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Volume XX
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The Serpent of Genesis 3

by — E.W. Bullinger (1837-1913)

In Genesis 3 we have neither allegory, myth, legend nor fable, but literal historical facts set forth, and emphasized by the use of certain figures of speech.¹



All of the confusion of thought and conflicting exegesis have arisen from taking literally what is expressed by figures, or from taking figuratively what is literal. A figure of speech is never used except for the purpose of calling attention to, emphasizing and intensifying *the reality of the literal sense* and the truth of the historical facts; so that, while the words employed may not be so strictly true to the letter, they are all the more *true to the truth conveyed by them*, and to the historical events connected with them.

But for the figurative language of :14-15 no one would have thought of referring the third chapter of Genesis to a snake – no more than he does when reading the third chapter from the end of Revelation (20:2). Indeed, the explanation added there, that the “old serpent” is Satan, would immediately lead one to connect the word “old” with the *earlier* and former mention of the serpent in Genesis 3; and the fact that it was Satan himself who tempted “the second man,” “the last Adam,” would force the conclusion that no other than the personal Satan could have been the tempter of “the first man, Adam.”

The Hebrew word rendered “serpent” in Genesis 3:1 is *Nāchāsh* (from the root *Nāchāsh*, to *shine*), and means *a shining one*. Hence, in Chaldee it means *brass* or *copper*, because of its *shining*. Hence also, the word *Nehushtān*, a piece of brass, in II Kings 18:4.

1. See *Companion Bible Appendixes*, App. 6.

In the same way *Sārāph*, in Isaiah 6:2, 6, means *a burning one*, and, because the serpents mentioned in Numbers 21 were burning, in the poison of their bite, they were called *Sārāphim*, or *Sārāphs*.

But when the LORD said unto Moses, “*Make thee a fiery serpent*” (Numbers 21:8), He said, “*Make thee a Sārāph*,” and, in obeying this command, we read in :9, “*Moses made a Nāchāsh of brass*.” *Nāchāsh* is thus used as being interchangeable with *Sārāph*.

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

Indeed, a reference to the structure of Genesis 3² will show that the *Cherubim* (which are similar celestial or spirit-beings) of the last verse (:24) require a similar spirit-being to correspond with them in the first verse (for the structure of the whole chapter is a great Introversion). The *Nāchāsh*, or serpent, who beguiled Eve (II Corinthians 11:3) is not spoken of as “*an angel of light*” in :14. Have we not, in this, a

2. *Ibid.*, App. 3.

(see *SERPENT*, page 4211)

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Paul Our Guide – Christ Our Goal

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This free weekly electronic publication (52 times a year) is dedicated to:

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- the affirmation of God's purpose to save all mankind through the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (I Timothy 2:3, 4; 4:10; Titus 2:11);
- the "preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began" (Romans 16:25);
- true freedom and liberty apart from law (Galatians 5:1);
- the organic nature of the church, the Body of Christ (I Corinthians 12);
- the distinct message and ministry of Paul, the apostle to the nations (Romans 11:13);
- the importance of receiving all whom Christ has received (Romans 14-15);
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- the completeness of the believer in Christ (Colossians 2:10), with:
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SERPENT (continued from front page)

clear intimation that it was not a snake, but a glorious shining being, apparently as angel, to whom Eve paid such great deference, acknowledging him as one who seemed to possess superior knowledge, and who was evidently a being of a superior (not of an inferior) order?

The word rendered “subtle” in :1 means *wise*. The word “beast” in :1, *chay*, denotes a *living being*, and it is as wrong to translate *zōa* “beasts” in Revelation 4, as it is to translate *chay* “beast” in Genesis 3. Both mean *living creature*. Satan is thus spoken of as being “*more wise than any other living creature which Jehovah Elohim had made.*” Even if the word “beast” be retained, it does not say that either a serpent or Satan was a “beast,” but only that he was “*more wise*” than any other living being.

We cannot conceive Eve as holding converse with a snake, but we can understand her being fascinated³ by one, apparently “*an angel of light*” (i.e., a glorious angel), possessing superior and supernatural knowledge.

When Satan is spoken of as a “*serpent*,” it is the figure *Hypocatastasis*⁴ or *Implication* – it no more means snake than it does when Dan is so called in Genesis 49:17; or an animal when Nero is called a “*lion*” (II Timothy 4:17), or when Herod is called a “*fox*” (Luke 13:32); or when Judah is called “*a lion’s whelp*.” It is the same figure when “*doctrine*” is called “*leaven*” (Matthew 16:6). It shows that something much more real and truer to truth is intended. If a figure of speech is thus employed, it is for the purpose of expressing the truth more impressively and is intended to be a figure of something much *more real* than the letter of the word.

Other figures of speech are used in :14-15, but only for the same purpose of emphasizing the truth and the reality of what is said.

