's seed? Simply her descendants? Or is Christ involved?

An affirmative answer to the first question isn't at all plausible. Clearly, the seed promise of this entire book (Gen. 22:18; cf. Gal. 3:8, 16) finds its complete fulfillment in the Savior who, in the fullness of time, was "born of woman" (Gal. 4:4).

Sometimes the claim is made that Genesis 3:15 is precise prophecy of the "virgin birth" of Jesus, since the phrase "seed of woman" appears to be unique. In the normal conception process, it is alleged, the male provides the "seed." Will this argument stand the testing of candid investigation? Frankly, it will not.

The "seed" of Hagar is mentioned later in the book (16:10), as is also the "seed" of Rebekah (24:60), and yet no virgin births were involved in those cases. The expression does not "exclude a virgin birth," but the grammar alone does not establish it (Lewis, 11).

E. F. Kevan once carefully noted:

"It is not right to infer the virgin birth from the Prot-evangelion, but it is certainly quite legitimate to look back from the point of view of the virgin birth and see how marvelously close were the words of promise to the mode of the performance" (80).

H. L. Ellison goes so far as to say that: “Not until the Virgin Birth could the full implication of the promise be understood (cf. Isa. 7:14)” (138).

The Conflict

In the common versions, the term “bruise” is twice found. Satan bruises the Seed’s heel; the woman’s seed bruises the serpent’s head. Some translators prefer to render the first instance as “bruise” or “strike at” while rendering the latter term by “crush” (Beck; Stigers, 78).

The reason for the difference, in the minds of some scholars, is twofold:

Some contend the Hebrew verb **swp** (“bruise”) occurs twice in this verse, but that contextual considerations suggest a varied rendering. A man can “crush” a snake’s head, while the snake can only “bruise,” or wound, the man’s heel, without the action being permanent. They suggest the translation should conform to the nature of the circumstances.

Others allege that the text actually contains similar, though different, words. Stigers argues that “crush” and “bruise” represent “a play on two Hebrew words that look alike, as though from the same root. But bruise is from **suph**, whereas crush is from **saaph**, an allied root (Stigers, 79; see also Harris, et al., 912; VanGemeren, 67).

Atkinson sums up:

“Whatever the exact meaning of the verb, the picture seems to be clear. To bruise the head is a picture of fatal and final destruction. To bruise the heel is a picture of damage, which is neither fatal nor final” (51).

In the final analysis, we must say that the overall and complete biblical picture does reveal a difference in the significance of the terms. Christ’s death for human sin was, in effect, a wound rendered by Satan. But the Lord’s resurrection, exaltation, and final victory will destroy the devil’s revolting efforts (Romans 8:20-21; 1 Cor. 15:26; Col. 2:15; Heb. 2:14; 1 Jn. 3:8; Revelation 20:10).

Great Truths Taught

There are a number of important points that we would make in concluding this discussion. These are practical points from which we may learn and enhance our own spiritual lives. Consider the following.

Satan — a real enemy

There is the fact that Satan is a real enemy, and he is a formidable opponent. He lied to Eve, and he murdered the human family (John 8:44). He is the ever-tempting one (Matthew 4:3 — a present tense participle) who, as our adversary, continuously is on the prowl for those whom he may devour (1st Peter 5:8).

Nothing could please him more than for liberal theologians to dismiss him as myth and metaphor.

Not a myth or legend

Allegations that the “serpent story” is a mere legend, are based upon anti-supernatural presuppositions. The God who fashioned all creatures certainly could, for a special occasion, empower a serpent to speak, just as in the case of Balaam’s donkey (Num. 22:28). The inspired Paul viewed the episode as strictly historical (2 Cor. 11:3).

There also is archaeological evidence that connects the serpent image with man’s original Eden fall. A seal was discovered at ancient Nineveh depicting a man and a woman on either side of a fruit tree. To the left of the woman stands a serpent.

Dr. Ira Price of the University of Chicago suggested that it likely portrayed an early tradition of the fall of man. Serpents have been associated with destruction of human immortality in several ancient cultures.

Such traditions, though distorted, may be traced ultimately to the historical events of Eden.

A preview of Christ

Genesis 3:15 is a preview of the incarnate Christ. The expression “seed of woman” implies humanity. The virgin would conceive and bear a son (Isaiah 7:14).

The apostle John, of course, notes that the eternal Word “became flesh” and dwelt among the human family (1:14)

There are tremendous reasons for the necessity of the Redeemer being human, not the least of which is the fact that a spirit-being can't die physical death (1 Tim. 6:16).

