

## Genesis 3:1-15. The Ultimate Temptation

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One common temptation that all people face is to doubt God and His Word. Those doubts can lead to direct and active disobedience against Him, a state that is at its least defined as rebellion. Continued disobedience ultimately results in eternal separation from God, described quite graphically in scripture as the many agonies of hell. As human beings we tend to resist any kind of rules or regulations, and this author is no exception, never quite losing that rebel edge. God's prohibitions, specifically those that prohibit sin, are designed to be a blessing to us, for we are given an opportunity to express our faith in God through obedience with established godly boundaries. It is also a blessing that serves to protect us from the consequences of sinful behavior. However, many people consider those boundaries to be oppressive, and in rejecting them they are rejecting the God which defined them, they suffer a myriad of consequences from their behavior, and as a result they are in rebellion against God and, without true faith, face an eternity separated from Him.

God's purpose for mankind is not their rebellion, but rather that the people of His creation would love Him and cling to Him. God promises blessings to those who turn to Him in faith.

**Deuteronomy 30:20. *That thou mayest love the LORD thy God, and that thou mayest obey his voice, and that thou mayest cleave unto him: for he is thy life, and the length of thy days: that thou mayest dwell in the land which the LORD swore unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them.***

**John 14:15. *If ye love me, keep my commandments.***

How can we show that we honor and love God? The primary way we do so is through obedience to Him as we give to Him full authority over us as our LORD and our Savior. It is impossible to live a life of obedience to God when our faith is not in Him. Furthermore, it is difficult for those of faith to be totally obedient as most, if not all, who seek to live in uncompromised obedience to God have difficulty making that obedience absolute. The natural bent to sin that is the basic nature of every individual is often used to rationalize all manner of rebellious behaviors, each characterized by a self-centeredness that is demonstrated by a less than full and unconditional love for others. As the biblical narrative of creation unfolds, mankind's first opportunity to demonstrate obedience is tainted by that selfish desire, and ultimately causes man to miss God's blessing.

**Genesis 3:1.** *Now the serpent was more subtle 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?*

"Now..." links the fall of mankind from innocence with the creation story<sup>1</sup> and with the establishment of right relationships on earth.<sup>2</sup> God provided that the man and the woman could express their trust in Him through their obedience. The passage starts with a reference to "the serpent." Our assignment of the serpent as a reference to Satan is not a tradition: it is biblically defined:

**Revelation 20:2.** *And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years,*

Of course, the identification of Satan as a serpent is a metaphor. By referring to Satan as a serpent, God is reducing his name to a simple noun, devoid of the plethora of meanings that an assigned name would represent. In ancient culture, names had power, and to refer to an individual by a noun rather than by their name was done to reduce that power. Furthermore, the assignment serves to communicate a similarity in character with what is defined by that noun. We still do the same thing today when we wish to show disrespect one for another.

Consequently, The Devil, Satan, is not and never was a literal, physical, snake. The name, "Satan" itself is the Hebrew word for "Adversary," one who actively and continually strives against God. However, the metaphor serves a great purpose as it helps us understand the characteristics of Satan who we can metaphorically refer to as "a serpent," and both the characteristics of the snake and the characteristics of God's judgment upon Satan form a vivid picture that is easily visualized and understood. If, indeed the serpent is a metaphor for Satan, who is Satan, and how are the snakes or serpents of today related to that metaphor?<sup>3</sup>

**Isaiah 27:1.** *In that day the LORD with his sore and great and strong sword shall punish leviathan the piercing serpent, even leviathan that crooked serpent; and he shall slay the dragon that is in the sea.*

**Genesis 3:14-15.** *And the LORD God said unto the serpent, Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life: <sup>15</sup>And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and*

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<sup>1</sup> Genesis 1:1-2:4.

<sup>2</sup> Genesis 2:4-25

<sup>3</sup> I have capitalized the name "Satan," in this study a form that is literally proper, but in most of my writings I prefer to render the name as uncapitalized "satan" as a subtle method of reducing his authority.

***between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.***

We may be able to note that the literal, physical serpent is to us a vivid reminder of the fall of man. What do you think of when you consider a live snake? Most people shudder in fear when surprised by a snake. As a bit of an ophiophile,<sup>4</sup> even I tend to keep most snakes at a distance out of a fear of the pain and suffering that some snakes can produce.<sup>5</sup> God's prophecy has indeed come true. God's curse is not one proclaimed upon the live snakes of this world; it is a curse against Satan himself, and the woes that God defines are proclaimed upon Satan.

