

Genesis 3.1-5: Deception of the Serpent

This chapter describes the sad entrance of sin into the world and thereby explains the sufferings and sorrows of our present mortal existence. There was no sin in the human race before this point (Romans 5.12) – sin originated with Satan. In summary, Genesis 3 is a chapter of *guile* (the Devil), *guilt* (Adam and Eve), and *grace* (on the part of God). Though sin brings *judgment*, God announces the divine programme of *salvation* and the ultimate doom of Satan (v.15). Even preventing Adam from eating from the tree of life was an act of mercy – to prolong his life, indefinitely, in such a state would be cruel (vv.22-24). Thus, “where sin abounded, grace did much more abound” (Romans 5.20).

The Fall. Genesis 3 describes what is often called “The Fall”. It is not quite a scriptural expression, but Paul says, “*And Adam was not deceived, but the woman, because she was fully deceived, fell into transgression*” (1 Timothy 2.14). But this was nothing accidental. It was deliberate rebellion. The lie of evolution begins with mankind ‘down’ seeking to make his way ‘up’. But, in reality, man was created ‘up’ and has plummeted ‘down’ because of sin.

We do not know *when* the Fall took place, but some observations suggest a period of **days**, rather than months before they sinned against God. **1.** The Hebrew grammar suggests the walking of the LORD God in the garden was an established, *repeated* and *habitual* practice (3.8). **2.** There is a possible reference to the Fall in Job 31.33, “*If I covered my transgressions as Adam, by hiding mine iniquity in my bosom*” (JND), and in Hosea 6.7, “*Like Adam, you broke my covenant and betrayed my trust*” (NLT). In Hosea, Adam’s breaking of God’s covenant is compared to the nation’s love “vanishing like the morning mist” (6.4). Any faithfulness and obedience did not last long! **3.** The period *before* the Fall was not long enough for Eve to conceive and bear children as they had been commanded (1.28).

The Fall of Satan must have taken place between the creation of man on the *sixth* day, and the beginning of Genesis 3. Two OT scriptures seem to furnish more detail of this event. Ezekiel 28.12-19 is a lament for the king of Tyre, and Isaiah 14.12-15 refers to the king of Babylon. In relation to Isaiah, John Riddle notes, “*The verses continue to deal with the ‘king of Babylon’ and anticipate the destruction of the last great Gentile ruler, ‘the beast’.* They can be applied to Satan, but he is not the direct subject of the passage.” Nevertheless, the language of both passages appears to have a dual reference, reaching beyond these mere human rulers to Lucifer (the Devil) himself. Iniquity was found in him as he sought to elevate himself and his throne alongside God saying, “I will be like the most High” (Isaiah 14.14). As such, God cast him to the ground (Ezekiel 28.17; cf. Luke 10.18). Ultimately, he will be cast into the Lake of Fire (Isaiah 14.15; Matthew 25.41). The initial rebellion of Satan was a direct, but failed attack on the throne of God. It is quite possible Satan was highly displeased with dominion over the newly created earth being given to Adam, a lesser created being. His second attack was therefore on mankind, that he might at least usurp the authority Adam had been given. From this position of power, the Devil still seeks to produce a seed (cf. 3.15) in a further attempt against the throne of God. This will culminate in the great rebellion at the end of the millennium (Revelation 20.8-9).

There are two further notes by way of introduction:

- **References.** The NT is full of references to the sad events of this chapter. See 2 Corinthians 11.3; Romans 8.20-22; 16.20. Two major passages are Romans 5.12-21 and 1 Timothy 2.11-15. In Romans, emphasis falls on *Adam* as the federal head of a fallen race. In 1 Timothy, emphasis falls on *Eve*, and a woman’s place in the assembly.
- **Repeat.** The Devil was so impressed with the success of the events of Genesis 3, he thought to repeat it in a different *place* with a different *Person*. This time it was not the *first* Adam in a garden, but the *last* Adam in a wilderness. Circumstances were harsher and perhaps tilted in the Devil’s favour – but he failed with Christ!

The Deception of the Serpent [vv.1-5]

v.1: Satan was allowed access to the garden to test mankind’s willingness to obey (love) God. He attacked God’s *order*, *word*, and *character*. The “serpent” (*nāḥāš*) was both a real creature that God had made, and a reference to Satan who appears to have indwelt the serpent. See 2 Corinthians 11.3; Revelation 12.9; 20.2. In using an animal as his instrument, Satan used what was placed under Adam’s dominion – it was an inferior creation under his control. The Hebrew word *nāḥāš* is closely related to the word for *bronze*, suggesting a shiny or luminous appearance. Satan was truly appearing in the guise of an “angel of light” (2 Corinthians 11.14). He is a clever imitator who disguises his true character and masquerades as something far more acceptable. It seems that God has never allowed Satan to appear to mankind as he is, except in his temptation of the Lord Jesus. His awesome dignity would be too much for us (Ezekiel 28.13-19). Wiersbe says, “*Satan still works today as the great impersonator. He has produced a counterfeit righteousness apart from faith in Christ alone (Romans 9.30-10.13). Satan has false ministers (2 Corinthians 11.13-16) who preach a false gospel (Galatians 1.6-10), and he has false brothers (and sisters) who oppose the true Gospel (2 Corinthians 11.26). The Devil*

