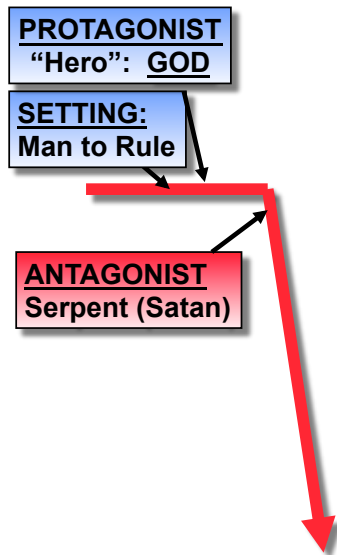


CHAPTER 5

THE CONFLICT (GENESIS 3:1-7)

The setting has completed its idyllic feeling, but with a hint of the possible failure of man, a devastating suggestion that if implemented, would change the whole nature of this creation. The statement that they would “surely die” if they ate of the fruit definitely leaves the reader uncomfortable at the possibility that it will become a reality. Yet it is from the reverie of the “setting” the “conflict” emerges. It will throw a huge boulder into the path of the Protagonist’s clearly stated desires. This conflict will come from what is known as “the antagonist,” one who is diametrically opposed to the Hero’s purpose.

The Introduction of the Antagonist: The Serpent (3:1a)



THE BIBLICAL STORY

“The serpent” is introduced in 3:1, and on the face of it he does not immediately appear to be a direct opponent to the Protagonist, God (e.g., he seems to be animal, not an unseen “god”). But very quickly all his speech will reveal his opposition to the desires of the Hero. That is the exact definition of a literary, and real, antagonist. The perception of the snake as being a normal common serpent quickly disappears. He must be more than a common animal in order to possess the attributes necessary to counteract the Divine Hero.

Genesis 3:1 Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, "Indeed, has God said, 'You shall not eat from any tree of the garden '?"

The desires of God were that man would rule over the animals on God's behalf (1:26, 28). The way for the antagonist to upset these desires was to have an animal rule over the man. The only way for that to happen was for the true antagonist (Satan) to become an animal and get man to listen to him.

“The serpent”:

Here the word has the article designating “this” snake as not just any snake. This was a unique snake in the serpent world and even in the animal kingdom. In other words, the verse is not stating that serpents were wiser, but that this particular serpent was wiser than any beast of the field.

“Crafty”:

The word here is **עָרִים**, which is used for wisdom; both that of a human wisdom (evil, manipulative, or even perceptive in the ways of man) or of God's wisdom (having revelation or knowledge of the character of God).¹ This is the first hint that this serpent is unique. No other animal is ever said to have “wisdom,” since by definition that requires conscious thought that enables one to alter their behavior or the behavior of others. Of course, this serpent's wisdom is a knowledge (determination) of “good and evil,” a knowledge at this point unfamiliar to his human objects. This snake's wisdom is the same as that which man can obtain by eating of a tree that will impart that knowledge. Eating of that tree will make them like the serpent, having his value system, having his “wisdom.” In other words, the question when one confronts this snake as “wise” must be the question as to whether it is the same wisdom as God has, or whether it is something different. It will quickly be seen that it is different since it opposes God.

“All the beasts (living things) of the field”

This snake is higher than the other beasts, those that were created by God. The reason is because of his craftiness or shrewdness. This designates that this snake has some wisdom that is separate from God's, a wisdom unknown to other beasts. Later when God curses this snake He states that this snake is cursed above “all the beasts” (same structure²; 3:14).

¹ Note also that this is the same word for nudity in 2:25. The word is used throughout the Old Testament and is translated “wise” or “naked” depending on the context only.

² The phrase in 3:1 is **מִכָּל הַחַיָּוִת** while the phrase in 3:14 is identical; **וּמִכָּל הַחַיָּוִת**. The indication here is that this serpent has a wisdom not granted to all (any) beasts. It is super-natural.

In the context of the natural creation (Genesis 1—2), beasts have no image, no ability to perceive and/or act for God. The whole purpose of parading the animals before Adam was to see if any of them were “corresponding to him.” They had to be able to relate to God through the possession of the “image,” and none could. Now by a surprising and stark contrast “this” snake appears who is “more wise” than any beast of the field, and who will soon interact (“speak to reveal his character) with regard to theology (i.e., God), traits not given to any normal animal since no animal has the “image.” He will argue against God’s value system from his own different value system.