- The curse upon Satan is greater than that upon any other entity in God's creation.
- Satan does not stand tall in honor, but is instead despised with his dishonor described as his slithering on his belly, a position that is as close to the ground as possible.
- Rather than receiving the blessings that God showers upon those who place their trust in him, Satan receives nothing, left to feed only on dust, the fruitless refuse of this creation.
- The relationship that Satan has with man is one of enmity; they are mortal enemies.
- Throughout the battle between Satan and man, Satan will vex man, but his bite will never be strong enough to destroy man. However, man will be empowered to defeat Satan, and one Man, Jesus Christ, will utterly destroy him.

When did the serpent strike the heel of man? One could argue that Satan has continually nibbled at the heel of man as he continues to tempt man to turn from God. His nibbles can bring consequences of great pain. The ultimate snake bite is often considered to be the event of Christ's death on the cross. Personally, I tend to lean towards the former argument since I see Christ's death on the cross a failure for Satan, not a successful attack.

When will the serpent's head be crushed? The crushing of the head is a death-blow, and we see Jesus' final judgment on him as he is cast into the "lake of fire" that is described in the Revelation of John,<sup>6</sup> the eternal abyss that is separated from the love of God forever. We get the impression that the serpent in the garden was attractive. He is described as subtle, or cunning. Note that there is a play on Hebrew words here, for the word selected for subtle, ('arum) is very similar to the Hebrew word for naked ('arom). Nakedness is a metaphor in poetic and apocalyptic scripture for unrighteousness.

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<sup>4</sup> One who likes snakes.

<sup>5</sup> ophidiophobia, or ophiophobia.

<sup>6</sup> Revelation 20:14.

Does it seem strange to you that a serpent, or snake, spoke to Eve? Remembering that the serpent motif here is a metaphor, are there any other references in scripture of animals speaking?

**Numbers 22:28. *Then the LORD opened the donkey's mouth, and she said to Balaam, "What have I done to you to make you beat me these three times?"***

Satan clearly directed his comments to the woman, and in the form of what may appear as an innocent, rhetorical, question, ***"hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?"***

Note the subtleties of the question:

- The serpent seemed to be intimately aware of God's command.
- The serpent did not mention that they could eat from all of the other trees.
- The serpent did not identify the tree of the knowledge of good and evil specifically

Through this strategy Satan promoted the idea that God was being unfair and did not have the woman and the man's best interests at heart. Satan was introducing doubt into their hearts.

This initial interaction between Satan and man is illustrative of the manner in which Satan is so successful at drawing people away from obedience to the LORD. His question sounds reasonable and unthreatening. It is not a direct effrontery that would challenge one's obedience to the LORD. The question simply served to misdirect in the same manner that an illusionist misdirects his audience, causing them to look and think in one very specific and well-planned direction while he is really accomplishing something quite different, doing so in plain sight. Satan finds great success in works of misdirection as he leads people away from the truth by presenting a mistruth that is masquerading as truth.

**Genesis 3:2. *And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden:***

The woman quickly tried to correct the serpent and paraphrased the prohibition. What is the difference between her paraphrase and God's actual command? Her description of the trees lacked the word, "all." She and Adam already had thoughts about the prohibition that God had placed in the center of the garden, and had likely communicated with one another concerning it. What are some prohibitions we live with? Do we resent them? What generally happens when people are presented with a set of rules? I am reminded of a Burger King slogan: "Sometimes you've gotta

break the rules,”<sup>7</sup> and “Your way, right away,”<sup>8</sup> or Outback Steak House who touted the slogan, “No rules, Just right.”<sup>9</sup> Advertising feeds upon the basic desires of their audience, and these focus on the desire that we all have to shape our world to our own desires. At this point, most older adults are probably remembering one of Frank Sinatra’s later recordings that he used as a testimony to sum up the character of his life: “I did it my way.”<sup>10</sup> Even at the formative age of 18, I found the lyrics of the song slightly offensive as it seemed to be a statement of rebellion against submission to the deserved authority of the LORD who so blessed him.

