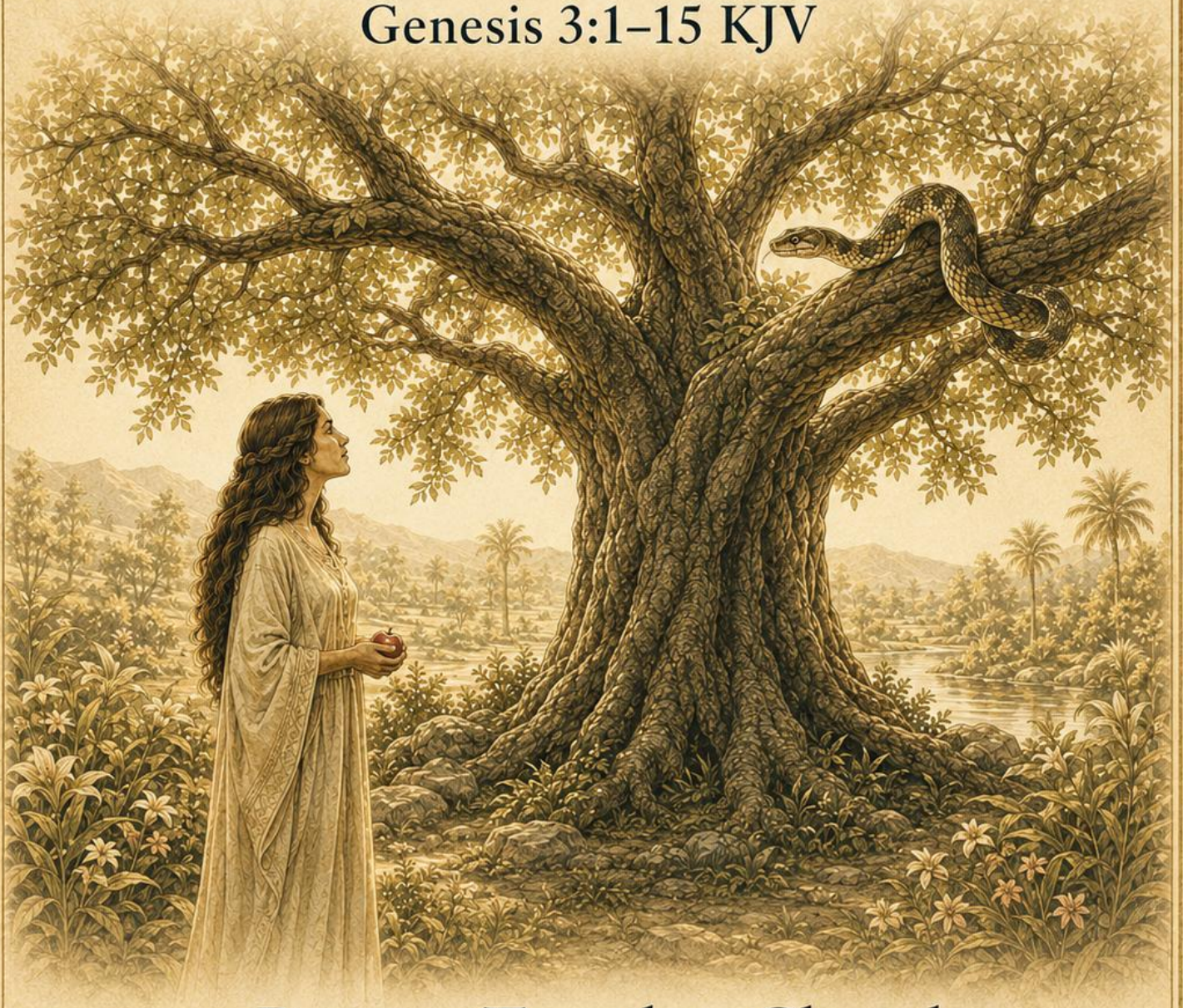


Who Was the Serpent in the Garden?

Genesis 3:1–15 KJV



Reason Together Church

www.ReasonTogether.Church

REASON TOGETHER CHURCH

Who Was the Serpent in the Garden?

Genesis 3:1–15

RTS-026 Sermon Transcript

by Dr. Thomas W. Hawksley

www.ReasonTogether.Church

Bring your questions. Open your Bible.

Let's Reason Together the Word of God.

Aloha, church family.

And aloha to everyone joining us online.

Welcome to Reason Together Church.

Bring your questions.

Open your Bible.

Let's Reason Together the Word of God.

Today's question came to us from a faithful member of the Reason Together Church family.

It arrived inside an advertisement for a special edition of an Ethiopian Bible.

Now, there is nothing wrong with receiving a question from an advertisement.

A question does not become bad simply because someone is trying to sell something with it.

But neither does a claim become true simply because it appears beside a Bible verse.

The material made some fascinating statements about the serpent in the Garden of Eden.

It said the serpent had a name.

It said that name had been removed from our Bibles.

It said the serpent originally had legs, perhaps wings, and may have flown through Eden.

It said the being who deceived Eve was a fallen angel named Gadreel.

It said Christians have been left spiritually powerless because we do not know that name.

And after making all of those claims, it offered to sell us the book that would restore the knowledge supposedly taken from us.

That gives us quite a bit to reason through together.

We are not going to ridicule the person who wrote it.

We are not going to dismiss every claim merely because it was part of an advertisement.

And we are not going to believe every claim merely because it sounds supernatural, ancient or mysterious.

We are going to do what we do here.

We are going to open the Bible.

We are going to read what God actually said.

We are going to distinguish between Scripture, interpretation, tradition and speculation.

And where God has not given us enough information to be certain, we are going to be honest enough to say, "I do not know."

Our question today is simple to ask.

Who was the serpent in the Garden?

Let us pray.

Father, thank You for giving us Your Word.

Thank You that we do not have to fear questions.

Give us wisdom as we study.

Give us discernment when a claim sounds impressive but goes beyond what You have revealed.

Give us humility when the Bible does not answer every detail we would like to know.

