



Candlewood Church



DECEPTION: The War of Unawares

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Glenn Garvin

BIG IDEA

The devil doesn't need you to believe a lie. He just needs you to keep listening.

SCRIPTURE FOCUS

"For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love, and self-discipline." **2 Timothy 1:7 NLT**

Main texts: Genesis 3:1-6 and Matthew 4:1-11

THIS WEEK IN A NUTSHELL

Some Christians see a demon behind every flat tire. Others aren't sure the devil exists at all. Either way, the lies still land.

This October, DECEPTION explores the difference between battling the devil and believing what Jesus already won. The war is over; the whispering isn't. We started at the beginning, with two conversations: one in a garden, where humanity lost, and one in a wilderness, where Jesus won.

THE MESSAGE

Two Lies and a Truth

We started with a game: two lies and a truth. It's fun on a Sunday morning. It's less fun when the serpent plays it. In the garden he mixed a distortion, a denial, and a truth with the price tag hidden. Eve didn't know she was playing for keeps.

The War That Never Ended

In 1972, a Vietnamese soldier named Ho Van Thanh fled into the jungle with his young son. The war ended in 1975, but they stayed hidden for forty more years, convinced the fighting continued. They weren't trapped by the enemy; they were trapped by fear that outlived the threat. (Story shared in Dr. Sean Tobin's *Big GOD, little devil.*)

**We are not deceived because we are stupid.
We are deceived because we keep listening.**

The Garden Conversation (Genesis 3:1-6)

We asked three simple questions about the very first conversation about God:

1. **Who's talking?** A creature, not a rival god. Humans were made to rule over the creatures (Genesis 1:28), yet here a creature is instructing God's image-bearers about God. The order got flipped.
2. **Why was Eve listening?** Innocent isn't the same as wise; Eve had never met a liar. She had also received God's command secondhand, through Adam, and when she repeated it, she edited it. God's generosity shrank and His restrictions grew. And Adam was right there with her, silent.
3. **What was gained?** The serpent offered "you will be like God" to people already made in God's image. They grabbed for what they already had, and gained shame, hiding, and exile.

Before she believed the lie, she doubted the truth.

The Wilderness Conversation (Matthew 4:1-11)

Fast forward thousands of years. Same enemy. Same script. Different ending.

- **Same opening move.** God had just declared, "This is my beloved Son." The devil's first words: "If you are the Son of God..."
- **Same goal.** Take the shortcut: provide for yourself, make God prove Himself, take the kingdoms without the cross.
- **Different response.** Eve edited God's word; Jesus quoted it exactly. The devil even quoted Scripture (Psalm 91), turning a promise to trust God into a dare to test Him.
- **Different ending.** Eve kept listening. Jesus shut it down: "Get out of here, Satan!"

"As by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous" (Romans 5:19). The wilderness shows the last Adam can win; the cross is where He wins the war.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Stop trusting God's promise, and every lie starts to sound like one.

- Secondhand faith is a starting place, not a hiding place.
- Don't let the devil be your dance partner. Give him no room on the floor (Ephesians 4:27).
- We don't fight *for* victory; we fight *from* His victory.

REFLECTION: WHAT ABOUT US?

When a voice speaks into our lives about God, or about ourselves, we can ask:

1. Who's talking?
2. Why am I listening?
3. What does it gain, and what do I lose?

Which voice are you still in a conversation with that you should have ended a long time ago?

THIS WEEK: WHO ARE WE DANCING WITH?

- **Know the Word for yourself.** Read Genesis 3:1-7 and Matthew 4:1-11 side by side. Notice who keeps listening and who ends the conversation.
- **End the conversation.** "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you" (James 4:7).
- **Live from the victory.** The war has a winner. Jesus heard every lie and stopped listening, and He finished the victory at the cross.

DIG DEEPER: The War of Unawares (Genesis 3:1-6)

DECEPTION, Week 1. For anyone with a little holy curiosity who wants to go further than Sunday's message.

A Creature, Not a Rival

Genesis 3:1 introduces the serpent (*nachash*) as "more crafty than any beast of the field that the LORD God had made." Notice the last phrase: the serpent is something God *made*. Evil doesn't walk into the garden as a rival god with equal power; it slithers in as a creature. Derek Kidner points out how restrained Genesis is here. The Bible doesn't explain where evil came from; it simply refuses to let evil look as big as God.