The LORD provided to Adam and Eve a form of protection that was realized by their obedience concerning the prohibition of eating of the fruit of the tree of knowledge. If they eat of that tree, that is, gain an understanding of right and wrong, they will forever be responsible for their choices, and no longer innocent. They will separate themselves in yet another way from the other of God’s creatures as they would become moral agents. This is very similar to the pattern of maturity that we find in the early growth of a child. When first born, the child is innocent. However, the child soon starts to learn the difference between things that are right and things that are wrong. At some point in their development, every child always decides to select things that are self-centered and wrong, and that spirit of rebellion forms the very basis of who we are. It becomes the parent’s universal responsibility to shape the will of the child without breaking their spirit.<sup>11</sup>

So, are we to place the blame on our bent for rebellious, self-centered indulgence and greed on the persons of Adam and Eve because they are the first people who demonstrated this behavior? Of course not... we not only exhibit the same trait, Adam and Eve are simply illustrations of our own inherent wickedness. There is no person who would not have fallen in the garden, because God gave us a choice to choose Him or rebel, and all people initially choose to rebel.<sup>12</sup> To place any blame on Adam and Eve for the defense of our own sin would be the height of hypocrisy.

**Genesis 3:3. *But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die.***

Again, Eve misquoted the command of God. She noted that the tree is in the midst of the garden, a fact absent from God’s command. Though this may be an accurate assessment of its location, her reference to it may imply that she was already focused upon it, to the point that the wonderful resource promised by the tree of life was

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<sup>7</sup> Debuted September 7, 1989.

<sup>8</sup> Debuted January, 1991.

<sup>9</sup> Debuted September 4, 2013.

<sup>10</sup> 1969, Songwriters: DUPRI, JERMAINE/SEAL, MANUEL LONNIE/RAYMOND, USHER. ATV Music Publishing LLC, BMG RIGHTS MANAGEMENT US, LLC.

<sup>11</sup> James Dobson. Your Baby’s Language, *Psychology Today* (May 1977).

<sup>12</sup> Romans 3:23.

secondary in position to the forbidden tree in her mind. Perhaps this is why the serpent focused his attack specifically on Eve. She may have been more susceptible to the temptation because she had already questioned God in her heart, and desired that which she was commanded to reject. Over the years many have tried to use this example to reduce the value of women in gender studies and gender comparisons, but to do so is inappropriate and unfair. One should remember that Adam was a witness to this entire event.

At this point, Eve had exposed her true motives, opening the door for Satan to attack with full force. What happens when we allow temptation to get our attention?

**James 1:14-16.** *But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. <sup>15</sup>Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death. <sup>16</sup>Do not err, my beloved brethren.*

**Genesis 3:4.** *And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die:*

Often a temptation to sin begins with twisted truth. Now that the serpent had Eve's attention and desire where he wanted it, he was free to directly contradict God's Word. He used a veiled lie as a frontal attack, using a statement that is rendered as, "**You shall not die.**" This is a single word that carries a double meaning in Hebrew just as its translated phrase does in English. The word refers not so much to the end of physical life, as it does to the separation from life. In what way was Satan correct in his lie? Eve would not die physically by her disobedience. Eating of the fruit would not cause her to drop to the ground dead as simply lying to the Holy Spirit did to Ananias and Sapphira.<sup>13</sup> However, the truth is that consuming the fruit, a metaphor for taking on the character that is defined by that fruit, would cause her to separate herself from God, with the myriad of temporal and eternal consequences of that separation. The biblical definition of the word that is rendered *death* is *separation*. Unforgiven sin separates those who never place their faith and trust in God from Him for all eternity. Sin separates the saved from a right relationship with God during this life and brings with it all manner of consequences.

God created man as male and female as he had done with the plants and animals, necessitating reproduction for the continuation of the species. In this manner they were "immortal" anyway. However, unlike the animals, God also created man in His own image. He breathed into them the breath of life, a spirit which is individually immortal, and has an eternal nature that is the same as God's.

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<sup>13</sup> Acts, Chapter 5.



When God said that their disobedience would cause them to die, He was stating that they would experience a separation from Him. It is an eternal separation, therefore it is spiritual. Satan was directly contradicting God in principle, but telling a half-truth in word. How many times do we become tempted by half-truths?

We will later observe the consequences of this decision both on Satan, and on the couple, Adam and Eve. In every instance, the judgment is one of separation of relationships. Where, prior to the fall, the relationships among all of the parties of this event could have been fully loving and fruitful. All of these relationships would all be broken.

**Genesis 3:5. *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.***

Now Satan had Eve questioning the validity of God's Word. He took the half-truth one step further. He described a deceitful God who is not acting in her best interest. He is using cunning logic to usurp the authority of God and present a false gospel. What reward is Satan implying Eve will get by stepping out on her own and disobeying God? To be like a God, knowing good from evil. This, again is a half-truth. Certainly, God knows the difference between good and evil. However, so does the innocent. Adam and Eve knew that it was wrong to disobey God's command to eat from the tree. Even a domesticated dog knows the difference between what is right and what is wrong. Adam and Eve were already like God in that knowledge and the simple truth that their spirit, like that of God, is eternal.