Help us never to turn a possibility into a doctrine or our imagination into revelation.

Most of all, help us see Jesus Christ clearly in Your Word today.

In Jesus' name we pray.

Amen.

Our primary passage is Genesis chapter 3, beginning with verse 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?”

“And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden:”

“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.”

“And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die:”

“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.”

“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.”

We will move down to verse 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.”

“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:”

“And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.”

Before we go farther, let me briefly explain how giving works at Reason Together Church.

We do not pass a plate and we do not pressure anyone to give.

Any donations or love gifts are greatly appreciated, but they are never required to visit the church or to download any of our free online studies.

If you are visiting with us, your presence is already a gift to us.

If you have a home church, we encourage you to support your home church faithfully.

If you would like to receive information from us, the guest card asks only for your first name and email address.

We will not single you out or place you under any pressure.

Now let us return to the Garden.

Most of us have carried a picture of this event in our minds since childhood.

There is a beautiful tree in the middle of the Garden.

There is Eve reaching toward a bright red apple.

There is a green snake wrapped around one of the branches.

We have seen that picture in children’s Bibles, paintings, movies and Sunday school materials.

But Genesis never says that the fruit was an apple.

Genesis never says that the serpent was wrapped around the tree.

Genesis never tells us its color, size or physical appearance.

And Genesis chapter 3 never calls the serpent Satan.

That last statement may surprise someone.

I am not saying the serpent had no connection to Satan.

We will follow that connection through the Bible.

I am saying that we must begin by reading what Genesis actually says before importing everything we have heard into the passage.

Genesis calls the creature “the serpent.”

The Hebrew word is nachash.

The serpent is described as “more subtil than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made.”

It speaks to Eve.

It knows what God commanded.

It questions God's Word.

It contradicts God's warning.

It promises Eve forbidden knowledge.

And Eve says, "The serpent beguiled me."

God then addresses the serpent and holds it responsible for what happened.

Those facts are in the text.

We can preach those facts confidently.

But there are many details Genesis does not give us.

It does not give the serpent a personal name.

It does not say whether Eve had heard animals speak before.

It does not tell us whether the serpent originally had legs.

It does not say the serpent had wings.

It does not tell us whether Satan took the form of a serpent or worked through a physical creature.

It does not say that another fallen being acted as Satan's representative.

Those are questions we may investigate.

But there is a difference between asking a question and possessing the answer.

One of the disciplines we need when studying Scripture is the ability to separate three categories.

There are things the Bible says.

There are things the Bible may imply.

And there are things the Bible does not reveal.

When the Bible says something, we may say, "Thus saith the Lord."

When the Bible permits an inference, we may say, "This is possible."

When the Bible remains silent, we should not fill the silence with our imagination and then call the result doctrine.

The advertisement begins with a clever question.

God said to the serpent, "Upon thy belly shalt thou go."

If crawling upon its belly was part of the curse, what was it doing before the curse?

That is a fair question.

Some respected Jewish traditions and Christian commentators have suggested that the serpent originally possessed legs.

That interpretation is possible.

God may have changed the creature's physical form so that its movement thereafter displayed its humiliation.

But look closely at the verse.

It does not say, "I will remove thy legs."

It does not say, "Thy wings shall be taken from thee."

It says, "Upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life."

The language describes more than locomotion.

Throughout Scripture, licking or eating dust can be an image of defeat, humiliation and being brought low.

The proud deceiver would be humbled.

The one who persuaded humanity to rebel against God would spend its days beneath humanity's feet.

The serpent may have undergone a physical change.

But the passage certainly announces humiliation.

We can say that it may have had legs.

We cannot say Genesis proves that it had legs.

And we have even less reason to announce that it had wings and flew to the tree.

That may make an exciting picture.

It may sell books.

But it is not written in Genesis.

Then we come to the Hebrew word nachash.

Some teachers will tell you that nachash does not really mean serpent.

They will say it means "the shining one" or "the diviner."

They may then suggest that translators have hidden the presence of a radiant heavenly being in the Garden.

We need to slow down.

When nachash functions as a Hebrew noun, its ordinary meaning is a serpent or snake.

There are related Hebrew forms associated with divination.

There are also related words that can be connected with bronze or something shining.
Those relationships have led some interpreters to explore whether the serpent is being presented as more than an animal.
That is a discussion worth having.
But a related word does not automatically replace the meaning required by the sentence in front of us.
Words receive their meaning from grammar and context, not merely from other words that share similar consonants.
Nearly every major Jewish and Christian translation renders the word in Genesis 3 as serpent or snake.
That is not evidence of a sixteen-hundred-year conspiracy.
It is the normal meaning of the Hebrew noun in this context.
A possible word association is not the same thing as a proven translation.
We should investigate the Hebrew.
We should not use the Hebrew to create a certainty the Hebrew itself does not provide.
So was this merely an unusually intelligent animal?
Genesis does place the serpent among the beasts of the field.
The curse has a continuing physical picture in the relationship between human beings and serpents.
People generally do not see a snake and think, “There is my new friend.”
Even those of us who are not afraid of snakes usually give them a little extra room.
There is something in this account that touches the natural world.
But there is also something happening that reaches far beyond the natural world.
This serpent understands God’s command.
It speaks intelligently.
It does not merely lure Eve toward a piece of fruit.
It presents a theological argument.
It challenges the truthfulness of God.
It questions the goodness of God.
It promises a form of godhood apart from obedience to God.
And through this deception, sin and death enter the human story.

Something larger than the behavior of an ordinary animal is taking place.

Genesis gives us the event.

Later Scripture helps us identify the spiritual enemy behind it.

In 2 Corinthians 11:3, Paul writes:

“But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.”

Paul confirms the Genesis account.

The serpent beguiled Eve.

But notice why Paul mentions it.

He is not trying to reconstruct the serpent’s anatomy.

He is warning Christians about the continuing method of deception.

The danger is that our minds might be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.

A few verses later, Paul warns about false apostles and deceitful workers.