There's also a wordplay you can't see in English. The serpent is "crafty" (*arum*), and just one verse earlier, Adam and Eve were "naked" (*arom*) and unashamed (Genesis 2:25). The Hebrew words are nearly identical. Their openness and his cunning sit right next to each other in the story; the innocent and the shrewd, side by side.

So Who Is the Serpent?

Genesis never calls the serpent Satan. The rest of the Bible fills that in:

- Revelation 12:9 and 20:2 name him "that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan."
- Jesus calls the devil "a liar and the father of lies" who was "a murderer from the beginning" (John 8:44).
- Paul writes, "the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning" (2 Corinthians 11:3), and promises that "the God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet" (Romans 16:20), an echo of Genesis 3:15.

Scholars approach the serpent in a few ways. Bruce Waltke and Victor Hamilton read it as Satan's instrument or embodiment, the classic Christian view. John Walton reads it against its ancient Near Eastern background as a chaos creature, and is careful to note that Genesis itself doesn't name Satan. Gordon Wenham observes that ancient readers associated serpents with pagan religion and magic, so they would have sensed trouble the moment it appeared. Michael Heiser goes further, arguing the *nachash* was a divine being, a "shining one," connected to Ezekiel 28 and Isaiah 14. That reading is intriguing but speculative, and those links are debated.

My simplest summary: **Genesis doesn't tell us who's behind the serpent. The rest of the Bible does.**

Who Rules Whom?

Go back one chapter. In Genesis 1:28, God gives the man and the woman dominion "over every living thing that moves on the earth." They were made to rule the creatures, as God's image-bearers caring for His world.

Now look at Genesis 3. A creature of the field is instructing the image-bearers about God. The order of creation is turned upside down, and the ones meant to rule are taking direction from the one they were meant to rule over. (That's an observation many readers have made; the text doesn't spell it out.) Once the order flips, domination spreads. By Genesis 3:16, rule and struggle have entered even the relationship between the man and the woman.

Paul describes the same reversal on a world scale: people "exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator" (Romans 1:25). Every idol we'll talk about in this series is a created thing that's been handed authority it was never meant to have.

The Name He Wouldn't Say

Throughout Genesis 2-3, the narrator calls God "the LORD God" (YHWH Elohim), using God's personal, covenant name. The serpent never does. He only says "God" (Elohim), the general title. He keeps the title and drops the relationship. And by verse 3, Eve is talking the same way.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer called this "the first conversation about God." Up until this moment, people talked *with* God. Now, for the first time, they're talking *about* Him, behind His back, with a stranger.

Innocent Isn't the Same as Wise

So why would a sinless woman listen to a snake? Was she gullible?

The second-century pastor **Irenaeus** (*Against Heresies* 4.38) pictured Adam and Eve as innocent but immature, something like children: made good, but meant to grow into wisdom over time through trust and obedience. Eve had never met a liar, because lying didn't exist yet. She had no category for a creature that would say false things about God.

Curiosity wasn't her sin, and neither was the conversation. Jesus Himself was tempted "in every respect... yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15). **Augustine** (*City of God* 14.13) argued that the fall happened in the heart before it happened in the hand: "the evil act would never have been done had not an evil will preceded it." The turning point wasn't the bite. It was the moment the creature became the authority on what God meant.

It's also worth noticing that in this conversation, Eve is the one defending God's command. She isn't careless; she's doing the theology. She just doesn't know the one she's talking to is lying. And she isn't alone. Genesis 3:6 says she gave the fruit "to her husband, **who was with her.**" Adam appears to have been standing right there the whole time, silent. Paul says Eve was deceived (1 Timothy 2:14), yet he lays the fall at Adam's feet (Romans 5:12). One common reading is that Adam sinned with his eyes wide open.

The Secondhand Word

God gave the command directly to Adam, before Eve was created (Genesis 2:16-17). Eve received it secondhand. Compare what God said with what she repeats:

- **God (2:16-17):** "You may **freely** eat of **every** tree... but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall **surely** die."
- **Eve (3:2-3):** "We may eat of the fruit of the trees... but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree... **neither shall you touch it, lest** you die.'"

She drops "freely" and "every," adds "don't touch it," and softens "surely die" to "lest you die." Before the serpent tells a single outright lie, God's generosity has shrunk and His restrictions have grown. And "Did God really say?" lands hardest exactly where the word was held secondhand.