Summary

The serpent is a beast of the field (3:1), over which man is to rule (1:26,28). In light of the position of man over the beast in multiple references (1:26, 28; 2:19), the serpent is introduced as an animal created to be under man’s authority. Yet this serpent, upon his arrival, causes no lack of concern to the reader. What is this odd beast doing in the story? He enters as a unique position, a beast, yet with wisdom. What could possibly be his purpose since he fits no category that has gone on before? Of course, to the astute reader who has moved comfortably through the serene setting, he recognizes the introduction of the antagonist who will bring the conflict to the Hero, God. This antagonist must be outside of the natural creation since the wisdom he possesses is not “good” and all creation is “good.” His wisdom is not from God and not part of the creation of Genesis 1—2, and thus “super”-natural.

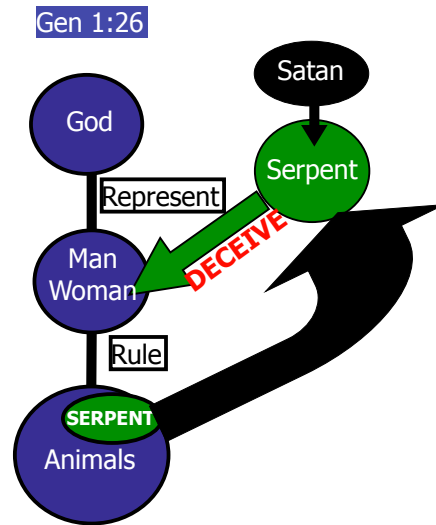
The Antagonist’s Attack on Protagonist by attacking His agent (3:1b-6)

The antagonist’s goal is that he might replace (defeat) God as the universal Ruler. Since he cannot get to the Hero, God, he will attack the weak link . . . the man, the “image.” It is the man who has the responsibility to make this creation work for God. However, he does not go to the man but to the woman. Satan attacks the man by going to the most submissive link in the chain of authority, the woman. This way the whole order will be reversed. The serpent would rule over the woman. The woman would lead the man. The man would rebel against the command of God. Paul references this verse in speaking of the order of man and woman and the serpent.

¹³ For it was Adam who was first created, *and* then Eve. ¹⁴ *And it was* not Adam *who* was deceived, but the woman being quite deceived, fell into transgression.

(1Timothy 2:13-14)

Not only would the rule of man be reversed (animal leading a woman, who in turn is leading a man), but man would be without a helper, thus making the representation by man inadequate and unfilled since God had pronounced that it was not good for man to be alone.



The Beast Attempts to Rule over the Man through the Woman

The beast then instructs the woman in her relationship with God (negates the “unseen revelation” for the “seen” human wisdom). Note that the serpent changes the words of God. This serpent will be the father of all false prophets and will typify them. So his deceit and alteration of the word of God is standard for false prophets yet to come as the New Testament authors testify.

New Testament:

³¹ "So you testify against yourselves, that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. ³² "Fill up, then, the measure *of the guilt* of your fathers. ³³ "You serpents, you seeds of serpents"³, how will you escape the sentence of hell?

(Matthew 23:31-33)

⁴⁴ "You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

(John 8:44)

³ But I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity *of devotion* to Christ. ⁴ For if one comes and

³ The “serpents” here are the fathers who are “seeds of the original serpent, Satan.”

preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted, you bear *this* beautifully.

(2 Cor. 11:3-4)

Thus the serpent now begins his theological instruction.

“And he said to the woman, "Indeed, has God said, 'You shall not eat from any tree of the garden '?"”

“From any tree of the garden” (מִכָּל עֵץ הַגָּן) is similar to God’s statement; מִכָּל עֵץ הַגָּן with the exception that the serpent has added the negative. In other words this is not a mild alteration, but a complete and exact reversal of God’s statement by adding the negative. In addition, he has only quoted the first part of the statement by God. For while God negated only one tree, Satan has shifted the negative to restrict all trees.

The Helper’s Response: Understanding of God’s command

The helper, who is to represent God by helping her husband to rule, responds to the confrontation brought by the serpent (who is the first false prophet, the father of all to come). This quoted response by the woman is given so that the reader can see that the woman understands the revelation of God very clearly (note that she corrects the serpent’s statement with regard to “any” tree). Thus she will disobey from clear knowledge, not from ignorance.

² And the woman said to the serpent, "From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat; ³ 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,'⁴ lest you die."