Then he says in verse 14:

“And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light.”

The enemy does not always arrive looking like an enemy.

He does not always enter the room wearing a red suit, carrying a pitchfork and announcing his intentions.

He presents darkness as enlightenment.

He presents disobedience as freedom.

He presents pride as self-discovery.

He presents a lie with enough truth around it to make the lie appear reasonable.

That is precisely what happens in Genesis 3.

But the clearest Biblical identification comes in Revelation 12:9.

“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.”

Listen to the names and descriptions joined together in that verse.

The great dragon.

That old serpent.

The Devil.

Satan.

The one who deceiveth the whole world.

Revelation 20:2 repeats the identification:

“And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years.”

Genesis introduces the serpent.

Revelation identifies the ancient spiritual enemy represented by that serpent.

The Bible begins with the serpent deceiving humanity.

The Bible ends with the old serpent judged and defeated.

That does not answer every question about how Satan and the serpent were related in the Garden.

There are two principal possibilities held by Bible-believing Christians.

The first is that Satan appeared directly in a serpentine form.

Under this understanding, the creature speaking to Eve was Satan manifesting himself in a form suited to his purpose.

Revelation’s use of “that old serpent” fits naturally with this interpretation.

The intelligence, the knowledge of God’s command and the deliberate deception all fit a supernatural rebel.

The second possibility is that Satan operated through a created animal.

Genesis calls the serpent a beast of the field.

Elsewhere in Scripture, spiritual beings work through physical agents.

Satan entered Judas.

Demons entered the herd of swine.

Under this understanding, Satan used the serpent as the visible instrument of his temptation.

Both interpretations recognize the serpent in the passage.

Both recognize Satan as the spiritual power behind the deception.

The Bible does not pause to explain the exact mechanics.

Was Satan the serpent?

Was Satan speaking through the serpent?

The text does not give us enough information to settle that distinction with absolute certainty.

We can have an informed opinion.

We should not divide the church over an unanswered detail.

Now we come to the name Gadreel.

This is where the advertisement becomes especially interesting.

First Enoch is an ancient Jewish religious work.

It is not one simple document written all at once.

It contains different sections from the centuries surrounding the time of Christ.

It preserves ideas that were known in portions of ancient Judaism.

It can help us understand part of the religious world in which the New Testament was written.

The Ethiopian Orthodox tradition preserves First Enoch as part of its canon.

Most Jewish and Christian traditions do not receive it as canonical Scripture.

In First Enoch chapter 69, verse 6, a being named Gadreel is described.

The passage says that Gadreel showed humanity the blows of death, led Eve astray and showed human beings weapons of death.

So the advertisement did not invent the sentence.

First Enoch really does say that Gadreel led Eve astray.

But now we must ask what that statement proves.

It proves that this claim appears in First Enoch.

It proves that an ancient tradition connected Gadreel with Eve's deception.

It does not prove that Genesis once contained the name Gadreel and that someone removed it.

No manuscript of Genesis has been presented with Gadreel's name in Genesis 3.

First Enoch does not even use the simple sentence, "The serpent's name was Gadreel."

It says Gadreel led Eve astray.

Someone might propose that Gadreel was the serpent.

Someone else might propose that Gadreel acted under Satan's authority.

Someone else might understand the statement as an ancient expansion of the Genesis story.

But none of those possibilities gives us permission to replace the identification supplied by canonical Scripture.

The Bible calls the ancient serpent the Devil and Satan.

First Enoch can tell us what one ancient tradition believed.

It cannot exercise authority over Genesis and Revelation unless we first establish that First Enoch itself belongs in the canon.

That leads to another question.

Did Jude quote First Enoch?

Yes.

We should answer that honestly.

Jude verses 14 and 15 say:

“And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints,”

“To execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him.”

That language closely corresponds with First Enoch 1:9.

Jude and his readers knew Enochic material.

Jude regarded that particular prophecy as true and used it under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost.

We do not protect the Bible by denying obvious evidence.

But what follows from that evidence?

Does Jude’s use of one passage declare every sentence in every section of First Enoch to be inspired Scripture?

No.

Paul quoted writers who were not Biblical prophets.

In Acts 17, he quoted a Greek poet when he said, “For we are also his offspring.”

In 1 Corinthians 15:33, he wrote, “Evil communications corrupt good manners,” language known from a Greek comedy.

In Titus 1:12, Paul quoted a Cretan writer.

The Holy Ghost could lead a Biblical writer to use a true statement found outside Scripture.

That inspired use does not make everything else written by the source inspired.

If I quote one accurate sentence from a history book during this sermon, I have not declared every page of that history book to be the Word of God.

Jude’s quotation means we should take First Enoch seriously as an ancient text.

It means we should not pretend the apostles lived in a world where nobody knew such writings.

But it does not settle the canonical status of every part of First Enoch.

And it certainly does not prove that Gadreel's name was stolen from Genesis.

The advertisement then makes an even larger historical claim.

It says church authorities, influenced by the same evil spirits operating since Eden, stripped twenty-two books from the Bible and crippled Christianity for sixteen hundred years.

It says the complete Bible was hidden in Ethiopia.

It says the Ethiopian Bible has eighty-eight books.

It claims the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8 carried all the apostolic teaching and complete Scriptures home before any church council could interfere.

That is a dramatic story.

It is not the story told in Acts 8.

Acts tells us that an Ethiopian official had gone to Jerusalem to worship.

He was returning home while reading from the prophet Isaiah.

The Holy Spirit sent Philip to him.

Philip began at that Scripture and preached unto him Jesus.

The man believed and was baptized.

That is a beautiful account of the Gospel crossing cultural and geographical boundaries.

But Acts does not say Philip gave the man a complete Bible.

It does not say he carried First Enoch, Jubilees and every apostolic book to Ethiopia.

Most of the New Testament had not even been written at the time of Acts 8.

The Ethiopian Orthodox Church does preserve a broader canon than Protestant, Catholic or most other Orthodox churches.

That is historically important.

It deserves a careful study of its own.