But Jesus partook of the nature of humanity so that “through death he might bring to naught him that had the power of death, that is, the devil” (Heb. 2:14).

The suffering of Christ

The allusion to the woman's seed having been bruised unquestionably looks to Christ suffering on behalf of the sins of humanity.

In Isaiah 53, there is a vivid portrait of Jehovah's abused servant, the Christ (cf. Lk. 22:37; Acts 8:32-35). Twice the prophet speaks of the promised Messiah being “bruised” (**daka**) and wounded as an offering for sin (53:5, 10).

The death of Jesus, planned even before the foundation of the world (1st Peter 1:19), was previewed in this Isaiah miniature “gospel.”

Incidentally, this symbolic prophecy of Christ's death is in conflict with dispensational allegations, namely, that the Lord's death wasn't part of the original plan. S. D. Gordon, in his book *Quiet Talks about Jesus*, wrote:

“It can be said at once that His dying was not God’s own plan. It was conceived elsewhere and yielded to by God”

Absurd!

Resurrection implied

The fact that only Christ’s “heel” (in contrast to the serpent’s “head”) was to be injured, obviously alludes to the Lord’s resurrection from the dead. Jesus’ death would not terminate the divine mission.

Human alliance with Satan

The allusion to the serpent’s seed ominously predicts that many of the human family would choose to be aligned with Satan, rather than with the Son of God.

This stands in bold relief to the modern notion that all men basically are good, and are, therefore, perfectly at liberty to pursue the course of their own interests in life with Heaven’s approval.

Victory over Satan

The prophecy reveals that the glorious cause of the woman’s Seed would prevail ultimately. Satan and his forces will be crushed.

As Paul writes, in words designed to encourage the saints in the imperial city of Rome:

“And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly” (Romans 16:20).

Observe the expression, “your feet.” The redeemed will partake of Christ’s triumph! (Rev. 19:14). Though Paul’s prophecy may refer to a situation more immediate than remote, the term “shortly” does not necessarily demand chronological proximity. Rather, as applied “the phrase means ‘swiftly.’ As with a swift stamping of the feet one crushes a snake’s head...” (Lenski, 922).

As noted earlier, Satan’s dreaded destiny is graphically set forth in the concluding book of the Bible (Rev. 20:10)

Conclusion

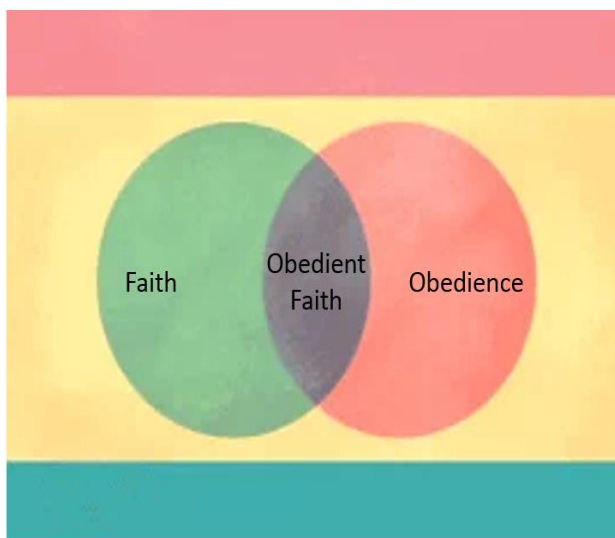
And so, Genesis 3:15 is a grand depository of rich, prophetic information. In capsulated format, it highlights the origin of human rebellion. But it does not leave the drama as hanging; rather, the triumph of the woman’s seed is previewed in the first Bible book. The “rest of the story” is depicted in the last book of Revelation!

This Old Testament text certainly is worthy of the designation “first gospel.” It’s the gospel, sketched in an abbreviated form, which concept, in fact, has the endorsement of Scripture itself (Galatians 3:8).

AT THE NEXUS OF GRACE & GLORY

Five Steps For Saving:

- **HEARING:**
- Romans 10: 17; Matthew 7: 24 - 27
- **BELIEVING:**
- Hebrews 11: 6; Mark 16: 15, 16
- **REPENTING:**
- Acts 2: 38; 17: 30; Luke 13: 3
- **CONFESSING:**
- Matthew 10: 32, 33; Acts 8: 36, 37
- **BAPTISM:**
- Romans 6: 3 – 5; Acts 8: 36 – 38



O That Will Be Glory

2. *Who that will be glory for me, e grace,*

I an Glory for me, glory for me; ce,

When by His grace I shall look on His face, e

That will be glory, be glory for me. me.