⁴ Many have noted that she adds to the command as it was pronounced, “or touch it,” indicating that Eve was making things more restrictive than they were, by prohibiting not only the eating but adding the touching. However, the word for “touch” is never used in that way in Genesis (which in narrative provides somewhat of a problem if a word, or synonymous thought has no impact in the rest of the narrative). It is always used in Genesis in this form as to touch to accomplish something, such as harm, with one exception in Genesis 28 where it is used in the sense of “went far enough” as ‘touch’ it. It is never used in the sense of “touch with admiration” or to “touch because it feels good” or to “touch on the way to possessing.” Thus the interpretation that she has added to God’s command is noteworthy, but the conclusion as to her motivation is difficult since it is never used again in Genesis 3 or seemingly even in the rest of the book in that way. In other words, while she mentions it clearly, her disobedience because she “touched” but because she “ate.” So her addition of “touch” does not seemingly affect anything that she does later (e.g., “touching” is not mentioned again.) While the application of not adding to God’s command is theologically correct it is a little hard to say that it is the point here. Of course, probably much of this is probably read in from the Pharisees’ tendency to add to God’s Law and make the Law more restrictive than it was. The difficulty was that they did this to justify themselves by keeping their added and intensified commands. While Eve mentions “not touching” it, she does not seem to derive any self-righteousness from the fact she has not done that. At this point while she most certainly adds to the command, it is difficult to say what her motivation was or what this statement’s purpose is. One

The Serpent's Response: Rejection of Judgment, Redefining "Life" as Selfish Ambition

"The serpent said to the woman, "You shall not surely die!""

The serpent's response is a denial of death. Since death was the judgment of God, the serpent is denying judgment by God. God and Satan, however, define "life and death" differently. For God "life" comes from His character alone (revelation) and is the enjoyment of His desires by the creature that represents Him in the physical realm. For Satan, "life" is physical only and is derived from the pursuits of the flesh, based on man's self-actualization, man's self-determination by ignoring God's revelation. Thus, in Satan's definition, man would not "die" but would "live" according to his own desires.⁵

⁴ And the serpent said to the woman, "You surely shall not die! ⁵ "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."

The essence of "knowing good and evil" is that man will then be the determiner of "good and evil" through the weighing of his own desires (lusts) through human wisdom. So, Satan tells man that he can be the source of determining what is right and wrong ("see") instead of God who is presently the source ("God saw"). Thus the question of source becomes very important. Is man's source of knowledge from his lusts⁶ . . . or from God? The issue of becoming like "gods" (or "God") is that a "god" is the source or determiner of his own morality. Thus Eve would become the determiner of her own good and evil, and thus would be her own god. Of course, her character was not her own, but came from Satan, her father, and she would submit to his desires as her god.

Note: Note that both Eve and the serpent are calling their value system and their evaluation as "good." They are not calling the things they do "evil." In other words, evil people do not call their deeds "evil," but "good" because they determine their value based on their own

possibility is that it signified removing it, so it wouldn't tempt her any longer, since "touching" is negative in many of the references in Genesis. In other words, she was not to eat it, nor remove it from the tree (e.g., so as not to be tempted). However, again at this point there does not seem to be a context for that point.

⁵ Note here that this is the context of James. James is saying that the rich in James are saying that the pursuit of physical success ("selfish ambition") is "life". But James says it is "death". James says "life" is only in the revelation of God and thus acting according to that revelation is "life" and acting according to physical lust is "death."

⁶ At this point Satan has prompted the woman, but not by her own source within her. She will reason from his temptation. Following her sin, she will be able to act from her own depraved being, lust.

character. Thus the unbeliever calls his own human wisdom “good.” Only God’s word reveals what is “good.” Only God’s word reveals that what human’s call “good” is actually evil.

New Testament

The Epistle of James in the New Testament reiterates exactly this as it refers to these chapters in Genesis. James is clarifying that people, even believers, wrongly claim that God is their source even when following self-centered, physical success. James states that this is the lie sourced from Satan and is not from God. They are redefining “good” as their self-centered desires.

¹³ Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God" (*i.e., doing what is self-centered but claiming it is from God*); for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone. ¹⁴ But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. ¹⁵ Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.

(James 1:13-15)

¹⁴ But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and *so* lie against the truth. ¹⁵ This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic. ¹⁶ For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing.

(James 3:14-16)

The woman’s response: Human Reasoning through Sight (she “saw,” “good” and “took.”)

The woman evaluates (“saw”) based on the serpent’s suggestion; that is, she looked and evaluated only what she could see and reason based on Satan’s wisdom.