But the Ethiopian Orthodox Church commonly identifies its canon as eighty-one books, not eighty-eight.

The advertisement turns a complicated history of canons, manuscripts, languages and church traditions into a simple conspiracy story.

Then it uses that conspiracy story to create urgency around a purchase.

Watch how the argument works.

It begins with a legitimate question.

If crawling was part of the curse, what did the serpent look like before?

Then a possibility becomes a certainty.

It must have had legs.

Then another unsupported detail is added.

It may have had wings, so now we are told it flew.

Then a Hebrew word is given a disputed meaning as though no other translation were possible.

Then an ancient noncanonical passage is treated as a verse secretly removed from Genesis.

Then religious leaders are accused of deliberately concealing the truth.

Then the reader is told that ordinary Christians are powerless without this hidden knowledge.

And finally, the product being sold is presented as the way to recover that power.

Church family, discernment does not mean assuming that everything in an advertisement is false.

Discernment means refusing to let the emotional power of the presentation do the work that evidence should do.

The most troubling statement in the entire advertisement is not that the serpent may have had legs.

It is not even the claim about Gadreel.

The most troubling statement is this idea:

“A believer who cannot name the enemy cannot fight him.”

Where does the Bible teach that?

It does not.

The Bible never tells Christians to discover the secret personal names of fallen spirits before we can resist them.

James 4:7 says:

“Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.”

Notice the order.

Submit to God.

Resist the devil.

There is no search for a hidden name between those commands.

Ephesians 6:10 says:

“Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.”

Our strength is in the Lord.

It is not in our mastery of secret information.

Paul tells us to put on the whole armour of God.

The armour includes truth.

Righteousness.

The preparation of the Gospel of peace.

Faith.

Salvation.

The Word of God.

Prayer.

There is no piece of armour labeled “the concealed names of demons.”

Our authority does not come from knowing whether the serpent’s private name was Gadreel.

Our victory comes from Jesus Christ.

And perhaps this is why Genesis does not spend its time satisfying all our curiosity about the serpent.

We want to know what it looked like.

God tells us what it said.

We want to know whether it had legs.

God tells us how it deceived.

We want to discover its hidden name.

God reveals the One who will crush its head.

The serpent’s method is more important for our daily lives than the serpent’s original anatomy.

Look again at the method.

The first recorded words of the serpent are:

“Yea, hath God said?”

The serpent begins by questioning God’s Word.

It does not begin by saying, “There is no God.”

It begins by creating uncertainty about what God said.

Did God really say that?

Is that what He meant?

Can you trust the words you received?

The attack upon humanity begins as an attack upon the Word of God.

The serpent then distorts God's Word.

God had generously permitted Adam and Eve to eat freely from the trees of the Garden except one.

The serpent frames God's generosity as deprivation.

It draws attention away from everything God provided and fixes attention upon the one boundary God established.

That method has not changed.

The enemy wants us to overlook every blessing and stare at the one thing we believe God has withheld.

Then the serpent directly denies the consequence of sin.

God said they would die.

The serpent said, "Ye shall not surely die."

Sin will not really hurt you.

There will be no lasting consequence.

God is exaggerating.

You can cross the boundary and remain in control.

Then the serpent questions God's goodness.

It suggests that God knows the fruit will improve them and is deliberately keeping something beneficial from them.

The temptation is not merely to eat fruit.

The temptation is to believe that God cannot be trusted with their good.

Finally, the serpent promises independence from God.

"Ye shall be as gods."

You will determine good and evil for yourself.

You will not need to receive truth from your Creator.

You can occupy the place that belongs to God.

That is how we recognize the serpent's work today.

Not because we have discovered whether it had feathers.

Not because we can pronounce an ancient angelic name.

We recognize the voice that questions God's Word, minimizes sin, attacks God's goodness and promises freedom through rebellion.

When a voice says, “Did God really say?” we have heard that strategy before.

When a voice says, “There will be no consequence,” we have heard that strategy before.

When a voice says, “God is keeping something good from you,” we have heard that strategy before.

When a voice says, “You can be your own god,” we have heard that strategy before.

We do not need the serpent’s measurements to recognize its message.

But there is something even more important in Genesis 3.

The chapter does not end with the serpent’s victory.

Before Adam and Eve leave the Garden, before the ground produces thorns and before the long sorrow of human history unfolds, God announces the serpent’s defeat.

Genesis 3:15 says:

“And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed.”

Then God says:

“It shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.”

This is sometimes called the first Gospel promise in the Bible.

The serpent would strike the heel of the coming Seed.

There would be suffering.

There would be a cross.

But the Seed of the woman would strike the serpent’s head.

There would be decisive victory.

The serpent entered the Garden and persuaded humanity to distrust God.

God answered by promising a Deliverer.

The advertisement tells us that the great missing revelation is the serpent’s name.

Genesis tells us that the great promised revelation is the Saviour.

The Bible does not say, “Wait until you learn the enemy’s secret identity.”

The Bible says, “Someone is coming who will crush his head.”

That Someone is Jesus Christ.

At the cross, the serpent bruised His heel.

Jesus suffered.

Jesus bled.

Jesus died.

For a moment, it may have appeared that darkness had won.

But on the third day, Jesus Christ rose from the dead.

The wound to His heel was not the end of the story.

The power of sin was broken.

The penalty of sin was paid.

Death was defeated.

The serpent's final judgment became certain.

Romans 16:20 tells believers:

“And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly.”

Did you hear the language of Genesis?

The God of peace will bruise Satan.

The victory promised in the Garden reaches the people who belong to Christ.

Revelation carries us to the conclusion.

The dragon is identified.

The old serpent is seized.

The Devil and Satan are judged.

His deception will not continue forever.

Genesis begins with a serpent entering a garden.

Revelation ends with the serpent defeated and God's people restored to the tree of life.

Genesis shows humanity driven from Paradise.

Revelation shows the redeemed welcomed into the presence of God.

Genesis announces the Seed of the woman.

Revelation celebrates the Lamb who has overcome.