What is the advantage Eve (and Adam) experienced when she did not fully have this knowledge that the tree offers? She would remain innocent, having chosen to obey God simply due to her (and his) complete lack of guile and self-centeredness.

What is the result we experience of obtaining this knowledge? To eat from this tree is to act on our rebellion against God by committing sin. The consequences of this knowledge is more than we can bear. We are crushed under it, not being able to remain innocent, but rather, we yield to it and exchange our innocence for guilt, and face the burden of eternal death. Again, what Satan said was true. Eating of the tree would open her eyes, and she would have the knowledge of good and evil that God has. She would also then find that she had rebelled against God, would continue in her rebellion against God, and would suffer the consequences of that rebellion.

**Genesis 3:6. *And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat.***

So, the stage has been set. Eve has lost focus on the command of God, lost interest in being obedient to Him, and her focus is firmly on the temptation. In what way can we generate a response to temptation which will avoid taking this last step experience by Eve? When tempted we can:

- Recognize our true relationship to God
- Determine what the true Godly response would be
- Pray and seek God's wisdom.

How did Eve respond?

**She saw it was good for food.** The temptation addressed her basic need for hunger. Were there any other sources of food that would properly meet this need? Of course, the fruit of every other tree and plant in the garden was theirs for the taking. Her hunger was not one for literal food: it was a hunger for that which she understood as prohibited by God. This prohibition made it pleasing to the eye.<sup>14</sup> Adam and Eve would not have been focused on this tree had it held no prohibition. The temptation addressed the lust within her. Were there any other scenes in the garden which were pleasing to the eye? Probably all of them!

**She saw it as desirable for gaining wisdom.** How did she know she would gain wisdom from it? She listened to the false teaching of the serpent instead of the true teaching of God. Disobeying God does not bring wisdom. Wisdom comes from obedience to God.

We, consequently, may observe here a complete example of the progression of activity that leads to rebellion against God. An idea is developed drawing focus to itself. The person responds by focusing on it, desiring it, and then rationalizing away its danger or impact. Finally, what did Eve do? She took of the fruit and ate it.

Where was Adam all this time? There is no indication that Adam was absent from this scenario at any time. In fact, note that when she sinned, Adam was there with her. How many times have you heard that Eve was to blame and Adam was tempted by Eve? The only difference was that Eve first touched the tree, as it was Eve that was attacked directly by Satan. They both experienced the conversation with Satan and they both ate of the fruit by their own choice. Sorry, Adam, you are just as much to blame here. Again, blaming Eve for her transgression is the height of hypocrisy.

**Genesis 3:7. *And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons.***

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<sup>14</sup> Virtually every parent has experienced the attraction that a developing child will have for anything that is declared forbidden. This is an excellent illustration of our basic bent toward rebellion against the authority of God.



Some of what the serpent said was true: after committing sin against God they were no longer innocent, they were given the full knowledge of good and evil and experienced the consequences of the latter. Again we see the play on words with the word naked. They saw their nakedness. They saw their own craftiness and cunning and the unholy, guilty feelings within themselves. They felt dirty, and felt the need to be covered. In a truly innocent relationship there is no need for such cover. One who is innocent has no reason to feel dirty or guilty.

As a result, they manufactured clothing from the plants. Were they physically naked anymore? No. However, their spiritual nakedness could not yet be covered until God's promise for salvation would be fulfilled.

**Genesis 3:8.** *And they heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God amongst the trees of the garden.*

Why do you suppose they hid? How did they feel? They felt guilty. They had sinned and knew it. They felt unworthy before God. They felt a sense of shame. Though we understand that there is nowhere to hide when we rebel against God, it is amazing how we still rebel as if He is not aware of our choices. It is also notable that they made an attempt to hide from God, hiding their sin from Him in the process.

**Genesis 3:9-10.** *And the LORD God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou? <sup>10</sup>And he said, I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.*

Note that where Satan addressed his attack upon the woman, God addressed His response upon the man. Though both were responsible for their actions, God put Eve in Adam's care, and Adam has been given the responsibility for the care of both of them.

Why did Adam say they hid themselves? They felt a new nature to their nakedness, their exposure to sin. They may have thought that they were no longer naked since they had made clothes. However, there is much more to it. They felt the pangs of guilt in the pit of their stomach that no quantity of leaves could ever cover. They had committed a disobedient act against God from which there was no correction. They were ashamed, not of their appearance, but of their guilt. In the same way, there is nothing that mankind can do to hide from God or to hide their sin. There is nothing that man can do to atone for his rebellions against God.