Her observation through the natural senses (to confirm God’s word) indicated several things. God had, in fact, made the tree good for food, and pleasing⁷ to look at (cf. 2:9). The physical realm was made for man to enjoy with his senses. However, the physical realm was to be only enjoyed according to God’s eyes, His revelation. And He had restricted this fruit. Yet the third statement regarding the goodness of becoming “wise” is without any basis of observation. She had made a moral/ethical⁸ evaluation of the opposing information given to her by God and the serpent⁹ regarding her own prosperity.

⁷ The word for “pleasing” here is different than 2:9. She uses the same word from 2:9 with regard to making her wise.

⁸ It should be noted that there are two parallel lines going through this text. There is the observable and physical. Man, a physical being, is created, has a woman brought from his side, and interacts with an animal. However, to ignore the moral/ethical is to miss the major point of a *theological* text. God’s word is moral/ethical (*i.e., God’s character*). Man’s contemplation is moral/ethical, as are the

⁶ 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 desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate.

The Man's Response: Failure to as leader to rule for God

The man, observing the whole process (“with her”, 3:6) fails to correct the helper, and following her lead, he then rejects the Word of God. He, as the appointed head of the family, (and the race) will now bear the ultimate assignment of responsibility.

Summary: The Serpent Rules over Man

Man rejects his position as representative of God, choosing to represent the serpent through his ‘lie.’

The man and the woman have now believed the “lie.” That is they are now “seeds” of the serpent or imitators of him. They now, deserving of the sentence of death (as God defines it), will represent the serpent since they can do nothing else, having now been given a character

resulting deeds that result from his contemplation of God's word. Thus, the physical indicates a snake, a man and woman. However, this snake contemplates God's word, opposes it, and being crafty, deceives man into opposing God. To say that the major theme of this passage is simply physical (fear of snakes) or psychological (embarrassment of nudity between the sexes) is to miss the extreme import of the author's writing. The passage is moral/ethical (about God and man and the relationship which is established only through His word) and this snake is more than a typical snake since he clearly makes moral/ethical choices. He is able to contemplate and confront the basis of the image of God in man. Normal animals are not able to perceive the value of the image. While Satan may not be identified by name here, this snake embodies a deceiver *par excellence*, a clear antagonist who makes moral/ethical decisions. This is in addition to the superior physical characteristics given him in this text. He speaks. Animals do not speak, and of course, speak about God. And, speaking in this context is necessary so as to communicate one's character.

Note also that the snake must speak in order to interact with this man. Thus the speech indicates something more than an animal. However, there is even something more than that. The speech is required because it reveals the character of this snake; it is evil and contradicts God. Without speech, that knowledge would not be known. And in fact, it is the speech that harms the woman, not the serpent's physical activities. This is the same as a false prophet, who is known by his speech (Deuteronomy 13:1-5).

⁹ Note that while the fruit was good to look at and good for food (natural observation alone) it did not justify eating since that was to be controlled by revelation.

(lust) that is the source of self-centered thinking. They are “dead¹⁰” at this point, not having any ability to represent God from their depraved character.

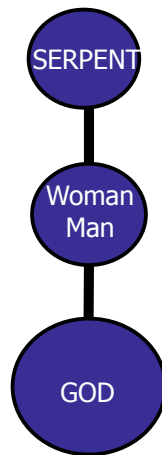
The roles are totally reversed now. Satan, through the serpent, rules over the woman and the man who now have created God in their own image (which makes him a god of their imagination, not of revelation, and thus as evil as they are). Their god has become subject to the desires of their imagination (value system). He will become the imaginary god of human wisdom that serves their lusts.

New Testament

As mentioned previously, James says that is what men, even believers, do. They make up a God that fulfills their desires and they say they are godly or following God.

¹³ Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone. ¹⁴ But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. ¹⁵ Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death. ¹⁶ Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren.

(James 1:13-16)

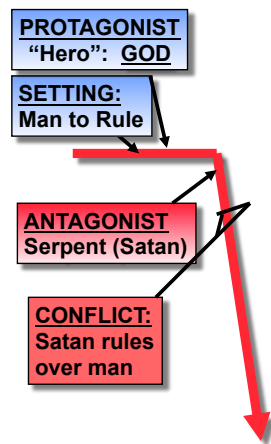


It is important to note the significance of what has occurred here in this primary confrontation and its significance throughout the rest of the revelation. Satan (here as the

¹⁰ This is very important here. Man has **NO** ability to represent God at all following the fall. It will be advocated from different quarters that non-believers can please God in some ways by doing “good” things. All their good things are evil since they are not doing them to please the God of revelation. They deny Him. Thus the “good” things glorify themselves, not God. Thus, man can only do evil continually unless he accepts the imputed righteousness (character) of God.

serpent) is the great deceiver, opposing the revelation of God. God is the ultimate revealer of His character, referred to as “truth”. Thus, Jesus, the ultimate revelation of God, the Word, confronts the Pharisees in John 8 as He claims to be the Truth (8:45; the revelation of reality from God; 8:42) and claims the Pharisees are liars (8:44; like Satan their father) in that they reject the revelation of God (the Word, the Truth).