The Bible is not a crippled book that leaves Christians helpless until a seller restores a concealed name.

The Bible gives us everything necessary to know whom to trust, how deception works, how to resist the devil and where victory is found.

So let us answer today's question as carefully as we can.

Who was the serpent in the Garden?

Genesis presents a real serpent as Eve's immediate deceiver.

Later Scripture identifies the ancient serpent with the Devil and Satan.

The Bible does not tell us whether Satan appeared directly in serpentine form or worked through a created animal.

The serpent may have undergone a physical change after God's curse, but Scripture does not tell us enough to reconstruct its original appearance.

First Enoch preserves an ancient tradition saying that Gadreel led Eve astray, but that statement does not override the canonical identification supplied by Scripture.

We may not know precisely what the serpent looked like.

We know whose rebellion and deception it represented.

And, much more importantly, we know who defeated it.

Church family, perhaps the most important question today is not whether you can identify the serpent.

The most important question is whether you have trusted the Saviour.

The serpent's first strategy was to separate humanity from God through unbelief and disobedience.

Jesus came to reconcile sinners to God.

He lived the sinless life we could not live.

He died for our sins.

He was buried.

He rose again.

Salvation is not found by purchasing secret knowledge.

It is received by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

Maybe the enemy has persuaded you to question what God has said.

Maybe he has convinced you that sin will carry no consequence.

Maybe he has caused you to wonder whether God is truly good.

Maybe you have spent years searching for hidden answers while overlooking the Saviour plainly revealed before you.

Today you can turn to Christ.

You do not need to know every detail about the serpent before you can know the One who crushed its power.

You do not need to understand every ancient writing before you can trust the Gospel.

You can come to Jesus as you are.

REASON TOGETHER CHURCH

If you have questions about salvation, speak with me after the service.

If you are joining us online, contact us through www.ReasonTogether.Church.

We will not pressure you.

We would be honored to open the Bible with you and reason together through your questions.

Let us pray.

Father, thank You for Your Word.

Thank You that Your truth does not fear investigation.

Teach us to read carefully.

Protect us from accepting speculation as Scripture.

Protect us also from becoming so afraid of unfamiliar writings that we refuse to examine them honestly.

Give us discernment to recognize the serpent's continuing method.

When Your Word is questioned, help us know what You have said.

When sin is minimized, help us remember its cost.

When Your goodness is attacked, help us remember the cross.

When we are tempted to seek power in secret knowledge, turn our eyes again to Jesus Christ.

Thank You for the promised Seed of the woman.

Thank You that Jesus was wounded for us and rose in victory.

Thank You that the old serpent's defeat is certain.

Help us stand in the strength of the Lord, clothed in the whole armour of God.

And if someone listening today has never trusted Christ, draw that person to You.

In Jesus' name we pray.

Amen.

Thank you for reasoning together with us today.

Please join us in the Reason Together Café.

The coffee is free.

It is locally grown.

And there are always free refills on conversations.

To all our first-time guests, Aloha Nui Loa.

PASTOR'S COMMENTARY

Who Was the Serpent in the Garden?

RTS-026 | Genesis 3:1–15 KJV

A reader's companion to the sermon

Reason Together Church

Dr. Thomas W. Hawksley

www.ReasonTogether.Church

*Bring your questions. Open your Bible.
Let's Reason Together the Word of God.*

About This Commentary

The Pastor's Commentary is a readable public companion to the sermon. It explains the principal Biblical reasoning, historical background, interpretive cautions and pastoral applications behind RTS-026. It does not replace the sermon transcript, and it is not intended to become a second sermon. Readers may use it for personal study, group discussion or careful follow-up after hearing the message.

The central question is straightforward: Who was the serpent that deceived Eve in Genesis 3? The short answer is that Genesis presents the serpent as Eve's immediate deceiver, while Revelation identifies the ancient spiritual enemy as the Devil and Satan. Scripture does not reveal whether Satan appeared directly in serpent form or acted through a created animal. That distinction between revealed identity and unrevealed mechanics governs this entire study.

A Personal Word from Pastor Tom

This question came from a faithful member of the Reason Together Church family. It was contained in an advertisement for a special edition of an Ethiopian Bible. The advertisement asked a genuinely interesting question about the serpent's body before the curse, then moved into claims about wings, a fallen angel named Gadreel, removed books and secret spiritual power.

I am grateful when someone brings material like this to me. A question does not become unworthy because it arrived through an advertisement or social media. At the same time, a claim does not become true because it sounds ancient, supernatural or urgent. Our task is neither to laugh at the question nor to surrender our judgment to the person selling the answer. Our task is to open the Bible and examine each claim separately.

That is the spirit of Reason Together Church. Bring your questions. Open your Bible. Let's Reason Together the Word of God. Some questions are best answered in a sermon. Others continue around a table in the Reason Together Café, perhaps with locally grown coffee and our customary free refills on conversation. This Commentary is meant to continue that careful conversation.

The Picture We Inherited

Most Christians can picture Eden before Genesis is opened. Eve stands beside a beautiful tree. A bright red apple is within reach. A green snake curls around a branch and whispers into her ear. The picture is so familiar that it can feel like memory rather than interpretation.

Genesis never identifies the fruit as an apple. It never says the serpent wrapped itself around the tree. It never tells us the creature's color, size or exact shape. Genesis 3 also never calls the serpent Satan by name. None of those observations denies the reality of Satan's involvement. They simply remind us to begin with the words God actually gave us.

Art can help us imagine a scene, but repetition can quietly turn artistic choices into assumed doctrine. The first discipline of Biblical study is therefore subtraction. We temporarily set aside the picture we inherited so the passage can speak on its own terms.

Beginning with What Genesis Says

“Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made.” (Genesis 3:1 KJV)

Genesis introduces ‘the serpent’ and compares it with the beasts of the field which the LORD God had made. The creature speaks, understands God’s command, questions God’s wording and deliberately redirects Eve’s trust. Eve later says that the serpent beguiled her. God addresses the serpent and pronounces judgment upon it.

