

Genesis 3:1

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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?

Analysis

Now the serpent was more subtil (עָרוּם, arum)—The Hebrew arum means "shrewd, crafty, prudent," a wordplay on Adam and Eve being "naked" (arummim, 2:25). The serpent perverts God-given wisdom into deceptive cunning. Revelation 12:9 and 20:2 identify this serpent as Satan, but Genesis presents him as merely a creature—**more subtil than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made**. His creaturely status demolishes any dualism: evil has no independent power, only parasitic perversion of God's good creation.

Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree?—Satan's opening gambit is masterful: he feigns incredulity, misquotes God (adding "every"), and shifts focus from abundance (eat freely of all but one) to restriction ("shall not eat"). He doesn't openly deny God's word but questions whether God really said it, planting seeds of doubt. This remains his primary tactic—not frontal assault on Scripture but subtle erosion of confidence in its clarity and goodness (2 Corinthians 11:3). Every temptation begins with "Did God really say...?"

Historical Context

Genesis was likely composed during or shortly after the Exodus (15th or 13th century BC), providing Israel with theological foundations: why the world is

broken, why serpents are cursed, why humans rebel against God. Ancient Near Eastern creation myths depicted primordial chaos battles, but Genesis shows evil entering through creaturely choice, not cosmic struggle. The serpent as a creature (not a god) would have been countercultural—Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Canaan all featured serpent deities.

Related Passages

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. How does Satan still use the "Did God really say..." strategy to undermine your confidence in Scripture today?
2. What does the serpent's creaturely status teach us about evil's ultimate powerlessness before God?

Interlinear Text

וְהַנָּחָשׁ	הָיָה	עָרֹם	מִכָּל	חַיָּת	הַשָּׂדֶה	אֲשֶׁר
Now the serpent	was	more subtil	H3605	than any beast	of the field	H834
H5175	H1961	H6175		H2416	H7704	
עָשָׂה	יְהוָה	אֱלֹהֵי יִם	אָמַר	אֵל	הָאִשָּׁה	אָף
had made	which the LORD	God	And he said	H413	unto the woman	Yea
H6213	H3068	H430	H559		H802	H637
כִּי	אָמַר	אֱלֹהֵי יִם	לֹא	תֹאכַל וְ	מִכָּל	עֵץ
H3588	And he said	God	H3808	Ye shall not eat	H3605	of every tree
	H559	H430		H398		H6086
הַגֶּן:						
of the garden						
H1588						

Additional Cross-References

2 Corinthians 11:3 (Parallel theme): 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.

2 Corinthians 11:14 (Parallel theme): And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light.

Revelation 12:9 (Parallel theme): 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.

Revelation 20:2 (Parallel theme): And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years,

Matthew 4:3 (Creation): And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread.

Matthew 10:16 (Parallel theme): Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves.

Matthew 4:6 (References God): And saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone.

Isaiah 27:1 (References Lord): In that day the LORD with his sore and great and strong sword shall punish leviathan the piercing serpent, even leviathan that crooked serpent; and he shall slay the dragon that is in the sea.