

GENESIS
Chapter 3:1

Technical Notes of Matthew Henry

Now the serpent was more subtle than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, He shall not eat of every tree of the garden?

We have here an account of the temptation with which Satan assaulted our first parents, to draw them into sin, and which proved fatal to them. Here observe,

I. The tempter, and that was the devil, in the shape and likeness of a serpent.

It is certain it was the devil that beguiled Eve. The devil and Satan is the old serpent (Rev. 12:9), a malignant spirit, by creation an angel of light and an immediate attendant upon God's throne, but by sin become an apostate from his first state and a rebel against God's crown and dignity. Multitudes of the angels fell; but this that attacked our first parents was surely the prince of the devils, the ring-leader in the rebellion: no sooner was he a sinner than he was a Satan, no sooner a traitor than a tempter, as one enraged against God and his glory and envious of man and his happiness. He knew he could not destroy man but by debauching him. Balaam could not curse Israel, but he could tempt Israel, Rev. 2:14. The game therefore which Satan had to play was to draw our first parents to sin, and so to separate between them and their God. Thus the devil was, from the beginning, a murderer, and the great mischief-maker. The whole race of mankind had here, as it were, but one neck, and at that Satan struck. The adversary and enemy is that wicked one.

It was the devil in the likeness of a serpent. Whether it was only the visible shape and appearance of a serpent (as some think those were of which we read, Exod. 7:12), or whether it was a real living serpent, actuated and possessed by the devil, is not certain: by God's permission it might be either. The devil chose to act his part in a serpent, (1.) Because it is a specious creature, has a spotted dappled skin, and then went erect. Perhaps it was a flying serpent, which seemed to come from on high as a messenger from the upper world, one of the seraphim; for the fiery serpents were flying, Isa. 14:29. Many a dangerous temptation comes to us in gay fine colours that are but skin-deep, and seems to come from above; for Satan can seem an angel of light. And, (2.) Because it is a subtle creature; this is here taken notice of. Many instances are given of the subtlety of the serpent, both to do mischief and to secure himself in it when it is done. We are directed to be wise as serpents. But this serpent, as actuated by the devil, was no doubt more subtle than any other; for the devil, though he has lost the sanctity, retains the sagacity of an angel, and is wise to do evil. He knew of more advantage by making use of the serpent than we are aware of. Observe, There is not anything by which the devil serves himself and his own interest more than by unsanctified subtlety. What Eve thought of this serpent speaking to her we are not likely to tell, when I believe she herself did not know what to think of it. At first, perhaps, she supposed it might be a good angel, and yet, afterwards, she might suspect something amiss. It is remarkable that the Gentile idolaters did many of them worship the devil in the shape and form of a serpent, thereby avowing their adherence to that apostate spirit, and wearing his colours.

II. The person tempted was the woman now alone, and at a distance from her husband, but near the forbidden tree. It was the devil's subtlety,

1. To assault the weaker vessel with his temptations. Though perfect in her kind, yet we may suppose her inferior to Adam in knowledge, and strength, and presence of mind. Some think Eve received the command, not immediately from God, but at second hand by her husband, and therefore might the more easily be persuaded to discredit it.

2. It was his policy to enter into discourse with her when she was alone. Had she kept close to the side out of which she was lately taken, she would not have been so much exposed. There are many temptations to which solitude gives great advantage; but the communion of saints contributes much to their strength and safety.

3. He took advantage by finding her near the forbidden tree, and probably gazing upon the fruit of it, only to satisfy her curiosity. Those that would not eat the forbidden fruit must not come near the forbidden tree. *Avoid it, pass not by it, Prov. 4:15.*

4. Satan tempted Eve, that by her he might tempt Adam; so he tempted Job by his wife, and Christ by Peter. It is his policy to send temptations by unsuspected hands, and theirs that have most interest in us and influence upon us.

III. The temptation itself, and the artificial management of it. We are often, in scripture, told of our danger by the temptations of Satan, his *devices* (2 Cor. 2:11), his *depths* (Rev. 2:24), his *wiles* (Eph. 6:11). The greatest instances we have of them are in his tempting of the two Adams, here, and Matt. 4. In this he prevailed, but in that he was baffled. What he spoke *to* them, of whom he had no hold by any corruption in them, he speaks *in* us by our own deceitful hearts and their carnal reasonings; this makes his assaults on us less discernible, but not less dangerous. That which the devil aimed at was to persuade Eve to eat forbidden fruit; and, to do this, he took the same method that he does still. He questioned whether it was a sin or no, *v. 1*. He denied that there was any danger in it, *v. 4*. He suggested much advantage by it, *v. 5*. And these are his common topics.

He questioned whether it was a sin or no to eat of this tree, and whether really the fruit of it was forbidden. Observe,

He said to the woman, Yea, hath God said, You shall not eat? The first word intimated something said before, introducing this, and with which it is connected, perhaps some discourse Eve had with herself, which Satan took hold of, and grafted this question upon. In the chain of thoughts one thing strangely brings in another, and perhaps something bad at last. Observe here, (1.) He does not discover [make known] his design at first, but puts a question which seemed innocent: "I hear a piece of news, pray is it true? has God forbidden you to eat of this tree?" Thus he would begin a discourse, and draw her into a parley. Those that would be safe have need to be suspicious, and shy of talking with the tempter. (2.) He quotes the command fallaciously, as if it were a prohibition, not only of that tree but of all. God had said, *Of every tree you may eat, except one*. He, by aggravating the exception, endeavours to invalidate the concession: *Hath God said, You shall not eat of every tree?* The divine law cannot be reproached unless it be first misrepresented. (3.) He seems to speak it tauntingly, upbraiding the woman with her shyness of meddling with that tree; as if he had said, "You are so nice and cautious, and so very precise, because God has said, You shall not eat." The devil, as he is a liar, so he is a scoffer, from the beginning: and the scoffers of the last days are his children. (4.) That which he aimed at in the first onset was to take off her sense of the obligation of the command. "Surely

you are mistaken, it cannot be that God should tie you out from this tree; he would not do so unreasonable a thing." See here, That it is the subtlety of Satan to blemish the reputation of the divine law as uncertain or unreasonable, and so to draw people to sin; and that it is therefore our wisdom to keep up a firm belief of, and a high respect for, the command of God. Has God said, "You shall not lie, nor take his name in vain, nor be drunk," &c. "Yes, I am sure he has, and it is well said, and by his grace I will abide by it, whatever the tempter suggests to the contrary."