

Gen 3:1 ¶ 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?

Was Satan a snake? This is a subject that has been debated through the ages.

On the one hand, there are those who will say that the serpent had to be a snake, because how else would you explain: “upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life?”

Those who hold to this view generally contend that Satan was possessing the serpent in Genesis 3. It is also believed by many that believe the serpent was a snake that serpents had legs or perhaps even stood upright before they were cursed. There is even evidence for this, some would say, as witnessed by this article by Perry Stone:

In Genesis, the serpent was used in the temptation process. After man sinned, God placed a curse on the serpent by saying, “Upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life” (Gen. 3:14). The implication is that the serpent was once able to travel and move using a method other than crawling on its belly. Researchers in Israel made an amazing discovery several years ago, which reveals that serpents may have originally had legs.

About a quarter of a century ago, several unusual fossils were discovered in a stone quarry at Ein Yabrud near Ramallah, which is in the West Bank area of Israel. These ancient fossils were serpents with two small hind legs. There were three well-preserved snake fossils, and they were considered evidence of the most primitive snakes ever found. This discovery added credence to the verse in Genesis 3:14, implying that before the serpent was cursed it could communicate and travel in a manner other than crawling. Amazingly, these fossils of serpents with legs were found in Israel not far from Jerusalem, again showing a parallel with the biblical narrative.

On the other hand, there are those who believe that the serpent was really Satan, and serpent is a metaphor used to describe him. Among those was E.W. Bullinger. A part of his note on this subject reads:

The Hebrew word rendered "serpent" in **Gen 3:1** is Nachash (from the root Nachash, to shine), and means a shining one. Hence, in Chaldee it means brass or copper, because of its shining. Hence also, the word Nehushtan, a piece of brass, in **2Ki 18:4**. In the same way Saraph, in **Isa 6:2,6**, means a burning one, and, because the serpents mentioned in **Num 21** were burning, in the poison of their bite, they were called Saraphim, or Saraphs.

But with the LORD said unto Moses, "Make thee a fiery serpent" (**Num 21:8**), He said, "Make thee a Saraph", and, in obeying this command, we read in v. 9, "Moses made a Nachash of brass". Nachash is thus used as being interchangeable with

Saraph. Now, if Saraph is used of a serpent because its bite was burning, and is also used of a celestial or spirit-being (a burning one), why should not Nachash be used of a serpent because its appearance was shining, and be also used of a celestial or spirit-being (a shining one)?

So where can one go to find the truth of this very basic question? Was Satan introduced to us in God's word as possessing a shining serpent that lost its' legs following the curse? Or was the serpent a figure of speech used to describe the Devil the first time he is encountered in God's Word?

In my opinion, there are some verses that we can go to that will add light to this question. The first time the word serpent is used in the scriptures is in Genesis 3. The next time it is used is in:

Gen 49:16-17 Dan shall judge his people, as one of the tribes of Israel. **17 Dan shall be a serpent by the way, an adder in the path**, that biteth the horse heels, so that his rider shall fall backward.

Would Dan actually become a poisonous snake that would bite the heels of horses? It is quite obvious here that a serpent is used as a metaphor for what the tribe of Dan would become.

In Genesis 3, the third chapter of the Word, we are introduced to the serpent. In Revelation 20, the third chapter from the end of the scriptures, we find the fate of the serpent.

Rev 20:1-3 ¶ And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. **2** And he laid hold on **the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil**, and **Satan**, and bound him a thousand years, **3** And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season.

Here Satan is plainly identified. This is the Devil and there can be no doubt about who or what he is.

1. Satan
2. The Devil
3. The Dragon
4. That Old Serpent.

Here he is called not only that old serpent, but also the dragon. So it is obvious that here there are two different metaphors used to describe Satan. It seems to me that if the last time the word serpent is used in God's Word is plainly a metaphor for Satan, then it is not only legitimate to assume the same about the first usage, but that the context will demand it.

However, before we go back there, let's look at some other figures of speech used to describe Satan. These all go to his character and are used to describe him in a particular context. Not to belabor the point, but look back just a few chapters to:

Rev 12:7-9 And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, **8** And prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven. **9** And **the great dragon** was cast out, **that old serpent**, called **the Devil**, and **Satan**, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.

Once again we can see that dragon and serpent are used as descriptive metaphors for the personage of Satan, the devil. If you look back up in verse 3, the color of the dragon is even given:

Rev 12:3 And there appeared another wonder in heaven; and behold a **great red dragon**, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads.

I used to tell the alumni of Central High School that they were Satan worshippers. No one ever seemed to get it, and only a few ever caught on when I said, "Well, your mascot is a Scarlet Dragon."

There is one particular type of serpent and dragon that is associated with Satan.

Isa 26:20-21 ¶ Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee: hide thyself as it were for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast. **21** For, behold, the LORD cometh out of his place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity: the earth also shall disclose her blood, and shall no more cover her slain.

Isa 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**.

Satan is called leviathan the piercing and crooked serpent. Job devotes an entire chapter to leviathan, and we will cover that in a future study. But there is another crooked serpent that is also found in Job.

Job 26:13 By his spirit he hath garnished the heavens; his hand hath formed **the crooked serpent**.

The reference here is not to an earthly serpent, but a heavenly one. The constellation Draco is in the northern sky and revolves around the north star. Draco is Latin for Dragon, and this constellation is also known as the crooked serpent. At the time that the book of Job was written, Thuban, a star in the Draco constellation, would have been the north pole star. Because of the wobble of the earth, Polaris is now the north star.