Those are textual facts. They may be taught confidently. Genesis does not supply the serpent’s personal name, former anatomy or exact relationship to Satan. It does not tell us whether Eve had heard an animal speak before. It does not describe possession, transformation or angelic disguise. Those are questions raised by the passage, not answers stated in it.

This produces a useful study rule. We should distinguish what Scripture states, what Scripture supports as a reasonable inference and what Scripture leaves unrevealed. When the Bible speaks plainly, we should speak plainly. When it permits a possibility, we should label it as a possibility. When it remains silent, humility is more faithful than invention.

The Curse and the Question of Legs

“Upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life.” (Genesis 3:14 KJV)

The advertisement begins with a fair question. If going upon the belly belongs to the curse, how did the serpent move before the curse? Ancient Jewish interpreters asked the same question. Josephus wrote that God deprived the serpent of the use of its feet. Genesis Rabbah and Targum Pseudo-Jonathan likewise preserve traditions in which the serpent loses feet or legs.

These witnesses show that a leg-removal interpretation is ancient. They do not prove that a missing sentence once stood in Genesis. Reception history tells us how later readers understood a passage. It should not be silently promoted into the original wording of the passage.

The physical interpretation remains possible. God may have altered the serpent so that its movement became a continuing sign of humiliation. Yet the language of belly and dust also carries a symbolic meaning of defeat. Micah 7:17 describes defeated nations licking dust like a serpent. Isaiah 65:25 repeats that dust will be the serpent’s meat. The curse can communicate humiliation even if every anatomical question remains unanswered.

The responsible conclusion is therefore modest. The serpent may have possessed legs or experienced physical alteration in the curse. Genesis does not directly say that legs were removed. It gives no basis for teaching that wings were removed or that the creature flew through Eden.

Why Wings and Flight Go Too Far

Once legs are treated as certain, it becomes easy for imagination to add more. The sales material connects Eden's serpent with the 'fiery flying serpent' mentioned in Isaiah 14:29 and 30:6. It also appeals to the seraphim of Isaiah 6, heavenly beings explicitly described as having six wings.

Those passages deserve study, but they never identify Isaiah's flying serpents or throne-room seraphim with the creature in Genesis 3. Shared imagery does not establish shared anatomy. The Bible can use serpent, dragon, burning and heavenly-being images in related ways without telling us that Eden's serpent once possessed wings.

A useful warning appears here. A chain of ideas may contain several interesting links while still failing to prove its conclusion. Serpents appear in Genesis. Flying serpents appear in Isaiah. Seraphim have wings. None of those facts supplies the missing sentence, 'The serpent in Eden had wings and flew.'

Nachash: Serpent, Diviner or Shining One?

The Hebrew noun in Genesis 3 is commonly transliterated nachash. In this context it ordinarily means serpent or snake. Related Hebrew forms are connected with divination, copper or bronze. Those relationships have encouraged interpretations such as 'the diviner' or 'the shining one.' They may be discussed as associations, but they do not make 'shining one' the certain translation of the noun in Genesis 3.

Words receive meaning from grammar, usage and context. A word can resemble another word or share a root association without carrying every possible meaning into each occurrence. English readers already understand this principle. A person can 'run' a race, 'run' a business or see paint 'run,' but the context decides which meaning belongs in a sentence.

The established translation 'serpent' is not evidence of a conspiracy. A supernatural dimension may be argued from the larger Biblical story, especially Revelation's identification of the old serpent. That conclusion should be built through the canon, not through a claim that generations of translators deliberately concealed a luminous angel behind the Hebrew noun.

Following the Canonical Trail

Genesis gives us the immediate deceiver. Later Scripture supplies the controlling spiritual identification. Paul writes that 'the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty' and then warns about false apostles and Satan transforming himself into an angel of light. The connection is primarily one of method: deception can appear wise, beautiful and spiritually impressive.

"And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world." (Revelation 12:9 KJV)

Revelation does not leave its symbols uninterpreted. The great dragon and old serpent are called the Devil and Satan. Revelation 20:2 repeats the identification. These passages establish the canonical

continuity between Eden's deceiver and the spiritual enemy who opposes God and deceives the world.

This does not mean that Genesis suddenly contains words it never used. It means progressive revelation allows later Scripture to illuminate earlier Scripture. Genesis shows the serpent acting. Revelation identifies the ancient spiritual adversary. Romans 16:20 then applies the crushing promise to Satan: 'And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly.'

Identity and Mechanics Are Different Questions

The Bible's identification of the old serpent with Satan answers the most important question. It does not explain the mechanics of the event. Two principal Christian models remain possible.

Satan may have appeared directly in serpentine form. This model takes Revelation's identification very directly and recognizes the supernatural intelligence of the speaker.

Satan may have acted through a created serpent. This model preserves Genesis' description of a beast of the field while recognizing the spiritual power behind its speech and deception.

Genesis does not explicitly describe a transformation or a possession. Neither model should therefore be preached as though the mechanics had been revealed. The sentence 'Satan was the spiritual enemy behind Eden's deception' is much stronger than the sentence 'We know exactly how Satan appeared and operated that day.'

The distinction may feel small, but it protects the authority of Scripture. Confidence is not measured by how many details we can supply. Biblical confidence means being certain where God has spoken and content to remain uncertain where He has not.

Gadreel and First Enoch

First Enoch is an ancient Jewish work composed of several sections. It was preserved completely in Ge'ez and is represented among the Dead Sea Scrolls. The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church receives it as canonical. Most Jewish and Christian traditions do not.

First Enoch 69:6 names a figure commonly rendered Gadreel or Gadrael in English editions. It says that he showed humanity deadly blows, led Eve astray and taught weapons of death. The sales material did not invent the presence of Gadreel in First Enoch. An honest response must acknowledge what the ancient text actually says.

The next step requires care. First Enoch does not say that a line naming Gadreel was removed from Genesis. It does not provide manuscript evidence that Gadreel once appeared in the Hebrew text. Its wording can be understood as identifying Gadreel with the Eden deceiver, assigning him some agency in the deception or expanding the Genesis story within a larger tradition about rebellious angels.

