

“The Serpent’s Scheme” – Genesis 3:1-5

Messiah Bible Church – October 21, 2026 - Adam Casalino

Introduction: Judas Goats

I’m not much of a farmer. Really, I’m not a farmer at all. But I do know a lot about politics. And there’s something that overlaps both farming and politics. Do you know what it is? *Not manure...* Okay, two things that overlap! It’s a little known phenomenon called *Judas goats*.

A Judas goat is trained to herd the other animals. It has a calm, assertive demeanor and with it, wins the trust of the herd. A Judas goat is used to lead the other goats to places they don’t normally want to go. Namely, the slaughter house. The other goats happily follow their leader, blissfully unaware that they are being led to their demise. As the herd is turned into chopped meat, the Judas goat knows a secret way out and goes back to the farm.

Like that, there is a political beast known as the Judas goat. By all appearances, they are a trusted member of a political party. Their loyalty is beyond question. They are even consulted on important decisions. Yet, unbeknownst to the group, this “Judas goat” is working to undermine them. He is providing advice that will eventually lead to the party’s destruction.

Some of you are thinking right now, “Oh! *That’s* why our country’s in such a mess!” There may be Judas goats at work today... but you’ll never know who they are. Not even their closest allies know. Because they’re *that* good at deception. Even the bad advice they give is disseminated through other people, so nobody suspects them.

You might be wondering what it takes to be a Judas goat. How can someone be that effective at leading people astray? They must be incredible actors, the most charming and charismatic people around. Maybe. But there is one quality all Judas goats have that make them so effective, and deadly.

Satan: The Master Deceiver

Now, all Judas goats take their cues from the original master deceiver. The “Father of lies,” our spiritual adversary, Satan. He has been deceiving humanity for thousands of years, working around the clock to keep people in darkness. And the moment you gave your life to Jesus Christ, you became his “Enemy Number One.”

Satan is out to destroy you. He will do whatever it takes to ruin your life. So, you need to know what his intentions are and how he goes about accomplishing those intentions, so you know how you to stop him.

Satan's intentions for you follow a twofold pattern:

1. First, he tempts you to sin.
2. Second, after you sin, he accuses you of that sin, so you'll feel condemned.

Once condemned, you'll feel alienated and hated by God. Which, inevitably, leads to more sin. Rinse, repeat. Rinse, repeat... until you die. He wants to keep fallen humans trapped in this cycle of sin so they never turn to the Lord for forgiveness and salvation--to ensure they'll suffer eternity in Hell. But if you are saved, guess what? His intentions for you are the same: Get you to sin, make you feel condemned so you'll feel hated by God... so you end up sinning again. **A born-again believer can't go to Hell, but Satan's just as happy to make you miserable to prevent you from being fruitful for God.**

To execute his goals, Satan deploys just one method: lies. You have to understand, Satan doesn't have the power so many Christians think he does. The only true power he has over humanity is the power we gave him, through sin. But Jesus Christ disarmed Satan, robbing him of this power, through the cross (Colossians 2:13–15). For the believer, Satan has no power over you, because he cannot accuse you of sin. Jesus has taken all your sins away.

So, his strategy to gain power over you is to lie. Satan lies, and he lies, and he lies some more. That's his only weapon. So, the key to overcoming the serpent's schemes is to recognize his lies so you can destroy them. The good news is, his tactics haven't changed since the beginning. So, let's go back in time, to when he first came on the scene in Genesis 3.

Part 1: Step One in the Serpent's Scheme

Genesis 3:1a (ESV) — 1 Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made...

Before we dive in too deep, let me just address a common question. Many scholars have study this verse and have come up with all kinds of theories about why the devil is called a serpent. Did Satan possess a real snake and then come to Eve? Did a snake cooperate with the devil and then got punished? Did they have legs, because later God says it'll crawl on its belly!