has gathered his counterfeit Christians into false churches that God calls 'synagogues of Satan' (Revelation 2.9)". The serpent is described as "more subtil". The Hebrew word is *neutral* and basically means 'clever' but can be used in the *negative* sense of 'cunning' (Job 5.12) or *positive* sense of 'prudent' (Proverbs 12.16, 23). The serpent is described as 'more crafty' because the Devil used it for his purposes. The plural form of the word is translated "naked" in 2.25. Adam and Eve's nakedness suggests they were oblivious to evil (naïve), not wary of lurking danger. This condition Satan sought to exploit by being crafty.

In speaking to the woman, Satan subverted God's order of headship. Eve was potentially more vulnerable, having not been given the prohibition directly from God. Nevertheless, Eve made a mistake in stepping out of her place. "Both Adam and Eve violated their God given status; Eve by an assumption of authority or dominion she did not rightly possess, and Adam, in a renunciation of authority he had no right to make" (Jim Allen). It seems Eve was mesmerised, even seduced, by the beauty of the animal – and though she was innocent and sinless, she was capable of sin. The Devil still uses charming talkers, and will yet do so in the future, making even an image to speak (Revelation 13.15). Scripture does not often record the Devil speaking (others will often do the talking for him!), but when he does, he is always casting doubt, whether on the *word* of God, the *people* of God (Job 1) or the *Son* of God (Matthew 4). This is not the only occasion an animal speaks in Scripture (Numbers 22)!

Note the *devices* (schemes) of the Devil:

- **Doubt** (v.1). "Hath God said" could be translated, 'Is it really true?' or 'Did God really say?' Satan wants to undermine our confidence in the word of God, so we use the maxims of the world to guide our lives. What God said was very *clear*, but Satan seeks to make it a matter of *debate*.
- **Discontent** (v.1). "Ye shall not eat of *every* tree of the garden". Satan's emphasis falls on the *negative*, the *restrictions*. In reality, God emphasised their liberty! "Of every tree of the garden thou *mayest* freely eat" (2.16). Satan said in effect, 'Look how God has restricted you?' God had said, 'Look at the freedom you have!' The Devil wants God to appear harsh and restrictive. He would make us discontent with our God-appointed situation.

v.2: In response to the serpent's *distortion* of God's word, Eve sought to correct him, but showed her own neglect of the word. However, these commandments were given to Adam by God, prior to Eve's creation. So, it is likely whatever Eve knew, she knew from Adam, not directly from God. *First*, she made an **omission**. God had said, "You may freely eat", but Eve simply said, "We may eat". She minimised the provision and grace of God. She also followed Satan's lead in referring to the *LORD God* as merely "God" (Elohim). Thus, she denied the personal relationship (communion) she already enjoyed with Jehovah. **v.3:** *Second*, she made an **addition**. Nothing was said about touching the tree, but Eve said, "Neither shall you touch it". Whilst this *could* be an exaggeration on Eve's part, it is also possible Adam so instructed her for her protection. Fruchtenbaum adds, "A rabbinic tradition says the serpent pushed Eve until she touched the tree, and when she touched it, she did not die. So he said to her, 'Just as there is no death in touching, neither is there any death in eating'." *Third*, she made a **dilution**. God had declared, "You shall surely die", but Eve said, "lest you die". She weakened the penalty for the sin.

- **Denial (v.4)**. "Ye shall not surely die!" Satan displays a more accurate knowledge of God's word than Eve! This is a downright lie, and the first lie of Scripture. He is a liar in character (John 8.44) but, here, dares to call God a liar! The suggestion is that there is nothing to worry about (no punishment) in disobeying God. This lie has been swallowed by humanity since the beginning of time, living without reference to God and without fear of impending judgment.
- **Deceit (v.5)**. "God doth know", according to the Devil he has *inside* knowledge of the Godhead! He impugns the integrity and love of God by suggesting He was withholding what was for their good, jealously guarding his divine prerogatives and status. But in fact, God is possessed of qualities that he *wants* mankind to emulate! The Devil offered sin and disobedience as a superior, instant ("in the day") and liberating form of life. Their "eyes would be opened", implying the lure of superior understanding and enlightenment. They would sadly come to know evil by *personal experience* (unlike God who knows all *about* evil but cannot indulge in it).
- The Devil promised they would become "as God, knowing good and evil" (JND). This was the temptation to step out from God's authority and live independently of Him, deciding for oneself what is "good and evil". Be your own God!

How can we stand against the constant onslaught of the Devil's temptations? See 1 John 2.14. The "young men" were "strong" to overcome the temptations of the "wicked one" because the word of God was *abiding* in them. Not simply that they grasped the meaning of the word of God, or that they stored it in their memory, but that it formed their thoughts, held their affections and governed their actions. We must trust, without wavering, in the word and goodness of God. Fullness of life is found in Christ, not the empty promises of the Devil.