The canonical Bible does not adopt Gadreel as the controlling name of the serpent. Revelation gives that controlling identification to the Devil and Satan. A Christian may study Gadreel as part

of ancient interpretation without building spiritual authority upon a name the canonical text never requires believers to know.

Does Jude Make All of First Enoch Scripture?

Jude 14–15 closely corresponds to First Enoch 1:9. We should not hide that relationship. Jude knew and used Enochic material, and the inspired epistle treats the cited prophecy as true.

A quotation does not automatically grant canonical authority to every sentence in the quoted source. Paul quoted Greek poets in Acts 17:28, 1 Corinthians 15:33 and Titus 1:12. The truthfulness and usefulness of those lines do not make the poets' complete works Scripture.

Jude's use of Enoch deserves respect and may tell us much about the Jewish world in which the New Testament was written. It does not require us to treat First Enoch 69:6 as the missing key to Genesis 3. The proper conclusion is neither 'Enoch is worthless' nor 'Jude canonized every part of Enoch.' The proper conclusion is that inspired writers can use truthful material from outside the later canonical collection.

The Ethiopian Orthodox Bible

The Ethiopian Orthodox tradition deserves accurate and respectful treatment. Its broader canon preserves ancient books that most Protestant readers seldom encounter. According to the Church's own published list, its canon contains 46 Old Testament books and 35 New Testament books, a total of 81.

Popular advertisements sometimes use different totals, including 88. Counting can vary when books or components are divided differently, but a confident commercial number should be checked against the Church's own account. Respect does not require accepting every sales claim made in Ethiopia's name. Respect requires listening carefully enough to represent the tradition accurately.

Our Reason Together Church family includes people of different races, cultures and backgrounds. I have said before that this diversity gives us a small glimpse of what heaven will look like. That conviction should shape theological disagreement. Ethiopian Christians are not props in a conspiracy story. They are brothers and sisters whose history deserves more than either romantic exaggeration or casual dismissal.

What Acts 8 Does and Does Not Say

Acts 8 tells us about an Ethiopian official reading Isaiah. Philip joins him, preaches Jesus from the passage and baptizes him after he believes. The account beautifully displays the Gospel crossing boundaries.

Acts does not say that Philip handed the man a complete apostolic Bible. It does not list First Enoch or Jubilees among his possessions. Most New Testament books had not yet been written at

the narrative time of Acts 8. The Ethiopian eunuch should not be made to carry a later canon-history claim Luke never placed upon him.

This correction does not diminish the passage. Its greatness lies in what it actually proclaims: a searching reader opens Isaiah, a servant of Christ explains Jesus and the Gospel reaches another life and another land.

How a Legitimate Question Becomes a Sales Argument

The advertisement's persuasive movement deserves attention because the same pattern appears in many religious claims. It begins with an observation that deserves consideration, then advances one step at a time until the final conclusion feels inevitable.

Ask what the serpent did before crawling. This is a legitimate question.

Treat former legs as certain. A possible inference becomes a fact.

Add wings and flight. Imagination is attached to unrelated serpent imagery.

Redefine nachash as a shining divine being. A disputed proposal becomes lexical certainty.

Name Gadreel as the suppressed identity. An ancient expansion becomes a missing Genesis verse.

Use Jude to authorize every Enochic claim. One quotation is asked to carry an entire canon decision.

Accuse councils and spiritual powers of suppression. Historical causation is asserted without documentation.

Tell believers they are powerless without the secret. Fear creates the need for the offered product.

The strongest sales arguments often contain some true statements. That is why each link must be tested separately. A true observation at the beginning does not guarantee the conclusion at the end. Urgency, mystery and a discounted price cannot substitute for evidence.

The Serpent's Method Matters More Than Its Shape

Scripture tells us far more about the serpent's argument than its anatomy. That may be intentional. The danger in Genesis 3 is not that Eve failed to recognize a particular body shape. The danger is that she listened as God's Word, warning and goodness were steadily recast.

"Yea, hath God said?" (Genesis 3:1 KJV)

The serpent begins by questioning God's Word. It reframes a generous provision around the single prohibition. It directly denies the consequence God announced. It suggests that God is withholding something good. It promises autonomy, enlightenment and the right to define good and evil apart from the Creator.

The strategy remains recognizable. Temptation still makes obedience look naïve. It makes boundaries look cruel. It turns God's generosity into deprivation and presents rebellion as freedom.

A believer can know every proposed name in ancient demonology and still be deceived by the same old question: ‘Yea, hath God said?’

This is why the sermon moves from curiosity to discernment. We may never know whether the visible serpent had legs. We can know how deception works. The shape remains partly hidden, but the method is exposed.

Secret Names and Real Spiritual Warfare

The advertisement warns that Christians cannot defeat an enemy they cannot name. That statement sounds practical, but it is not the pattern Scripture gives believers.

James 4:7 says, ‘Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.’ Ephesians 6 locates strength in the Lord and describes truth, righteousness, the Gospel, faith, salvation, the Word of God and prayer. None of those passages makes victory depend upon discovering the private names of fallen spirits.

Christian authority is not a technique for controlling spiritual beings through hidden information. Our confidence rests in Jesus Christ. We resist by submitting to God, standing in truth, trusting His promises and praying in faith. The New Testament directs attention away from esoteric mastery and toward faithful dependence upon the Lord.

There is a pastoral danger in secret-name spirituality. It can persuade ordinary believers that their Bibles are inadequate, their prayers are powerless and Christ has withheld the knowledge necessary for safety. The Gospel gives the opposite assurance. In Christ, believers have not been abandoned with an incomplete Savior.

The First Gospel Promise

“And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.” (Genesis 3:15 KJV)

Genesis does not end its treatment of the serpent with a lesson in anatomy. It ends with a promise of conflict and victory. The woman’s Seed will suffer a heel wound, but the serpent’s head will be bruised. Christians have long recognized this verse as the first announcement of the Gospel promise.

