

The Devil Made You Do What?
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Genesis 2:15-17, 3:1-7

¹⁵ And the Lord God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it. ¹⁶ And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: ¹⁷ But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.

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? ² And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: ³ 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. ⁴ And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: ⁵ For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil. ⁶ And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat. ⁷ And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons.

The Devil Made Me Do It.

Really?

Have you ever said that? Have you ever thought it? Why? Where did that idea come from?

Based on Sunday school lessons, pastors and most Christians, I always attributed this saying only to Eve's interaction with the serpent in our reading from Genesis. When confronted by God for eating the fruit, Eve blamed the serpent because the serpent was really the devil and it tricked Eve, thus leading to the fall of humanity.

Is that all there is to the saying, "the Devil made me do it?" I thought, "no, that's too simple. There also must be some folklore or histories that may have used "Eve and the serpent," as a

core nugget, but modified it or adapted it over the last “however many thousands of years...” So, I naturally did some Googling and searching the Internet, “what is the etymology of the phrase, ‘the devil made me do it.’ How did it originate and how has it changed and/or been used over time?” To my surprise, I found only two “answers.”

- The character of Geraldine Jones
 - The Flip Wilson show; late ‘60’s - early ‘70’s. Flip Wilson, played a character named, Geraldine Jones who was constantly misbehaving, crossing the line and violating her conscience. The explanation she always had for her behavior was, “the devil made me do it.”
 - I searched for Geraldine Jones on YouTube – she was quite funny.
- And of course, Eve and the Serpent. Those are the only two discussion points for researching “the devil made me do it.”
 - Would it surprise you that the idea of “the devil made me do it,” is a Christian idea, not a Jewish one.

You might ask, how can that be? The Eve and serpent story is in Genesis, the first book of the Old Testament, the Torah – **THE** Hebrew scriptures. It’s right there!

For Jews, the serpentis just a serpent, a snake, that’s it. Well, not simply a snake, it is a talking snake after all.

In the New Testament texts there are references to the devil and Satan, but not in the same way in the Old Testament. In the New Testament, Satan/the Devil is an independent, evil and malevolent adversary of humans – that’s in fact what Devil means (diabolos – adversary); a fallen angel (Luke 8:12), the devil serpent is created by God (Rev 12:9), and the one who **makes** Judas Iscariot betray Jesus (John 13:2). But in the Old Testament it is “God who holds the power over good and evil. Whatever the serpent is and whatever it does is of God.

- [From Isaiah 45:7 it says,] ‘I form light and create darkness, make prosperity and create doom; I am the Lord, who does all these things.’
- [From 2 Samuel 24:1] ‘The Lord burned with anger against Israel again, and [the Lord] incited David against them; Go and count the people of Israel and Judah.’¹
- A prime example is in the book of Job. “One day the divine beings came to present themselves to the Lord, and the Adversary (Satan) also came among them. The Lord said to Satan, “Where did you come from?” Satan said, “From wandering throughout the earth. The Lord said to Satan, ‘Have you thought about my servant Job...’” (1:6-8).
 - Taking Job at face value, it is God who appears to be cunning and crafty, offering a leading question to the devil.

Another perspective - consider Balaam and his donkey (Numbers 22:21-39). The donkey sees the angel of the Lord, when Balaam cannot. The donkey eventually speaks **only** because the Lord “opened the donkey’s mouth.” Do we say that the donkey is anything but a donkey? Is the

¹ Garst, Karen. The Faithless Feminist. Oct 15, 2015.

donkey really a benevolent angel? Is the donkey goodness? Is it anything more than a donkey? No. It's a donkey; not good or bad; and it happens to speak in that moment **because of God**.

This story opens up so many discussions about God and good and evil.

According to Hebrew texts, God controls good AND evil. It's not that God is good and the devil is evil. God is in control of it all. In the New Testament, evil/Satan becomes separate from God, beyond/outside of God's control. From the Jewish perspective, we couldn't say, "the Devil made it do it, but rather, God made me do it." Hmmmmm....