When it is said in :15, “*thou shalt bruise His heel*,” it

cannot mean His literal heel of flesh and blood, but suffering, more temporary in character. When it is said, “*He shall crush thy head*,” (:15) it means something more than a skull of bone, and brain, and hair. It means that all of Satan’s plans and plots, policy and purposes, will one day be finally crushed and ended, never more to mar or to hinder the purposes of God. This will be effected when Satan shall be bruised under our feet (Romans 16:20). This again, will not be our literal feet, but something much more real.

The bruising of Christ’s heel is the most eloquent and impressive way of foretelling the most solemn events; and to point out that the effort made by Satan would become the very means of insuring its accomplishment; for it was through the death of Christ that he who had the power of death would be destroyed; and all of Satan’s power and policy brought to an end, and all his works destroyed (Hebrews 2:14; I John 3:8; Revelation 20:1-3, 10). What literal words could portray these literal facts so wonderfully as these expressive figures of speech?

It is the same with the other figures used in :14, “*On thy belly shalt thou go*.” This figure means infinitely more than the literal belly of flesh and blood; just as the words “heel” and “head” do in :15. It paints for the eyes of our mind the picture of Satan’s *humiliation*; for prostration was ever the most eloquent sign of subjection. When it is said “*our belly cleaveth unto the ground*” (Psalm 44:25), it denotes such a prolonged prostration and such a depth of submission as could never be conveyed or expressed in literal words.

So with the other prophecy, “*Dust shalt thou eat*.” This is not true to the letter, or to fact, but it is all the more *true to truth*. It tells of constant, continuous disappointment, failure and mortification; as when deceitful ways are spoken of as feeding on deceitful food, which is “*sweet to a man, but afterward his mouth shall be filled with gravel*” (Proverbs 20:17). This does not mean literal “*gravel*,” but something far more disagreeable. It means *disappointment* so great that it would gladly be exchanged for the literal “*gravel*.” So when the Galatians are rebuked for “*biting and devouring one another*” (3:14-15), something more heart-breaking is meant than the literal words used in the figure.

3. It is remarkable that the verb *nāchāsh* always means to enchant, fascinate, bewitch; or of one having and using occult knowledge. See Genesis 30:27; 44:5, 15; Lev. 19:26; Deut. 18:10; I Kings 20:33; II Kings 17:17; 21:6; II Chron. 33:6. So also is the noun used in Numbers 23:23; 24:1.

4. See *Companion Bible Appendixes*, App. 6.

When “*His enemies shall lick the dust*” (Psalm 72:9) they will not do it on their knees with their literal tongues; but they will be so prostrated and so utterly defeated, that no words could literally depict their overthrow and subjugation.

If a serpent was afterward called a *nāchāsh*, it was because it was more *shining* than any other creature; and if it became known as “wise,” it was not because of its own innate positive knowledge, but of its wisdom in hiding away from all observation; and because of its association with one of the names of Satan (that old serpent) who “beguiled Eve” (II Corinthians 11:3, 14).

It is wonderful how a snake could ever be supposed to speak without the organs of speech, or that Satan should be supposed able to accomplish so great a miracle.⁵

It only shows the power of tradition, which has, from the infancy of each one of us, put before our eyes and written on our minds the picture of a “snake” and an “apple”: the former being based on a wrong interpretation, and the latter being a pure invention, about which there is not one word said in Holy Scripture.

Never was Satan’s wisdom so craftily used as when he secured universal acceptance of this traditional belief: for it has succeeded in fixing the attention of mankind on the *letter* and the *means*, and thus blinding the eyes to the solemn fact that the Fall of man had to do solely with the Word of God, and is centered in the sin of believing Satan’s lie instead of Jehovah’s truth.

5. Greater than that wrought by God Himself, who opened the mouth of Balaam’s ass.

The temptation of “*the first man Adam*” began with the question “*Hath God said?*” The temptation of “*the second man, the Lord from heaven*” began with the similar question “*If thou be the Son of God,*” when the voice of the Father had scarcely died away, which said “*This IS My beloved Son.*”

All turned on the truth of what Jehovah had said.

The Word of God being questioned led Eve, in her reply, (1) to *omit* the word “*freely*” (3:2; cf. 2:16); then (2) to *add* the words “*neither shalt thou touch it*” (3:3; cf. 2:17); and finally (3) to *alter* a certainty into a contingency by changing “*thou shalt surely die*” (2:17) into “*lest ye die*” (3:3).

It is not without significance that the first ministerial words of “*the second Man*” were “*It is written,*” three times repeated; and that His last ministerial words contained a similar threefold reference to the written Word of God (John 17:8, 14, 17).

The former temptation succeeded because the Word of God was three times misrepresented; the latter temptation was successfully defeated because the same Word was faithfully repeated.

