

Snake?

When reading the scriptures, there are various passages that reveal the depths of knowledge that challenge the minds of men. Solomon said to his son, concerning the words of inspired men, contained in their writings, that he might be equipped “To understand a proverb, and a figure, The words of the wise, and their dark sayings.” (Prov. 1:6).

When reading the word of God, we are faced with various figures of speech, i.e., when the passage is taken literally it means one thing, when taken figuratively it reveals something entirely different and deeper.

The scriptures are often viewed from two standpoints, i.e., does the text demand a literal definition, or a figurative one? When John was baptizing in the Jordan, “he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said unto them, Ye offspring of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?” (Matt. 3:7). When certain Pharisees came to the Lord, they said, “Get thee out, and go hence: for Herod would fain kill thee,” to which, the Lord replied, “Go and say to that fox, Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and to-morrow, and the third day I am perfected” (Lk. 13:31-32). The text and the context require a figurative use in both cases: the Pharisees were not literal vipers, and Herod was not a literal fox. However, each entity possessed similar characteristics.

The writing of Revelation is a collection that uses numerous illustrations that require figurative applications, i.e., chapter seventeen. It may be applicable to say that if the text does not demand a figurative definition, a literal one is to be applied. If the text does not demand a literal definition a figurative one may be applicable (and before someone jumps on the “what about?” train), as when John referred to the Pharisees as “offspring of vipers,” the literal definition is “an adder or other poisonous snake” (Strong’s): obviously requiring a figurative application. In like manner, Jehovah referred to Pharaoh King of Egypt as, “the great dragon that lieth in the midst of his rivers, which hath said, My river is mine own, and I have made it for myself” (Ezek. 29:3, kjv). Was Pharaoh a literal “dragon,” or “great monster” (nasv)? Obviously not.

In Revelation 20:1-2, the scriptures reveal four designations that apply to one entity, i.e., “the dragon, the old serpent, which is the Devil and Satan.” Peter refers to this entity, saying, “Be sober, be watchful: your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour,” (1 Pet. 5:8). So, who, or what is this “devil”? In this text the “devil” is an “adversary,” i.e., “an opponent,” “seeking whom he may devour.” The term “devil” is defined as “one who attacks the reputation of another by slander or libel, backbiter, defamer, libeler, maligner, slanderer, vilifier, depreciator, detractor, disparager, knocker - one who disparages or belittles the worth of something” (Free Dictionary), in short, “a slanderer; a calumniator” (Webster’s). W. E. Vines, defines the term as ““an accuser, a slanderer" (from diabolos, "to accuse, to malign"), is one of the names of Satan. From it the English word "Devil" is derived, and should be applied only to Satan, as a proper name:” Satan = “the accuser” (Strong’s). Now, let us return to Revelation 20:1-2. John reveals that the “dragon, the old serpent” is non-other than the “Devil and Satan:” the slanderer and accuser.

Where else do we find this entity doing his work? In Matthew 4:1, “Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil,” and in verse 10, “Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan.”

The first recorded appearance of this “dragon, the old serpent, which is the Devil and Satan” is in Genesis 3, “Now the serpent was more subtle than any beast of the field which Jehovah God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of any tree of the garden? And the woman said unto the serpent, Of the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat: 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 God, knowing good and evil” (Vs. 1-5). Eve later says, “The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat” (Vs. 13).

The scriptures tell us “who” he was in character, not “how” he manifested himself. The scriptures identify the work of Satan, not what form he takes: “Now it came to pass on the day when the sons of God came to present themselves before Jehovah, that Satan also came among them. And Jehovah said unto Satan, Whence comest thou? Then Satan answered Jehovah, and said, From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it” (Job 1:6-7).

There is no doubt there will be numerous “Well, what about(s)”, a-plenty, and we may even address them another day. But for now, the scriptures unequivocally identify “the dragon, the old serpent, which is the Devil and Satan,” as the same entity that beguiled Eve; came before Jehovah accusing Job; and the same entity that tempted the Lord. So, a “literal snake?” Judge ye. ret