The Conflict to the Protagonist: Man (the image) represents the serpent: 3:7



THE BIBLICAL STORY

⁷ Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings. (Gen 3:7)

The “eyes” indicates their ability to evaluate and thus determine. They are now “seeing” in the evaluative sense. However, this “seeing” is a physical, human wisdom sense, which means that they are their own source of evaluation of good and evil sourced from their newly found lusts. Since they can only now perceive through their human wisdom, with emphasis on what their physical eyes can see, they decide that they can cover their rebellion by covering their nudity and thus not be exposed before God (clearly they are not seeing things as God does). Thus while they are different now, they feel they can *deceive* God that nothing has changed, or that what has changed is not any big deal . . . i.e., they should not die. But their self-attempts to justify themselves are not from God but from their own, now newly depraved, mind. Thus the very attempt at self-covering, their attempt to deceive God, reveals the very character they had sought to hide. (In other words, their attempts to show they are good through their self-works end up demonstrating that they are, in fact, evil).

The attempt to cover their sin with leaves seems somewhat ridiculous, but it is what man does today by assuming his good works, his heritage, his job, his ministry, endears him to God

and eliminates God from viewing his sin. But that is through man's eyes, his values, not God's. It is all deceitful. It is all a lie. It was clear that man was working from his imagination, his own reasoning, since so far the only instruction regarding the fruit of the ground ("leaves) was that it was to be eaten. Now man had created a new use through human wisdom . . . clothing. The clothing was not meant to cover their embarrassment before one another (i.e., as the shame of their nudity as is so often interpreted), nor was it as a protection against the weather (it had not changed). It was clothing meant, very simply, to deceive God by covering themselves and hopefully avoiding their sure judgment. It was a hope that God would not be able to detect the new difference between them and God, or that they could get God to understand their value system and agree to it.

Of course, their self-justification, their self-defense, revealed their new character. They were, by their very actions, demonstrating that something had changed from their previous encounters with God. They responded with "fear," something that was not present before.

In John's first epistle, he discusses this issue of "fear" of judgment, stating that this has been taken away, not by self-righteousness, but by belief in Christ.

¹⁷ By this, love is perfected with us, so that we may have confidence in the day of judgment; because as He is, so also are we in this world. ¹⁸ There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love. (1 John 4:17-18)

Thus their defense revealed their new character to God. And God responded that they must have received some instruction from another source beside Him since their reasoning was the same as the serpent's.

This happens today in the world of political correctness, and the seeking of honor, in the church. When one seeks honor from any secular source in front of others in the church, he/she is revealing what they really believe about God, that he is a God who honors secular or "success" type achievements. Thus they show by their very desire for self-elevation that they are, in fact, not walking with God, since that is sourced from lust not God.

It is now very apparent that Adam and Eve have received something new, something that uses deception and self-justification to avoid God's judgment. This reasoning is not from God and shows that they have received it from Satan, the serpent. He originally deceived them for his benefit, now they attempt to deceive God for their benefit.

This new nature that they have received which represents their self-beneficial character continues to reject the revelation of God and deceive themselves and others. As Jesus stated to the Pharisees,

⁴⁴ "You are of *your* father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth

in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own *nature*; for he is a liar, and the father of lies.

(John 8:44)

Summary

As the setting of God's idyllic creation ended, the antagonist has entered to interrupt God's desires. He attacked the representative of God, man and woman. He then reversed the rule as they choose to follow him and his lies. When they do they become like him, deceitful and self-serving. Satan has now reversed the rule over God's creation. Man and woman now serve him innately by following their lusts. They will, however, claim that they are (self-) godly and (self-) righteous as they fulfill their selfish ambition. When they do this they make God the God of their imagination.

The meaning of John's "walk in the darkness" becomes clear. It is walking apart from the revelation of God, a denial of the truth.

⁶ If we say that we have fellowship with Him and *yet* walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth;

(1 John 1:6)

God now enters the scene. What will He do with regard to His now fallen creation? What will He do with the man and woman that He had created? What will death look like? But most of all, what will He do to correct the fact that an enemy has appeared and turned the object of His love, His creation, against Him?