**Genesis 3:11-12.** *And he said, Who told thee that thou wast naked? Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not*

***eat? <sup>12</sup>And the man said, The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat.***

Note the man's response to God's question. Many have used this verse to defend attacks upon women for being the one that tempted Adam. Actually, Adam lied by telling God a half-truth, which in itself is a lie. This is the first lie that is recorded by any person. She did give the fruit to him. But he was there during the entire temptation. He made no effort to tell Eve that Satan was a liar. He made no effort at all to defend God's command. He at no time attempted to protect Eve by advising her to stop her act of rebellion. Adam was every bit as part of the act of disobedience as Eve was, and as Eve's protector, and by his blaming her for his own rebellion, his sin was far greater than hers.

Adam's response to God was a lie. Given an opportunity for confession and repentance, Adam chose to affirm his rebellion. He did not confess the sin, gave no evidence of contrition, failed to demonstrate any form of repentance, and did not seek forgiveness. He blamed his sin on Eve, disdaining responsibility for what he had done. As we look around us, we can observe that this trait of man has not changed much. Almost all criminals in prison today are totally convinced that their incarceration is the fault of the officers who arrested them, taking no real responsibility for the criminal acts that they chose to commit. However, few of us will freely admit the rebellion against God that we demonstrate in our lives every day by our self-centered actions.

***Genesis 3:13. And the LORD God said unto the woman, What is this that thou hast done? And the woman said, The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat.***

Now it's Eve's turn. Like Adam, she responded to the questioning of God with a half-truth. She heard the serpent's words, and she chose to eat of the tree. However, she was not deceived by Satan. She simply used his suggestions as a rationalization to do what she truly wanted to do in her own heart from the very beginning. It was a short step from listening to Satan's suggestions and following them. She was following her own true desire, her lust, her rejection of God's authority, placing her own authority over His.

Eve also responded to God's question with a lie. Like Adam, she made no effort confess the sin, demonstrate repentance, or seek forgiveness. She blamed her sin on the serpent.

Did Adam and Eve fully understand the nature of the tree of knowledge and the full range of consequences that would be realized by their act of rebellion? None of us fully understands the nature of very many things, even though we may pretend that we do. God's call to obedience serves to protect us against the dramatic consequences of

sin. Satan used that ignorance against Adam and Eve to openly reveal their own selfish desire. Still, it was Adam and Eve who acted upon those desires. We should always trust in God's word even though we may not understand all of the reasons for doing so.

What harm came to Adam and Eve as a result of their giving in to temptation? We find that following their choice of rebellion, God dramatically changed the relationship that they had with Him. They would receive far fewer blessings in their lives as they chose to continue to live in rebellion to Him. Their bent to sin was passed on to their children who brought them tremendous grief when sin entered their home, particularly in the slaying of Abel by Cain. Sin has left its destructive mark on every generation of mankind that has ever lived. Giving in to temptation harms us and the people nearest and dearest to us.

How do you feel after you have given in to temptation? Sin inevitably produces a sense of guilt, a sense of unworthiness before God, and a sense of shame.

What should we do when we have sinned? We must confess our sins openly to the LORD and seek forgiveness as we truly work towards complete repentance.

The plan of God does not end in the Garden. God has promised to provide complete, unconditional and eternal forgiveness to all who place their trust in Him. Jesus Christ, YAHWEH in the flesh, paid the penalty of death on the cross for every faithful believer. However, the consequence of our self-centered actions is still with us. John, in his description of the final judgment of God upon the people of His creation, illustrates the opening of the books<sup>15</sup> that reveal all of the acts done by all people. Your sin and rebellion does have a consequence in this life and it has an eternal consequence. Your demand to have it your own way, instead of submitting to the Holy Spirit, does have a tremendous consequence, yet many live and act like their arrogant and self-centered actions are unseen by God.

If you observe your own life and find that you have sinned: you have demonstrated less than an unconditional love for others; you have demanded that everyone do things your way; you have judged the decisions of others; you have felt and demonstrated prejudice; the list goes on and on. You know which spirits in your life are holy, and which spirits in your life come from the Adversary, and like Adam and Eve, you feel the guilt deep down inside.

The Ultimate Temptation is to rebel against God. You can act upon your rebellion by confession, repentance, and forgiveness. It is time to do so.

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<sup>15</sup> Revelation 20.