Jesus Christ enters the human family, suffers, dies and rises in victory. At the cross the enemy wounds His heel, but through the cross and resurrection Christ secures the decisive defeat of sin, death and Satan. Romans 16:20 extends that victory to God’s people: the God of peace will bruise Satan under their feet.

The final name the believer needs is not the concealed name of a fallen spirit. It is the revealed name of Jesus Christ. Salvation, authority and hope are found in Him. The serpent may be the question that opens the study, but Christ must be the destination that completes it.

A Better Way to Examine Extraordinary Claims

This study offers a method that can serve us well beyond Genesis 3. When a religious claim sounds startling, ancient or urgent, begin by slowing down. Fear thrives on speed. Truth welcomes examination.

Read the primary Biblical passage in context before reading the proposed explanation into it.

Write down exactly what the passage states and what it does not state.

Follow later canonical Scripture before treating a noncanonical source as controlling.

Identify whether a claim is direct teaching, strong support, responsible inference, ancient tradition or speculation.

Read ancient sources for what they actually say rather than what an advertisement says they contain.

Require historical evidence for accusations of suppression, corruption or coordinated removal.

Notice when fear and urgency are being converted into a purchase decision.

Ask whether the conclusion leads toward clearer trust in Christ or dependence upon the seller's secret knowledge.

Discernment is not cynicism. Cynicism dismisses before listening. Gullibility accepts before testing. Biblical discernment listens respectfully, tests patiently and holds each conclusion at the level of confidence its evidence can bear.

Questions for Personal or Group Reflection

Which details in your mental picture of Eden come directly from Genesis, and which come from art or tradition?

Why is it important to distinguish the serpent's identity from the mechanics of Satan's involvement?

What does the curse permit us to infer about the serpent's former body? What does it leave unresolved?

How should Christians receive useful ancient literature without granting it automatic canonical authority?

What can Jude's use of First Enoch teach us about the way inspired writers use outside sources?

Which step in the sales argument seems most persuasive to you? Where does the evidence become weaker than the claim?

How does the serpent's method in Genesis 3 continue to appear in modern temptation?

What does Ephesians 6 teach that believers actually need for spiritual resistance?

How does Genesis 3:15 move the study from fear of the deceiver to confidence in Christ?

Interpretive Cautions

- Do not say Genesis directly names the serpent Satan. Genesis presents the serpent, while Revelation supplies the controlling canonical identification.
- Do not preach former legs as an explicit statement of Genesis. Present them as a possible or reasonable inference.
- Do not teach that the serpent had wings or flew. The passages about flying serpents and seraphim do not identify their subjects with Eden's serpent.
- Do not translate nachash as 'shining one' as though the ordinary meaning 'serpent' were fraudulent.
- Do not deny that First Enoch 69:6 associates Gadreel with leading Eve astray. Represent the ancient source honestly.
- Do not claim that Gadreel's name was removed from Genesis. No manuscript evidence establishes that conclusion.
- Do not treat Jude's quotation as automatic canonization of every Enochic passage.
- Do not reduce the Ethiopian Orthodox tradition to an advertising device or a conspiracy prop.
- Do not teach that spiritual authority depends upon learning secret names.
- Do not allow fascination with the serpent to overshadow the promised Seed who defeats it.

Pastoral Note

A faithful questioner should never feel foolish for bringing unusual material to the church. Many misleading claims begin with real Bible verses, genuine historical details or respected ancient writings. The proper pastoral response is patient examination, not ridicule.

At the same time, kindness toward the questioner does not require softness toward the claim. A pastor serves people by showing where evidence is strong, where an interpretation is possible and where a conclusion has moved beyond what can be demonstrated. Truth and gentleness belong together.

If this study has made you anxious about hidden spiritual dangers, return to the clear promises of Scripture. Submit to God. Resist the devil. Put on the whole armour of God. Pray. Stand in the truth. Trust the completed work of Jesus Christ. You are not spiritually helpless because you do not possess a private catalogue of fallen names.

Selected Sources

All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version.

- Genesis 2:25–3:24. The serpent, deception, fall, judgment and promised Seed.
- Isaiah 14:29, 30:6 and 65:25. Fiery flying serpent language and the serpent's dust.
- Micah 7:17. Licking dust like a serpent as an image of defeat.
- 2 Corinthians 11:3, 13–15. Eve's deception, false apostles and Satan's transformation as an angel of light.
- Romans 16:20. God's promise to bruise Satan under the feet of His people.

Revelation 12:7–9 and 20:1–3. The old serpent identified as the Devil and Satan.

James 4:7 and Ephesians 6:10–18. Submission, resistance and the whole armour of God.

Jude 14–15 and First Enoch 1:9. Jude's use of Enochic material.

First Enoch 69:2–7. The Gadreel passage, especially verse 6.

Flavius Josephus, Antiquities of the Jews 1.1.4. Ancient retelling of the serpent's punishment.

Targum Pseudo-Jonathan on Genesis 3:14–15 and Genesis Rabbah 20:5. Later Jewish traditions concerning the serpent's feet or legs.

Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, official canonical books list. The Church's published 81-book total.

A Closing Prayer

Father, thank You for giving us Your Word and for allowing us to bring every question into its light. Give us confidence where You have spoken, humility where You have not spoken and discernment when truth is mixed with speculation. Protect us from fear, pride and the desire for secret knowledge. Teach us to recognize the serpent's old method when Your Word, goodness and authority are questioned. Fix our eyes upon Jesus Christ, the promised Seed who suffered for us and won the victory. Help us stand in His truth, rest in His grace and make His name known. In Jesus' name, amen.

Until We Reason Together Again

We may not know precisely what the serpent looked like or how Satan operated through the event. We do know the pattern of his deception, the certainty of his defeat and the name in which salvation and victory are found.

“And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly.” (Romans 16:20 KJV)

Bring your questions. Open your Bible.

Let's Reason Together the Word of God.

Reason Together Church

www.ReasonTogether.Church