

The Nachash (נָחָשׁ) and His Seed: Some Explanatory Notes on Why the “Serpent” in Genesis 3 Wasn’t a Serpent

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As readers of *The Façade* already know, my view of the fall narrative in Genesis 3 is quite different than the usual theological or exegetical fare. As different as it is, it is based on (1) sound Hebrew grammar; (2) the context of the Hebrew Bible’s descriptions of Eden with the vocabulary of the meeting place of the divine council in wider ancient near eastern terms and motifs (see the earlier newsletter issue with that specific PDF file); and (3) sound reasoning that springs from the first two considerations. In that regard, my explanation provides a coherent answer for why Eve was not at all surprised that a “serpent” (a *nachash*)¹ was speaking to her.

In this lesson, I’d like to lay out in more detail, with at least a little visual help, my translation of the word in Gen. 3 usually translated “serpent” in Genesis 3 – *hannachash* (הַנָּחָשׁ). I’ll also trace a few references to the “seed” of *hannachash* in the Old Testament. Some of what follows will be familiar, as my goal is to try and tie a few ends together a bit more tightly for readers.

The Translation of the Word הַנָּחָשׁ

The Hebrew word הַנָּחָשׁ is actually an adjective (נָחָשׁ; meaning “bright”, “brazen [as in shiny brass]) with the prefixed article (הַ - the word “the” in Hebrew). Thus the word is formed נָחָשׁ + הַ for הַנָּחָשׁ (a dot is added in the second letter from the right when an article is attached). The whole word then, in the Hebrew text is הַנָּחָשׁ, *hannachash* (*nachash* is pronounced “nakash”).

What is different about this approach is that I view the base word, *nachash*, as an adjective, not a noun. The **NOUN** spelled *nachash* in Hebrew can mean: snake / serpent or one who practices of divination. The adjective means “bright, brazen” and is itself the base word for other nouns in Hebrew, like “shining brass” - נְחֹשֶׁת (n^echoshet). In

¹ For sake of clarity for non-Hebrew readers, I will not use all the technically correct transliteration symbols and diacritical marks).

Hebrew grammar, it is not unusual for an adjective to be “converted” for use as a noun (the proper word is “substantivized”).² A common example would be “holy one” (with or without the article). If we take שִׁהַרְרָה as deriving from the adjective rather than as a noun, the translation becomes “the shining one”, which is quite in concert with descriptions of the satan figure in the Old Testament. For example, in Isa 14:12-15, he is called Helel ben-shachar – “The shining one, son of the dawn.” Elsewhere, divine beings are described as “shining” or luminous, even by use of the adjective שִׁהַרְרָה. For example:

Daniel 10

⁴Now on the twenty-fourth day of the first month, as I was by the side of the great river, that is, the Tigris, ⁵I lifted my eyes and looked, and behold, a certain man clothed in linen, whose waist was girded with gold of Uphaz! ⁶His **body was like beryl, his face like the appearance of lightning, his eyes like torches of fire, his arms and feet like burnished bronze** (נְהַרְרָה ; *n^echoshet*) in color, and the sound of his words like the voice of a multitude.

Personally, I tend to think that, in light of the serpentine appearance of divine beings in Yahweh’s presence (see that PDF file), what we have in Genesis 3 is wordplay using all the meanings of the שִׁהַרְרָה semantic range. **That is, Eve was not talking to a snake. She was speaking to an bright, shining upright being who was serpentine in appearance, and who was trying to bewitch her with lies.** She was in the presence of one of the sons of God, beings who had free will, who were more powerful than mere angels, whom humanity was created “a little lower” (Psalm 8:4-5; the phrase usually translated as “a little lower than the angels” is actually “a little lower than the *elohim* in the Hebrew text).³ She was speaking to a member of the divine council who did not share Yahweh’s enthusiasm for his new creation, humankind, to whom Yahweh had just given rule over the planet (Gen 1:26-27). These mere humans were—as the “lesser *elohim*” had been previously—created as Yahweh’s image (“let US”... “OUR” in Gen 1:26-27), to rule the cosmos for Yahweh, and earth – at least until humanity was fashioned. In this last regard, I share the view of certain lines of Jewish tradition that teach the “serpent’s” motive for seducing Eve was jealousy at humanity’s “appointment” as

² See B. Waltke and M. O’Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 261-262.