The history of Genesis 3 is intended to teach us the fact that Satan’s sphere of activities is in the *religious* sphere, and not the spheres of crime and immorality; that his battlefield is not the sins arising from human depravity, but the *unbelief* of the human heart. We are not to look for Satan’s activities today in the newspaper press, or the police courts; but in the pulpit, and in professors’ chairs. Whenever the Word of

(see *SERPENT*, page 4214)

The Divine Calendar

— A.E. Knoch (1874-1965)

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Freedom from a Neglectful or Abusive Husband

by — Clyde L. Pilkington, Jr.

There is no place or excuse for a neglectful or abusive husband. A wife is always free to leave such a man. The husband is charged in Scripture with the love, care and protection of his wife. Abuse of women is inexcusable, especially at the hands of their own husbands, whether that abuse be physical or mental.



Though presented to us in a parallel format, it is nonetheless clear that a husband does not have the right physically, passively or actively to abuse his wife. The lesser (*i.e.*, slave), does not have *more* rights than the greater (*i.e.*, wife). If God cares for and makes provision for slaves, of course He cares at least as much for wives. The rights of the wife are at least equal to those of a slave. In fact, if a slave has rights, it must be unnatural for us to assume that a wife has fewer.

The Law of Moses clearly protected the wife from an abusive husband, as William Luck writes in his definitive work *Divorce and Remarriage: Recovering the Biblical View*.

The final requirement of Exodus 21 (:10) is consistent with the first three. If the male one-flesh partner was prohibited from *passively* attacking the well-being of his covenant partner, we may reasonably conclude that more *physical aggression* on his part would be a more grievous insult to the relationship. If we think so, we are not disappointed by the later verses of the chapter (page 35).

When a man strikes the eye of his male or female slave and destroys it, he must let the slave go free in compensation for his eye. If he knocks out the tooth of his male or female slave, he must let the slave go free in compensation for his tooth (:26-27).

A husband who "reduces" his wife's care and provision, passively or actively, is derelict in his duties and has thereby broken the husband/wife covenant. Neither passive nor active abuse of a wife is to be tolerated. The wife has the marital rights to adequate physical provision, and non-abuse. Thus, a neglectful and/or abusive husband is a covenant-breaker whose default of the covenant has ended the husband/wife relationship – releasing the wife from further covenant obligations.

When the husband, who owes provision to his mate, intentionally fails to produce that provision, his claims over his mate are thereby nullified (page 51).

Additionally, the Law of Moses mandated that a runaway slave seeking refuge from a master could not ►



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be returned to his master (Deuteronomy 23:15-16).

You shall not deliver unto his master the servant who has escaped to you from his master: He shall dwell with you in that place which he likes best within your gates: you shall not oppress him.

The Law of Moses gave protection for those who were under authority; in the case such authority became abusive or oppressive in *any* way. In the example of

these verses, it is interesting to note that no details are provided regarding the circumstances surrounding the runaway slave. The simple fact that the slave left the master was all of the proof necessary that some form of mistreatment, oppression, neglect, tyranny, injustice or abuse had taken place. There was no conditional clause given to the mandate. ■

SERPENT (continued from page 4212)

God is called in question, there we see the trail of “that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan.” This is why anything against the true interests of the Word of God (as being such) finds a ready admission into the newspapers of the world, and is treated as “general literature.” This is why anything in favor of its inspiration and Divine origin and its spiritual truth is rigidly excluded as being “controversial.”

This is why Satan is quite content that the *letter* of Scripture should be accepted in Genesis 3, as he himself accepted the letter of Psalm 91:11. He himself could say “*It is written*” (Matthew 4:6) so long as the *letter* of what is “*written*” could be put instead of the

truth that is conveyed by it, and so long as it is misquoted or misapplied.

This is his object in perpetuating the traditions of the “snake” and the “apple,” because it ministers to the acceptance of his lie, the hiding of God’s truth, the support of tradition, the jeers of the infidel, the opposition of the critics, and the stumbling of the weak in faith. ■

(Adapted)

Companion Bible Appendixes
App. 19, pp. 26-27, edited
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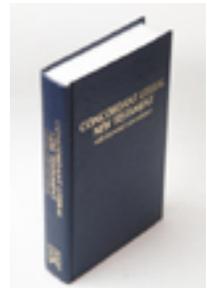
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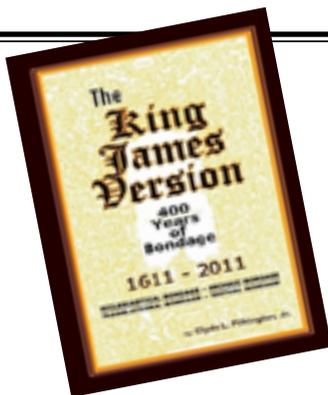


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