

4. The Fall (3:1-24)

I. Structure

Divide chapter based upon the participants and active parties.

1. Rebellion (3:1-8): Yahweh God not an active participant
 - a. Temptation (1-5): dialog between the serpent and the woman
 - b. Fall (6-7): man and woman alone, no dialog.
 - i. Sin (6)
 - ii. Consequences (7-8)
2. Yahweh God's response (3:9-24): Yahweh God the primary party
 - a. Interrogation (9-13)
 - i. Of the man (9-12)
 - ii. Of the woman (13)
 - b. Judgment (14-19): addresses the participants in reverse order
 - i. On the serpent (14-15)
 - ii. On the woman (16)
 - iii. On the man (17-19)
 - c. Expulsion (20-24)

II. Act I. Rebellion (3:1-7)

A. Stage-setting (3:1)

v 1 is a stage-setting introduction, providing information necessary to understand the ensuing narrative.

Who or what is this serpent?

1. Egypt: *uraeus* (raised cobra), symbol of Wadjet, patron goddess of Lower Egypt; worn on Pharaoh's headpiece.

2. OT: One of several "mythic" creatures:

Nahash (נָחָשׁ), the serpent.

- Leviathan (לִיְיָתָן); LXX δράκων.
- Rahab (רָהַב).
- Tanin (תַּנִּינִין, pl. תַּנִּינִים), the sea monster; LXX δράκων.
- Yam (יָם), the Sea.

In the mythologies of the surrounding countries, these were feared as evil forces (gods) that constantly threatened to overwhelm the ordered universe. But the OT shows that God effortlessly rules over them:

- In that day, the LORD will punish with his sword, his fierce, great and powerful sword, Leviathan (לִיְיָתָן) the gliding serpent (נָחָשׁ), Leviathan (לִיְיָתָן) the coiling serpent (נָחָשׁ); he will slay the monster (תַּנִּינִין) of the sea (יָם) (Isa 27:1 NIV)
- It was you who split open the sea (יָם) by your power; you broke the heads of the monster (תַּנִּינִים) in

the waters. It was you who crushed the heads of Leviathan (לִיָּתָן) and gave him as food to the creatures of the desert. (Ps 74:13-14)

- So, although Nahash the Serpent is opposed to God, in no sense is he an equal and opposite power to God.

Nahash the Serpent is not identified as Satan. Many human figures function as an “adversary” (שָׂטָן), but on 3 occasions there is a heavenly adversary (הַשָּׂטָן “The Satan”) who opposes God and his people: Job 1-2; 1 Chr 21:1; Zech 3:2. In the NT, the devil (διάβολος) means “slanderer.”

In Revelation, the dragon, the serpent, the devil, and Satan are identified as being the same implacable foe of God (Rev 12:9; 20:2).

Wordplay: the man and the woman were naked (עָרֹם *arom* 2:25); the serpent is crafty (עָרוּם *arum* 3:1). Crafty (עָרוּם *arum*) is a neutral term: it can be positive or negative, cf. “shrewd.” We, the readers, are to evaluate subsequent narrative to see if the serpent is behaving negatively or positively. Adam should have made the same evaluation.

B. Temptation (3:2-5)

The temptation unfolds through a three-stage dialog between the serpent and the woman. Only three verbs of narrated action: he said...she said...he said.

1. serpent to woman (1b): the serpent mis-speaks:
 - a. What he so emphatically affirms (“Surely God said”) is not at all what God said (“Eat, yes, eat of any tree except one”). Adam should have immediately stepped in and corrected this error.
 - b. The serpent refers to the Lord as merely “God.” He does not know him as Yahweh God. Yahweh is the personal name of God, the name by which he is known by those with whom he is in covenant. “Yahweh God” is used throughout 2:4-3:24, except in 3:1-5.
2. woman to serpent (2-3): the woman corrects the serpent, but exaggerates God’s prohibition to include touching as well as eating. She follows the serpent in referring to “God” not “Yahweh God.”
3. serpent to woman (4-5): outright contradiction of God’s word and maligning of his motives.

C. Fall (3:6-8)

The narrator focuses in on the woman and the man as they succumb to the serpent’s temptation. No dialog, but 11 verbs in rapid sequence:

- the woman: saw, took, ate, gave.
- the man: ate.
- both: eyes opened, knew, sewed, made, heard, hid.