You can make of this what you will, but the point is that Satan is also identified with a particular constellation in the northern hemisphere. That dragon – that crooked serpent – was being communicated to the world before the creation of man in the stars.

Rom 1:18-20 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; **19** ¶ Because that which

may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed *it* unto them. **20** For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even* his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse:

Just a few more examples to emphasize how figures of speech are used in God's Word:

Matt 16:22-23 Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee. **23** But he turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.

Did Peter turn into Satan in this passage? Of course not. What Peter was doing was being an adversary to God's plan, and as an adversary, he was taking on the characteristics of Satan.

Isa 14:12 How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! *how* art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations!

Was God saying the king of Babylon was named Lucifer and that he fell from heaven? Again, no. The king of Babylon was exalting his pride against God and was thus being identified with the Devil who is the king over all the children of pride.

So now go back to Genesis 3 where Satan is introduced to us as a serpent. I said that the context will demand that Satan is actually present in his true form and not the form of a serpent, so let's see if I can back that up.

Gen 3:1-5 ¶ 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? **2** And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: **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. **4** And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: **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.

So here is the question: Who are the gods? When he tells Eve that they will be like the gods, obviously there were gods in the garden of Eden that Eve was familiar with, otherwise she would have no idea what he was talking about. Satan had once said that he would be like the Most High, but that is one God. Here he tempts her by telling her that she will be like the gods, plural.

Eze 28:12-13 Son of man, take up a lamentation upon the king of Tyrus, and say unto him, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Thou sealest up the sum, full of wisdom, and perfect in beauty. **13** **Thou hast been in Eden the garden of God**; every precious stone *was* thy covering, the sardius, topaz, and the diamond, the beryl, the onyx, and the jasper, the sapphire, the emerald, and the carbuncle, and gold: the workmanship of thy tabrets and of thy pipes was prepared in thee in the day that thou wast created.

Here again, the king of Tyrus was not in the garden of God, but Satan was. Some say that the Eden here was not the earthly Eden, but a heavenly Eden because later on in the passage the holy, heavenly city is described.

I believe that it was the same garden that God planted for Adam and Eve for a couple reasons.

1. In Ezekiel 31, when describing the Assyrian to the Pharaoh in Egypt, he uses the analogy that all the tree of Eden envied the Assyrian because of his beauty. But as the trees of Eden were brought down into the nether regions of the earth, so would the Assyrian. The Assyrian here is the antichrist which gets his power from Satan. The trees of Eden are earthly trees.
 - a. Every other time that Eden or the garden of God or the garden of the LORD is mentioned in the scripture, it always refers to the earthly garden.
2. What need would there be for a heavenly garden? In Psalms 78:25 we're told that the manna that the children of Israel ate in the wilderness is what angels eat. If angels eat the manna which God supplies, what need is there for a garden?

Nonetheless, it seems evident that Satan was one of the gods of Genesis 3:5. And as Eden was the garden of God, one would assume that other heavenly creatures would also have been there. Comparing three verses, I believe that we can say that angelic beings are known as gods in the Word:

Isa 14:13 For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon **the mount of the congregation**, in the sides of the north:

Ps 82:1 ¶ God standeth **in the congregation of the mighty**; he judgeth among **the gods**.

Heb 12:22 But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to **an innumerable company of angels**,

In heaven there is the mount of the congregation. God stands in the congregation of the mighty judging gods. In the heavenly Jerusalem there are an innumerable company of angels.

And in many, many passages, God is called the god of gods and the Lord of lords. And we know there are visible and invisible thrones, dominions, principalities, and powers.

Going back again to Genesis 3 then, we can see that when Satan told Eve that they would be as gods, she didn't say: "What gods?" She looked at that tree and thought that it could make her wise – just like the gods – just like Satan.

So the subtlety of Satan didn't come by disguising himself as a snake. The subtlety of Satan came by telling Eve that she could be just like "us" gods.

One more thing concerning the serpent and his personification.

Remember in Numbers 21: The people were murmuring and complaining again against Moses and God and saying why did you bring us out here to die?

God sent fiery, or poisonous serpents among them. Then the people came to Moses and said that they had sinned and please pray to God to take the snakes away. So God told Moses: "Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live." Moses then made a brass serpent on a pole and stood it up, and anyone who was bitten by a serpent only had to look at that brazen image and they lived.

Then we get to the first coming of Jesus Christ and he makes what may seem to be a strange statement:

John 3:14-15 And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: **15** That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.

Did you ever think that it was strange that Christ would compare himself to a brazen image of a serpent? Especially seeing that Satan is also presented as a serpent who would later encourage people to worship graven images?

That is because the serpent was also made a metaphor for sin. When a graven image was made of that serpent and they had to look to it for healing, it was showing them that their law or their works could not save them.

Remember, making graven images was forbidden, yet Moses was instructed to make one

Lev 26:1 ¶ Ye shall make you no idols nor graven image, neither rear you up a standing image, neither shall ye set up *any* image of stone in your land, to bow down unto it: for I *am* the LORD your God.

Not only that, but that graven image was the symbol of sin. To be saved, they had to look outside the law at the personification of sin.

When Christ was raised up as that graven image was raised up, he became the personification of our sin.

2Cor 5:21 For he hath made him *to be* sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

Just as their law and works couldn't save the Israelites, we can't be saved by our own works or righteousness. Jesus Christ became the personification of sin on the cross so that our sins could be crucified with him. We only have to look to Christ for our salvation and it will be granted to us. But unlike those who looked on the graven image of the serpent, our salvation is eternal and the righteousness of Christ is given to us as a free gift from God.