Most of us received God's word secondhand too, from parents, pastors, books, and podcasts. That isn't wrong; it's how nearly all of us start. But secondhand faith is the faith most vulnerable to "Did God really say?"

A Fence Around the Word

What Eve did in the garden, God's people have done ever since. The Mishnah, a collection of early rabbinic teaching, opens its wisdom section with this advice: "make a fence around the Torah" (*Avot* 1:1). The idea was to add protective rules so you'd never get close to breaking the real one. The rabbinic tradition counts 613 commandments in the Torah (*Talmud, Makkot* 23b), and generations of interpretation grew up around them.

The rabbis saw the danger in this, too. An early commentary, *Avot de-Rabbi Natan* (chapter 1), points to Eve's "don't touch it" as the cautionary example of a fence built too big. Another tradition, *Genesis Rabbah* 19, imagines the serpent pushing Eve against the tree; when touching it didn't kill her, she began doubting the rest of what God said. The added rule became the crack the lie slipped through.

Jesus confronted the same pattern: "You leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men... thus making void the word of God by your tradition" (Mark 7:8-13). Scripture warns in both directions: "You shall not add to the word that I command you, nor take from it" (Deuteronomy 4:2), and "Do not add to his words, lest he rebuke you and you be found a liar" (Proverbs 30:6).

The fence-builders usually meant well; their rules came from love for God's law. And the church has built plenty of fences of its own. But here's the danger: add to God's word and He looks stingy; take away from it and He looks soft. Either way, we've made Him smaller. And a stingy God is exactly what the serpent was selling: *God is holding out on you*.

How Ancient Readers Filled the Gaps

Scripture never explains why a talking snake didn't seem strange to Eve. Ancient Jewish writers filled in the blanks. These are *tradition and interpretation, not Scripture*:

- **Jubilees 3:28** (2nd century BC) claims all the animals spoke a common language until Adam and Eve left the garden. In that telling, the serpent wasn't a stranger; he was a neighbor.
- **Josephus** (*Antiquities* 1.1.4), a first-century Jewish historian, says the serpent lived alongside Adam and Eve and envied their happiness. The Wisdom of Solomon 2:24 agrees: "through the devil's envy death entered the world."
- **The Apocalypse of Moses** (also known as *The Life of Adam and Eve*) imagines Satan recruiting the serpent with the words "be my vessel," and lets Eve tell the story in her own voice.

The Truth With the Price Tag Hidden

The serpent makes three claims:

1. **"Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree'?"** (3:1) A distortion. God said every tree *but one*.
2. **"You will not surely die."** (3:4) A flat denial. They didn't drop dead that day, but death entered, and they were cut off from the tree of life (3:22-24).
3. **"Your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."** (3:5) True. Genesis 3:7 says "the eyes of both were opened," and in 3:22 God Himself says, "the man has become like one of us in knowing good and evil."

The most dangerous lie in the garden wasn't false. It was true, with the price tag hidden. Their eyes did open, and the first thing they saw was their own shame.

Grasping What She Already Had

The serpent offers, "You will be like God." But Eve was *already* made in God's image (Genesis 1:26-27). She was tempted to grab what she'd already been given.

Centuries later, Paul describes Jesus as the One who, "though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped" (Philippians 2:6). The Greek word for "grasped," *harpagmos*, carries the idea of seizing something. Adam and Eve reached up and grabbed; Jesus reached down and gave. That's a devotional connection, not a claim Paul makes about Genesis, but it's one I can't stop thinking about.

Two Conversations: The Garden and the Wilderness

Fast forward thousands of years. Right after the Father declares at His baptism, "This is my beloved Son" (Matthew 3:17), Jesus is "led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil" (Matthew 4:1). It's the same enemy, using

the same playbook, but this time he's unmasked. Matthew calls him "the devil" (*diabolos*, the slanderer), then "the tempter," and finally Jesus Himself names him: "Satan" (4:10).

The devil opens with "If you are the Son of God." In Greek, that "if" assumes the statement is true for the sake of argument; it's closer to "Since you are the Son of God..." He isn't really doubting who Jesus is. He's attacking what God just said, exactly the way "Did God really say?" attacked God's command in the garden. And he's testing what kind of Son Jesus will be: one who provides for Himself, forces God to prove Him, and takes the kingdoms without the cross.