The serpent is described as the most cunning ...or more intelligent or crafty than any other wild animal that the Lord God had made. If the serpent is **more** cunning or even **the most** cunning, then logically that would mean other animals and beasts were cunning or crafty as well, just less so. To be cunning means to "have or show skill in achieving one's ends by deceit or evasion." Does having the characteristic or trait of "cunning" automatically qualify one as evil? I'm sure we've all known or heard of someone who was cunning, and it wasn't derogatory, but offered as a somewhat positive attribute. How cunning must an animal or person be to cross that invisible threshold from cunning as good to cunning as evil? Cunning may be a *questionable* trait, but I think that depends on **how** one utilizes that skill.

So, when looking at Eve and the serpent in Genesis, it is WE who conclude that the serpent is actually "the devil" and more than just a snake in the grass.

The fall; humanity's transition from innocent obedience to guilty disobedience, is Eve's fault because "the devil made her do it." This passage is fascinating because there are so many questions. Questions for and about Eve, the serpent, Adam and God.

As Genesis chapter 3 opens, Adam and Eve are hanging out and the cunning and crafty snake saunters over to Eve...

- Why did the snake talk to Eve and not Adam?
 - Maybe it's because God made Eve (2:22) AFTER God told Adam to not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (2:17).
 - There's nothing to support it, but should we even consider that maybe Adam isn't there? It's just Eve and the serpent.

The snake asks, "Did God say, "You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?"

- We already ask, "Why is the snake talking in the first place?"
 - If you're the first male and female created, is it so unusual that a snake would talk? Probably not, but we think it is - remember...context, context, context...we can't

forget ...*that* time, that place, those circumstances. We can't simply apply our 21st century knowledge to that moment and exclude all of the context!

- Is this the first time the snake is speaking to Eve or Adam? Was there any previous conversation, before this question? If it's a first conversation, WHY is the snake asking this question at all? So, out of the blue, like the example in Job with God asking the devil, "Have you considered my servant Job?"
 - Unfortunately, we're not given more details...we think to ourselves, if we had more information, we could make better decisions, perhaps understand better.
 - So, we conclude that this must be what's important for us to know. All other conversation between the snake and Adam and Eve, if there was any, is unimportant.
 - If we put this transcript before a lawyer today, she'd say that the snake's question is leading and manipulative – very cunning.
 - THIS WHOLE INTERACTION BETWEEN EVE AND THE SERPENT IS A TEXTBOOK CASE IN THE LAW - HOW TO EFFECTIVELY INTERROGATE SOMEONE AND HOW TO RESPOND TO AN INTERROGATION...

- Eve responds, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden, but not the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden, NOR MAY WE TOUCH IT, or we will die."
 - Is that what God said?
 - Did God say you may not TOUCH the tree?
 - There's no evidence that God said that, but Eve tells the serpent that's what God said. Why? Why would Eve exaggerate and make God's rule MORE restrictive than it really was? What she said was true and not true – that "touching part" was technically, a lie.
 - Perhaps *over-speaking* is what became problematic for Eve and created the opening for the serpent to think – aha, I've got her! Remember in the book of James (5:12) that we are instructed to let our yes, be yes and our no, be no. Do not swear oaths unto heaven or earth. It's similar to what I learned in business; under promise-over deliver.
 - But...there are those moments in our lives when we try to defend an argument so vehemently that we perhaps step over the line just a bit. Exaggerate. A little hyperbole. We need to remember that there is no need to misrepresent God's word, it will stand on its own.
 - There is a belief that by "extending" God's command from not eating to also not touching, Eve created an additional protective barrier for herself, but also out of respect for God. Eve may have added "do not touch," out of such awe for God – I will honor God so much that I will not only not EAT the fruit, but I won't TOUCH it either.

- The serpent then says, "Surely, you shall not die; for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."
 - What did Adam and Eve understand about death? When God said to Adam, "for in the day that you eat of it you shall die...." did Adam *know* what death meant or just

that “death = bad.” Did they understand death in the same way we do? We are fallen human beings, can we relate and truly understand Adam and Eve’s perspective?

- Why doesn’t Eve ask any questions of the serpent? She’s being interrogated but why can’t it be a conversation?
 - “How do you know this?”
 - “If that’s true, why would God tell you something different than what God told us?”
 - “If eating the fruit makes one like God, why aren’t you eating the fruit?”

We then read that Eve sees the tree of knowledge of good and evil.... she see the fruit

- as good for food
- as delightful to look at
- as desirable to become wise

These “new” perspectives are all because of the information she gets from the serpent...

So she eats.

She shares with Adam.

