

59 SERPENT IN THE GARDEN WAS NOT SATAN

INTRODUCTION: Tradition maintains the serpent in the garden was “Satan,” a fallen angel, and the cause of our depraved condition. However, this is not supported by scripture. Instead of following traditions or making unfounded assumptions, let’s see what we find when we let scripture interpret scripture.

1. Paul placed the responsibility for the fall squarely on Adam, not “Satan.” In fact, Paul did not even mention this adversary in regard to original sin.

- a) “Sin entered into the world through one man [Adam], and death through sin; and so death passed to all men...” Rom 5:12
- b) “Death reigned from Adam until Moses.” Rom 5:14
- c) “By the trespass of the one [Adam] the many died.” Rom 5:15
- d) “By the trespass of the one [Adam], death reigned through the one.” Rom 5:17
- e) “So then as through one trespass [by Adam], all men were condemned.” Rom 5:18
- f) “Through the one man’s [Adam’s] disobedience many were made sinners.” Rom 5:19
- g) “We will die because of Adam.” I Cor 15:21
- h) “For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive.” I Cor 15:22

2. Interestingly, Paul tells us Adam was not deceived, making his trespass deliberate.

“Adam was not deceived.” I Tim 2:14

3. Paul laid some responsibility on Eve in one passage.

“The woman, being deceived, has fallen into disobedience.” I Timothy 2:14

4. Paul blamed the serpent (not “Satan”) for deceiving Eve in one passage.

“The serpent deceived Eve with his craftiness.” 2 Cor 11:3

5. To our knowledge, only Adam was warned by God to not eat the forbidden fruit. (Eve was not yet present/created but apparently told later).

“Yahweh God commanded the man, saying, ‘Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; 17 but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat of it; for in the day...you will surely die.’” Ge 2:16-17

6. The serpent not only knew what God had said, but twisted it to make Yahweh seem stingy and cruel.

“The serpent said to the woman, ‘Has God really said, ‘You shall not eat of any tree of the garden?’” Ge 3:1

7. This serpent character seems to have had a remarkable human-like genius for persuasion and deception.

“Now the serpent was more subtle than any animal of the field which Yahweh God had made.” Ge 3:1.

8. The serpent asserted Yahweh was lying and keeping Eve from “reaching her full potential.” One wonders why she would trust the serpent more than her Creator and her husband, Adam.

“The serpent said to the woman, ‘You won’t surely die, for God knows that in the day you eat it, your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God.’” Ge 3:4-5

9. The serpent motivated Eve to defy God, potentially alienating her from Adam also. It seems like only someone who had her full confidence could deceive her so completely, causing lust, pride and greed.

“When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit, and ate.” Ge 3:6

10. Adam was with Eve during the conversation with the serpent and, strangely, uttered no rebuke— not even a word. Isn’t silence in the face of falsehood itself evil? Did Adam actually agree with the serpent? Remarkably, he appears to have been immediately willing to eat the forbidden fruit without hesitation.

“She gave some to her husband with her, and he ate.” Ge 3:6

11. Genesis 3 is the last we hear of the serpent in the Old Testament, but in Genesis 4, God gave sin sentient predatory qualities, similar to the serpent.

“Yahweh said to Cain, ‘...If you don’t do well, sin crouches [lies] at the door. Its desire is for you, but you are to rule over it.’” Ge 4: 6-7
“...While they were in the field, Cain rose up against Abel, his brother, and killed him.” Ge 4:8

12. People given over to their carnal, self-serving cravings are often referred to as serpents/vipers in scripture, recalling the Eden story.

- a) “But when he [John] saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for his baptism, he said to them, “You offspring of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?” Mt 3:7
- b) Jesus said, “You offspring of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks. 35 The good man out of his good treasure brings out good things, and the evil man out of his evil treasure brings out evil things.” Mt 12:34-35
- c) Jesus said, “You serpents, you offspring of vipers, how will you escape the judgment of Gehenna?” Mt 23:33

- d) "They have all turned aside... There is no one who does good, no, not, so much as one. Their throat is an open tomb. With their tongues they have used deceit. The poison of vipers is under their lips." Rom 3:12-13
 e) "They hatch adders' eggs... and that which is crushed breaks out into a viper." Is 59:5
 f) "They have sharpened their tongues like a serpent. Viper's poison is under their lips." Ps 140:3
 g) "Their wine is the poison of serpents, The cruel venom of asps." Deut 32:33 (Regarding Israel in the last days.)