³ See the previous PDFs on the divine council in the Hebrew Bible for all the context for these statements.

supreme authority under Yahweh on earth – as opposed to the sons of God getting that job.

What about the curse of the "serpent"?

This is a common question put against my view – the notion that the curse of the nachash makes no sense in my view. I think the opposite is true.

Naturally, as the reader can tell, I take the fall event literally. I think the curses, on the other hand, are metaphorical and point to a cosmic "literality" rather than an earthly one.

Note the text:

¹⁴ So the LORD God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this,

"Cursed are you above [more than] all the livestock
and all the wild animals!

You will crawl on your belly
and you will eat dust
all the days of your life.

¹⁵ And I will put enmity
between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and hers;
he will crush your head,
and you will strike his heel."

My view of the curse in simple terms is that, as the *nachash* desired to vaunt himself above all created things on earth (and above the other created elohim, the "stars of God" – cf. Isa. 14:12-15; Job 38:7-10), and above the apex of that creation, humanity, so God turns the tables on him. He will now be placed under humanity's authority, who also governs the animals. He's going to be put on the bottom of the barrel of created things, so to speak.

I view this as eschatological – it is not true now, since the kingdom of God—which will be administered by a HUMAN, God incarnated in Jesus Christ, and by HUMANS – those of us who will, in Paul's words "rule over angels" (I Cor. 6). When the kingdom comes, the *nachash* will be put in his place.

In some sense, as Bible students know, the kingdom is already here. It was inaugurated at Jesus' first coming ("the kingdom of God is in your midst"; Col. 1:13 – we HAVE BEEN TRANSFERRED [past tense] into the kingdom of his dear son"), and will be fully consummated in the future at his return. Note the reference to the kingdom in Isaiah 65:25 –

The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like the bullock: and dust shall be the **serpent's** (nachash) meat. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, saith the LORD.

Why is it that the members of the animal kingdom are at peace and the effects of the fall are reversed EXCEPT FOR THE NACHASH? Because the reference to the serpent "eating dust" here hearkens back to Genesis 3 and reminds us that the ultimate FULFILLMENT of the curse is at the kingdom's culmination.

I also think this is a preferable understanding to a literal curse on a snake primarily because the curse on the woman—whose seed is at odds with the seed of the *nachash*—is the messiah (cf. Gal.3). The ultimate outcome of the curse is tied to the messiah's reign – and OUR reign with him as messiah's seed.

My view also makes more sense than the traditional view in that:

- 1) Not all women fear snakes.
- 2) There is no indication that snakes had limbs and walked upright and talked prior to the fall. This has been read into the passage "of necessity" by some who are not aware of the many divine council terms and motifs that clearly demonstrate the Eden incident concerns a confrontation against Yahweh and his human imagers from within the divine council.
- 3) What would the *nachash's* "seed" be if this referred to a literal snake? If this is in fact a shining divine being, then it makes eminent sense that the "counter seed" that would arise to oppose and kill off the seed of the woman (both in terms of godly humans and the ultimate seed, the messiah) would be an actual genealogical line that would be evil in origin – which is exactly what we see in Genesis 6:1-4. The activity of the fallen sons of God is juxtaposed with the thorough corruption of all human lineages (except Noah's), and the slate must be wiped clean. It's all about preserving bloodlines and "hybrid"

bloodlines. As readers of my PDF material on “demonic geography” in the Old testament know, the offspring of the sons of God—the nephilim and other giant clans—show up in very interesting places in the OT, and references to them in other texts (like that from Ugarit) show inextricably link them to the netherworld, the Canaanite hell.

A few notes on the “seed” of the *Nachash* Outside Genesis 6

In my PDF file on serpentine beings I noted the following passage:

Isaiah 14:29

Rejoice not thou, whole Palestina, because the rod of him that smote thee is broken: for out of the **serpent's** (*nachash*) root shall come forth a cockatrice, and his fruit shall be a fiery flying **serpent** (*saraph* me^copheph; שָׂרָף מְעוֹפֵף).