Everything changes.

I want to say to Eve...

- Why did you trust the serpent? God is your creator. The snake is a wild animal created by God. Why would you put the same kind of trust in the serpent that you put in God?
- Why didn’t you go to God and ask some questions?
 - Yo, God, what’s the story?
 - Why is the serpent saying that we won’t die, but you say we will?
 - Why can’t we know about good and evil like you?
 - What does he know that we don’t?

How do we think God would have responded to Eve had she gone to God with questions?

First, think about Jesus and Thomas. “Doubting Thomas” wasn’t branded as evil or flawed for saying that he wanted proof of Jesus’s resurrection. Even after providing Thomas what he needed, Jesus still loved him, but commented on how wonderful and freeing it is when one doesn’t need proof to believe.

Would God have been mad with Eve? In my experience, I grew up being told, “Don’t question the Lord your God!” Asking questions of God was sinful and meant that I had no faith. It would in fact make God mad.

I think there are many people who are taught just that, but how does such an attitude contribute to a healthy and authentic relationship with God? Believe and have faith, but you’re never allowed to ask any questions? That’s too cult-ish for me. God wants to talk with us, listen

to us, hear our prayers, share our joys and our struggles. Being able to say to God, “I have doubts and I need your help” or to ask God, “Why?” is a vital and wonderful part of such a relationship.

I can imagine God responding to Eve with love and gentleness, helping her to understand in a way that would have been clear and simple. In Isaiah 1:18 it says, “Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.” How wonderful and freeing it must be to know that one can talk and reason with God? It’s a radical idea.

When questioned by God, Adam said, “Eve made me do it”

- Really, Adam? Where were you when the serpent was interrogating Eve? You knew just as well as Eve that neither of you were to eat from the tree, so why didn’t you step in and tell the snake to back off? Eve didn’t need protecting, but she could have used a supportive partner.
- And when Eve offered you the fruit, why did you take it? You could have said, no. You could have actually talked with her and ask her why she was doing it and why she wanted you to join her. Take responsibility for your own actions, Adam!

When questioned by God, Eve said, “The serpent made me do it”

- Ok, Eve, let’s be honest. What exactly did the serpent do? The serpent asked you leading questions that caused you to have questions. There’s technically nothing wrong with that. You got more information and ran with it before verifying it.

In today’s Internet age, we can understand that information isn’t bad, it’s just dangerous. Information can be factual or false. Information can be overwhelming. Having access to information is a double-edge sword, good if you verify and confirm it, but bad if you believe everything you read. It’s called Fake News and gaslighting. These aren’t new concepts. It’s been happening for millennia; people and groups providing inaccurate and/or distorted information – planting a question or seed of doubt.

Eve was gaslighted – taken in by fake news.

We all have. We’ve all jumped on a story or idea that seemed right or was just enough of a question to make us lose all sense of ourselves and not only start believing wrong information, but acting upon it and even espousing it. That’s why there is an upsurge in articles and even classes on how to spot fake news.

The devil didn’t MAKE Eve do anything. The serpent provided information, some true and some false. Was it done maliciously? Yes – it’s not hard to reach that conclusion. We can ask many questions about the minutiae in this story, but it’s clear that the serpent wasn’t “just innocently chatting up Eve.” There were ulterior motives.

It's how Eve acted with the new information that's at question here....and it's not accurate to say, "The Devil Made Me Do it."

According to psychologist, Jennifer Kunst, "We fare better in life when we can take more and more responsibility for ourselves—when we can own the good, the bad, and the ugly when it belongs to us. We have very little power to influence our lives for the better when we imagine we have no part in our troubles. But when we own our own stuff, we have the chance to make a change for the better. We Adams and Eves have been trying to figure that one out for a very long time." ²

It's strange when you think about it, but the serpent kind of gets a bad rap, as well. We read Genesis and Eve's encounter with the snake and automatically vilify the cunning serpent, but remember, just because the serpent is cunning, it's not necessarily a bad thing.

In the gospel, of Matthew chapter 10, Jesus called his 12 disciples together, gives them power against unclean spirits and to heal sickness and disease. Jesus sent them out to heal, to preach and share the word of God. "I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves; be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves."

May we be as wise as serpents.

Amen.

² "Projection 101: The Devil Made Me Do It." 10/18/11 – www.psychologytoday.com