13. Scripture depicts the work of the serpent (sin, evil) coming from within man.

- a) "Now the deeds of the flesh are obvious, which are: adultery, sexual immorality, uncleanness, lustfulness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, strifes, emulations, wraths, rivalries, dissensions, sects, envy, murders, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these; of which I forewarn you, even as I also forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit God's Kingdom." Gal 5:19-21
 b) Jesus said, "From within, out of the hearts of men, proceed idolatry, sorcery, hatred, strife, jealousies, outbursts of anger, rivalries, divisions, heresies, evil thoughts..." Mk 7:21-23
 c) "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" Jer 17:9
 d) "But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own lust and enticed. Then the lust, when it has conceived, bears sin. The sin, when it is full grown, produces death." James 1:14-15

14. There are two verses pertaining to God's curse of the serpent. The second is sometimes called "The Protoevangelium," i.e. the first preaching of the gospel, where a symbolic interpretation of the serpent to mean "sin" or "evil" is frequently given. We prefer a more broad interpretation that highlights the struggle of man with his serpent nature as foreshadowed in the Cain story. Regardless of one's perspective, these two verses have nothing to do with cursing literal snakes, but pertains to the struggle against sin and evil as a consequence of the fall. Animals (including snakes) do not know the humiliation of sin. It is man who is cursed "above every animal," in experiencing the consequences of sin. See #15, #16, #17

SERPENT CURSE: "Yahweh God said to the serpent, 'Because you have done this, you are cursed above all livestock, and above every animal of the field. You shall go on your belly and you shall eat dust all the days of your life. I will put hostility between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring. He will bruise your head, and you will bruise his heel.'" Ge 3:14-15

15. The serpent was cursed, above other creatures, experiencing hostility, corruption.

- a) "For the wages of sin is death..." Rom 6:23
 b) "The earnings of the wicked are sin and death." Prov 10:16
 c) "The pursuit of evil brings death." Prov 11:19
 d) "They themselves are bondservants of corruption... brought into bondage by whoever overcomes him." 2 Pt 2:19
 e) "Don't you know that to whom you present yourselves as servants to obedience, his servants you are whom you obey; whether of sin to death, or of obedience to righteousness?" Rom 6:16

16. The serpent would crawl on his belly, suffer humiliation.

- a) "You will be brought down, and will speak out of the ground. Your speech will mumble out of the dust..." Is 29:4
 b) "The loftiness of man shall be bowed down, and the arrogance of men shall be brought low..." Is 2:17
 c) "The proud look of humanity will be brought low, And the arrogance of people will be humbled..." Is 2:11
 d) "But we are all like an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags. We all fade as a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away." Is. 64:6

17. The serpent would eat dust, suffer degradation.

- a) "You will be brought down, and will speak out of the ground... your speech will whisper out of the dust." Is 29:4
 b) "They will lick the dust like a serpent. Like crawling things of the earth they shall come trembling out of their dens. They will come with fear to Yahweh our God..." Micah 7:17
 c) "Come down, and sit in the dust, virgin daughter of Babylon; sit on the ground..." Is 47:1
 d) "The children of Israel were assembled with fasting, and with sackcloth, and earth on them." Neh 9:1
 e) "Therefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." Job 42:6

18. Paul saw two natures at war within himself: what could be described as the image of God nature and a serpent nature."

"For I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, dwells no good thing... 19 For the good which I desire, I don't do; but the evil which I don't desire, that I practice. 20 But if what I don't desire, that I do, it is no more I that do it, but sin which dwells in me... 23 but I see a different law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity under the law of sin which is in my members. 24 What a wretched man I am! Who will deliver me out of the body of this death? 25 I thank God through Jesus Christ, our Lord!" Rom 7:18-25

NOTES:

1. "The serpent" is a skillful literary device to show the dual nature of man.
2. After the 3rd chapter of Genesis there is no more mention of the serpent in the Old Testament. One would expect frequent appearances and/or warnings to mankind regarding this super-villain if he was an actual spiritual entity. Noah, Abraham, Issac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Saul, David, Solomon nor any of the kings were warned of this dangerous character who, some say, caused all the sin and misery of the world. The prophets were constantly warning of and condemning sin, pointing out the need for repentance, but never a word of warning to the people about this very cunning, evil entity.
3. There is a brief appearance of an "adversary" in Job, transliterated and mistranslated as Satan, but no serpent.
4. Dealing with the serpent=satan=devil of Revelation will require another paper.