My treatment at that time concerned the serpentine appearance of the seraphim, and went as follows:

“In putting these features together, let’s return first to Isaiah 30:6. In that text, the flying serpents come from the Negev, that desert area between Palestine and Egypt. These were either real animals, or the term denoted some type of spiritual (cosmic) enemy. The latter seems preferable, since throughout the ancient world certain deities were described in such terms (flying serpents), and there is no such flying animal.¹ The term could also be used of human enemies, as is implied by the other reference to flying serpents above, Isaiah 14:29:

This passage is noteworthy on several levels. Three times the enemy of Israel, the “chosen seed” (cf. Genesis 3:15ff.) is described in serpentine terms. The “root” or “seed” (offspring, in Hebrew idiom) is described as the root of the *nachash*. Readers of *The Façade* will instantly recognize this being as the one in the garden of Eden who seduced Adam and Eve. In *The Façade*, I argue that the “serpent” (Hebrew, *nachash*) in the Eden story of Genesis 3 was not a snake – it was a divine being, a rebel of the divine council, which met in Eden, the garden of God.² God curses all parties concerned at the Fall in Genesis 3. One of the curses involves the “seed” of the *nachash* being bitterly opposed (a perpetual enemy) of the “seed” of the woman (Eve). The seed of the woman is obviously humanity (and ultimately, the Messiah; cf. Gal. 3:16). Who are the seed of the *nachash*? They are both the

original enemies of the divinely chosen seed of the godly (Noah), produced by fallen divine beings in Genesis 6:1-4. These offspring are called the *nephilim* (giants) and *gibborim* (mighty warriors). The *nephilim* and / or *gibborim* produce succeeding generations of enemies of God's chosen seed (Israel). It is no mistake that Moses and Joshua and their armies continually run into these descendants (like the *Anakim*; cf. Deuteronomy 3 and Numbers 13). Later enemies, like the Philistines spoken of in Isaiah 14:29 above, are logically referred to as the "seed of the *nachash*" (recall Goliath the giant was a Philistine, and a descendant of one the *nephilim* lines).

The meaning behind this, as I see it, is that Israel's enemies would be descendants of the reptilian / serpentine beings who seduced human women in Genesis 6."

The point of this is not to say that the enemies of Israel were all reptilian beings – though "flying seraphim" ("angelic beings") may have been referenced as having been involved from time to time. The point is that the nephilim bloodlines continued (in some form – noted by gigantism back then) and those bloodlines were in perpetual antagonism to Israelites.

Readers of certain portions of my book *Islam and Armageddon* will also recall this verse:

Genesis 49:17 - Dan will be a serpent by the roadside, a viper along the path, that bites the horse's heels so that its rider tumbles backward.

This text is one of the most frequently appealed texts in rabbinical debates about the identity of the great eschatological enemy of Israel from the north (in Christian parlance, the Antichrist; cf. Daniel 11). Recalling my notes there, Dan was a tribe whose territory in part coincided with the region of Bashan:

Deut. 33:22 - About Dan he said: "Dan is a lion's cub, springing out of **Bashan**."

Bashan was a place noted in both the Hebrew Bible and Ugaritic as a nephilim stronghold (cf. Num 21, 32; Deut. 3; Josh.9). In Hebrew, Bashan is spelled:

בַּשָּׁן - (reading right to left: ך (n) ש (sh) ב (b); = bshn, "Bashan" with vowels)

In Ugaritic, the place name "Bashan" is spelled (left to right): B – th – n (**Bathan**). Ugaritic often interchanges the "sh" sound of Hebrew words with "th" in its own semitic dialect. Interestingly—and significantly—"Bathan" in the Ugaritic language is the word for "**serpent**". Bashan was the place of the serpent, or seed of the serpent, the nephilim offspring, just as the Old Testament describes.⁴

Since Bashan is NORTH of Israel (and "north" in Hebrew and Ugaritic was Zaphon / Tsaphon⁵ respectively, the place of Baal's abode from where he ruled the Ugaritic divine council), the rabbis connected the northern locale / "foe from the north" motif in the OT (Dan 11; Ezek. 38-39)/ serpent seed ideas to come up with the notion that the great eschatological foe would come from the tribe of Dan (or region of Dan).

All of this coheres within my own view of Genesis 3, not if Eve was threatened by a literal snake.

⁴ For a fascinating article on this, see the entry for "Bashan" in the Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible (Eerdmans, 1999), 2nd revised edition.

⁵ See the PDF on the divine council meeting place for this and other terms.