The individual actions describe the sin; the joint actions describe the consequences.

1. Sin

- the woman: saw that it was good (רָאָה כִּי טוֹב) and she took (לָקַח). Repeatedly in chapter 1 we read that God saw that it was good. He, as Creator, is alone able to determine whether something is good. The human does not have that ability. He/she is to accept God’s definition of what is good. To decide oneself that something is good is to act in moral autonomy. All sin is a variation on this theme: to decide that something is good and take, i.e. to act as God. There was nothing magical

about the tree: it was good for food and beautiful to the eyes, but it was off-limits because God said so. The woman made her own decision as to what was good and what was evil, i.e. not good.

- the man: passively present with the woman all along. He should have gone after the serpent from the beginning.

2. Consequences

- Knowledge: eyes opened...knew. The serpent was right:
- Hide
 - from one another: sewed...made.
 - from God: heard...hid. The sound of Yahweh God is now terrifying.

III. Act II: Yahweh God's response (3:9-24)

A. Interrogation (3:9-13)

The man and the woman are each given a chance to confess; each passes the buck, blaming another.

- The man (9-12)
- The woman (13)

B. Judgment (3:14-19)

Yahweh God passes judgment in reverse order.

1. The serpent (3:14-15)

Yahweh God does not bother to question the serpent, but moves straight to judgment. He makes no effort to redeem Satan.

God blames the serpent.

- Cursed (אָרוּר *arur*) is the opposite of blessed (בָּרוּךְ *barukh*). Wordplay: the serpent was “crafty (עָרוּם) above every wild animal” (עָרוּם מִכָּל חַיַּת הַשָּׂדֶה). God pronounces him “cursed (אָרוּר) above every wild animal” (אָרוּר אֶתְּהָ מִכָּל־הַבְּהֵמָה). To bless is to endow with “abundant and effective life.” To “curse” is to rob of abundant and effective life, i.e. to frustrate. God will frustrate the serpent/Satan in everything he seeks to do. He consigns Satan to futility.
- Enmity: the serpent persuaded the woman that he was her friend and God the enemy. God was not content for it to remain so. But to restore the balance he had to interpose enmity; i.e. the humans could not choose rightly on their own.
- Seed: The rest of the OT can be read as the story of the generation of this seed.
- Battle: Knowing he will be mortally wounded in a battle with the woman's seed, Satan will try to eliminate the seed.

2. The woman (3:16)

Only the woman is not blamed.

The woman is afflicted in two realms: as mother, as wife.

- Pain: childbirth. Since God promised a seed we would expect him to facilitate the bearing of seed, but he afflicts childbearing with pain.
- Discord in marital relationship: 16b is very similar to 4:7.

3:16 אֶל-אִשְׁךָ תִּשְׁקָתָךְ וְהוּא יִמְשָׁל-בְּךָ For your husband your desire,
but he will/must master you.

4:7 וְאַלְיָךָ תִּשְׁקָתוֹ וְאַתָּה תִּמְשָׁל-בּוֹ For you its (sin's) desire,
but you will/must master it.

In both cases the verb “master,” “govern” מִשַׁל is “gapped”:

3:16 “For your husband (will be) your desire [to master], but he must master you,” i.e. “it is your husband that you desire to master, but he must master you.”

4:7 “For you will be its desire [to master], but you must master it,” i.e. “it is you that sin desires to master, but you must master it.”

3. The man (3:17-19)

Man is blamed: he listened to the voice of his wife, i.e. he obeyed her, not God.

Man is afflicted in the realm of his work.

- Ground cursed: the *adamah* consigned to futility.
- Pain: to eat man will henceforth suffer pain and toil.
- Toil: man goes from working the garden to working the ground . In the garden he did not have to work for his food; henceforth he will.
- Death: pre-Fall dust[®]man. Post-Fall man[®]dust.

C. Grace

1. Life: the man names his wife חַוְוָה *Havvah*, Life. Though afflicted with death, he nevertheless believes that life will continue.

2. Yahweh God makes: replaces the humans' inadequate clothing with his adequate clothing. Debate as to whether sacrifice is entailed here.

3. Yahweh God

3' Yahweh God sends:

2' Yahweh God expels:

1' Life: cherubim guard the garden, especially the tree of life. Man replaced as guard of the garden.