

DID GOD ACTUALLY SAY?
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Please read Genesis 3:1-5.

- (1) Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, “*Did God actually say*, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden’?”
- (2) And the woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden,
- (3) but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.’”
- (4) But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die.
- (5) For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”

In the whole history of recorded thought the small phrase uttered by the serpent “did God actually say” is surely the most consequential. Hidden within this seemingly innocent question was a Pandora’s box full of blasphemous errors and destructive evil. “Did God *actually* say” conveys a host of assumptions motivated by envy, mutiny, and cynicism. The audacity and arrogance implicit in this question are difficult to imagine.

With this inquiry the snake got his proverbial “foot in the door” within Adam and Eve’s mind and heart. He inserted just enough doubt and confusion to suggest the idea that God could and should be questioned. The serpent insinuated that the creator’s perspective was skewed and in dire need of correction. Subtly, he positioned Adam and Eve to judge between himself and Yahweh Elōhîm. He asked them to heed his words instead of God’s.

The snake declared to her: “You will *not* surely die.” He urged Eve to hesitate no more and to embrace impunity and a serpent-like attitude. He soothed her fears of God’s retribution and gave her permission to eat and violate God’s covenant. One commentator summarizes the snake’s strategy: “It is noteworthy that the serpent never tells the woman to transgress God’s prohibition. He simply calls into question both God’s truthfulness (by denying his warning) and trustworthiness (by impugning his motives), and leaves the woman to draw her own conclusions.”

The snake’s declaration: “You will not surely die” was also a blatant contradiction of God’s words in 2:17. In effect, he accused God of lying. Yahweh Elōhîm was holding back on them, the serpent argued, and withholding his greatest blessing, specifically a kind of knowing that would make them “like God.”

By utilizing the language from Gen 1:26-28 of image and likeness (“like God”) the snake urged them to re-imagine themselves apart from their creator. The serpent redefined them within his worldview by stripping the concept of the divine image from its setting in Eden. He inspired them to align themselves with the serpent as the *imago Satanas* (image of Satan), rather than the *imago Dei* (image of God).

The serpent assumed a skeptical position to evaluate God’s command for Adam and Eve. From this position he proposed a critical assessment of God’s motives and goodness. His question to Eve presupposed that God was malfeasant. The benevolent serpent, on the other hand, came to Adam and Eve to set the record straight for their own good. He invited them to embrace his twisted mentality, motivation, and mannerisms – and he succeeded.

“The god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God” (2 Cor 4:4).