


# Identifying the Serpent – A Brief Response

Steven J. Wallace  
Church of Christ, Sunnyside WA  
([www.RevelationAndCreation.com](http://www.RevelationAndCreation.com))

We are actually in agreement with 'about' everything Marty Pickup wrote in his Florida College discourse, "The Seed of Woman," about everything until page 61, that is.

The thing that really left a mark on my mind, as I write this response, was the frightening approach to scripture that Brother Pickup conveyed. He weighs the testimony of men and scholars, it seems, as something that would or could have influenced the views of those recording Holy Scripture. Rather than perceiving that the literal account had been passed down from Adam and then perverted throughout successive generations into mythical stories, he thinks that it was the mythical stories that influenced the inspired writers! That is astonishing! Mr. Pickup writes:

It is also worth considering that *the account* of these events may be, to some degree, accommodative and symbolic. Genesis may use the serpent motif because it is borrowing imagery from the mythological culture of that day regarding a cosmological foe of Deity. Old Testament writers commonly take features of well-known pagan myths and rework them in order to present the truth of Israelite monotheism. ("[Seed of Woman](#)") 

What a dangerous way to look at the scripture! Accusing men, moved by the Spirit to "rework" fables is preposterous! There are two ways in understanding scripture:

One, interpreting it by the opinions of the day – We have recently seen this with the days of Genesis controversy. Whatever the mainstream ideas of world-history are affects the way we view scripture. This is taking man's fallible ideas to the Bible; rather, we need to take the Bible to man. It results in nothing short of compromise of the Biblical record.

Two, accepting it for what it says and letting the scripture interpret its own scripture. This would allow the serpent to be just that, a serpent as God's word states. Satan worked through the serpent to deceive and distort God's word as he works through ministers who corrupt and confuse the clarity of scripture today or as God worked through a literal donkey to restrain Balaam, etc., etc.

When Jesus spoke on marriage (Matt. 19:3-9), he didn't rely on the views of men before Him, but rather, he restored God's law on the subject that would have been true from the beginning of time. The same is true with the apostles who spoke by the Spirit of God on any subject.

The natural reading of the Genesis scripture is that a literal serpent stood before a literal woman and challenged the Word of a literal God. Many today, like Eve are denying the word of God and *monkeying around* with the tree of knowledge. It was later in time that the Holy Spirit clearly identifies who the opposing being is

but that is no reason to reject the notion that Satan filled a literal serpent. That is no justification to invent that the writer of Genesis borrowed imagery from popular myths. Neither Paul nor John were 'guessing' or even 'concluding' who the serpent was. They wrote by infallible inspiration. The case should therefore be closed at that. Revelation came "in part" and we ought to look at the Bible as a whole rather than the works of men who were "reworking" the works and ideas of men into inspired testimony. Fundamentally, we would ask, 'what' inspired scripture? God or fable?

"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work."

2 Timothy 3:16, 17

Consider that God reveals more about hell in the NT than anywhere else, but shall we then reject a literal hell? What about heaven? What about the church? What about the death of Jesus. Why didn't God just tell Adam that now His only Son was going to have to die on a cross for sin? Because He reveals this truth in a fuller revelation later doesn't mean that we should cast a skeptical eye on the redemptive work of Christ, does it? But why should we be skeptical on the literal account of the serpent in Genesis 3? I think I know why and that is because there is an attack on the foundation of scripture that began with an atheistic current in or around about 1925 with the infamous *Scopes Trial* and now has culminated to a Noachian size deluge of the whole world which prefer to wash away our true understanding of history. Society and the church have become so 'evolutionized' with 'long ages' that we cannot accept Genesis (dinosaurs with man, no death before sin, world-wide flood, confusion of tongues, etc.) as literal even if Jesus and His apostles so stated. We must offer "worthwhile" alternative views to consider. . . views that have been created and coddled by people who long ago gave up the ghost when it comes to respecting the authority of the scriptures. If the first temptation and sin are surrounded with fable, then so is the payment for such a thing. If the Garden was fiction and "very good" world of Genesis 1:31 was really not that "good," then we have God restoring such fiction and fantasy and such an impoverished and weak system when Jesus returns (cf. Acts 3:21). In order to have a restoration, there must have been something good to be restored—a world without sin, suffering, death, pain, etc. If the tree that Adam and Eve ate of was merely a symbol and not literal, then the tree Jesus died on was equally a mere icon. If the serpent wasn't real, then why should we think the temptation, the sin, the woman, the garden, etc. were real? If the Tempter was not in a literal serpent, why should we think the Savior was in a literal body?

But the serpent was real. He was cursed to crawl on his belly and eat the dust of the earth. Such is not true of the spirit, Satan, but is true of literal serpent. Satan didn't take the form of a serpent, but entered one to deceive Eve. This should be no surprise as demons have entered the bodies of man and animals. In the Garden Satan entered a serpent. In the New Testament, Legion entered a heard

of swine. These swine suffered the consequence of death as they ran down a cliff (see Mk. 5:10-13). We ought not question Mark's account and think that he thinking that it is symbolical and merely borrowed from the "mythological culture of the day." Rather, Satan's encounter with Eve in the Garden was just as historical as his encounter with Christ in the wilderness (Matt. 4:1ff).

As per Marty's brief comments about Leviathan; it was not the stories and mythology that created Leviathan, it was God that created Leviathan from which man's imaginations and exaggerations came to produce myths. Leviathan was real, "There the ships sail about; there is that Leviathan which You have made to play there" (Ps. 104:26). Leviathan is as real as ships are! That is not to say that a Bible writer may not use Leviathan as a symbol in a context of prophesy, but one cannot deny that the scripture speaks of Leviathan in the real sense. If God made Behemoth with man (Job. 40:15) then Leviathan is real also (41:1ff). John used "dragon" in Revelation 12, but that doesn't mean that dragons were fiction any more than "woman," "male Child," "throne," "sun," "moon," or "stars" were. These were all real things but used as a sign to denote something deeper and less obvious. John's "original" readers may have visualized a Leviathan when reading chapter 12.

I have no mischievous spirit against brother Pickup. I had always looked up to him and respected him and enjoyed hearing him preach. He was an influence on me in my younger days just before I went into preaching. But my fellowship with any Christian is first and foremost base on their relationship with God's word. If they are in the business of "decoding" and "mythologizing" scripture then we will stand opposed to each other.

With this in mind comes the exhortation from the apostle of love, "Beloved, do not believe ever spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world" (1 Jn. 4:1). And then Paul writes, "But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ" (2 Cor. 11:3). It is evident that the Serpent of old is still working on deceiving people today. Revelation 12:9, "So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him." Revelation 20:2, "He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years."

Steven J. Wallace  
October 7, 2003