Interestingly, the word for "tempted" (*peirazō*) also means "tested." The Spirit leads Jesus into the wilderness to prove Him, the way God tested Israel in the wilderness (Deuteronomy 8:2), while the devil uses the same moment to try to break Him. One event, two intentions. God tests; He never tempts anyone to sin (James 1:13).

	The Garden (Genesis 3)	The Wilderness (Matthew 4)
Setting	Paradise, every tree available	Desert, 40 days without food
The speaker	An unnamed serpent	Named three times; Jesus calls him Satan
Opening move	"Did God really say?"	"If you are the Son of God"
God's word	Eve adds to it and softens it	Jesus quotes it exactly
The devil and Scripture	Twists God's words	Quotes Psalm 91:11-12 out of context; a promise for trusting God becomes a dare to test Him
The offer	"You will be like God"	Bread, spectacle, kingdoms without the cross
The response	Keeps listening	"Be gone, Satan!"
The outcome	Exile from the garden	"Angels came and were ministering to him"

Notice that the devil quotes Scripture too. In the second temptation he cites Psalm 91:11-12, God's promise to protect those who make Him their refuge, and uses it as a dare: jump, and make God prove it. In both Matthew and Luke his quote leaves out the phrase "in all your ways," which older commentators like Matthew Henry saw as telling; the promise was for walking in God's ways, not for stunts. Scholars note that Gospel writers often shorten quotations, so the deeper problem isn't the missing words but the misuse: a promise meant for trust, turned into a tool for testing God. Jesus answers with Scripture read in context: "You shall not put the Lord your God to the test" (Deuteronomy 6:16). (A devotional aside: the devil stops just before Psalm 91:13, "the young lion and the serpent you will trample underfoot.")

All three of Jesus' answers come from Deuteronomy 6-8, Moses' words to Israel after their 40 years in the wilderness. Israel was called God's son (Exodus 4:22;

Hosea 11:1), and Israel grumbled about bread and tested God. Jesus, the true Son, relives Israel's story and Adam's story, and He trusts where they doubted.

Paul calls Jesus "the last Adam" (1 Corinthians 15:45) and puts it this way: "as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous" (Romans 5:19). Mark adds a detail that's easy to miss: in the wilderness Jesus "was with the wild animals, and the angels were ministering to him" (Mark 1:13). Many readers hear an echo of Eden there; the Son of Man among the creatures again, this time with nothing turned upside down. (That's an observation, not Mark's stated point.)

The wilderness isn't the end of the war. Luke says the devil "departed from him until an opportune time" (Luke 4:13). The victory that begins in the wilderness is finished at the cross and the empty tomb. But the wilderness shows us something the garden never did: a human being who heard every lie and stopped listening.

Don't Give Him the Dance Floor

Paul writes, "give no opportunity to the devil" (Ephesians 4:27). The word translated "opportunity" or "foothold" is *topos*, a place or space. Don't give him room. James gives the exit: "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you" (James 4:7).

A Take-Home Line

The devil doesn't need you to believe a lie. He just needs you to keep listening.

Blue Letter Bible Links

- [Genesis 3 \(KJV with Strong's\)](#)
- [nachash, serpent \(H5175\)](#)
- [arum, crafty \(H6175\)](#)
- [arom, naked \(H6174\)](#)
- [radah, have dominion \(H7287\)](#)
- [Elohim, God \(H430\)](#)
- [YHWH, LORD \(H3068\)](#)
- [Mark 7 \(KJV with Strong's\)](#)
- [Matthew 4 \(KJV with Strong's\)](#)
- [diabolos, devil, slanderer \(G1228\)](#)
- [peirazō, to test, to tempt \(G3985\)](#)
- [Satanas, Satan, adversary \(G4567\)](#)
- [harpagmos, a thing to be grasped \(G725\)](#)
- [topos, place, foothold \(G5117\)](#)

For Further Reading

- Derek Kidner, *Genesis* (Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries)
- Gordon Wenham, *Genesis 1-15* (Word Biblical Commentary)
- Victor Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1-17* (NICOT)
- Bruce Waltke, *Genesis: A Commentary*
- John Walton, *Genesis* (NIV Application Commentary) and *The Lost World of Adam and Eve*
- Michael Heiser, *The Unseen Realm*
- Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*
- R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (NICNT)
- D.A. Carson, *Matthew* (Expositor's Bible Commentary)
- Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, Book 4
- Augustine, *City of God*, Book 14
- *Pirkei Avot* (Mishnah, Ethics of the Fathers), chapter 1