That's not my view. I don't believe we're dealing with a literal snake. The Bible reveals spiritual beings can take on different forms when interacting with the physical realm. Angels do this all the time: they're called "flames of fire," (Hebrews 1:7) yet they can appear as men. Paul

warns us that Satan masquerades as an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14). I think it's more sensible to believe the devil took on the form of a snake--something Eve would have been familiar with and had no reason to fear. Snakes likely always looked the way they do now; they're neither good nor evil. But because of this incident, we've forever associated them with Satan. Sorry, snakes.

But Moses is mentioning this for another reason. Real snake or not, he's trying to communicate something important about our enemy. This verse tells us that Satan was "more crafty" than anything else. That's how the ESV translates this. The NKJV uses the word "cunning." Both are good. But I think the old King James was on to something when it renders the Hebrew word "subtle." That's very good. Satan is very, very subtle. All good liars are; in fact, that's the one quality Judas goats possess that make them so effective.

Subtle means that Satan doesn't make his lies obvious. He doesn't come at you (most of the time) with his "guns a' blazing'." He doesn't announce his attack. No, he's more cautious than that. Subtle means he rarely takes the direct approach, using a brash, bald-face lie. He's careful. He hints. He suggests. His best work weaves a little bit of the truth in with his deception.

Most of the time, he tries to convince you that he's on your side. That his view of a situation is the only accurate view. He makes you think that his thoughts are actually your own. And if you're not careful, you'll fall for it every time.

This is why he's portrayed as a serpent. He's taking on the guise of something unthreatening. He didn't come as a rhino or elephant, stomping at Eve. No, snakes are *smooth*. They slither. They glide effortlessly and silently across the ground. Even their *hiss* has a soothing quality to it. Look what he does next:

Genesis 3:1b (ESV) — ...He said to the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?"

There it is. There is the crux of Satan's entire strategy against you. It's all summed up in those four words, "Did God actually say..."

Satan might use clever arguments. He might use the wisdom of this age. He might use a person or a book. But the goal is always the same: to get you to question the trustworthiness of what God has said. This is our first point: **Step one of the serpent's scheme is: to get you to doubt the Truth.**

Satan didn't come out and say, "God is wrong!" Instead, he just asked Eve a question. Just a harmless question! But it was structured to undermine what God had said. This question is actually a statement: "I can't believe God said you can't eat from any of the trees!" Did you

sense that as you read it? Satan is posing as Eve's friend. "That's so terrible! You can't eat from these trees? But you need to eat fruit. What does God expect you to do, starve to death?"

Ever have thoughts like that before? Ever face a problem in your life and you immediately think, "What am I going to do? Where is the help going to come from? I don't have an answer to this situation! How could God allow me to end up here?" Thoughts like that tend to come from the enemy. It's his oldest and most effective tactic.

Want to know the truth? God promised he'd never leave you nor forsake you (Hebrews 13:5). Jesus said he'd be with you always, even to the end of the age (Matthew 28:20). He said he is your Good Shepherd (John 10:11), who provides for your every need (Psalm 23:1). There is no problem or challenge too big that he can't take care of it. In fact, the Scriptures indicate that long before the problem arose, God knew and already made provision for it (Ephesians 1:4).

Yet, in that moment, when the problem seems insurmountable, the devil slips this lie into your mind. "God doesn't know. God doesn't care. You can't depend on him." **He does this to convince you that you can only depend on yourself.**

How do we overcome this scheme? We remind ourselves of God's word. What did God really say to Adam and Eve? In Genesis 1, he told man and woman that their food was all the seed-bearing fruit (Genesis 1:29). And in the next chapter, we learn that God put in the garden every tree that was good for food (Genesis 2:9). God told them that they could freely eat from every tree in the garden, except one (Genesis 2:16–17).

Freely means there were no restrictions. They could eat as much as they wanted and there would still be much more left over. That was the truth. God provided an oversupply of food for just two people. Yet, Satan had the audacity to lie to Eve and suggest *God did nothing*. Worse than nothing. He implied that God put all these trees in the garden, but denied her access to them, the very trees she needed!

Getting you to doubt the truth is a necessary first step in getting you to fall. If Satan can't do this, he's failed. So, he'll go to great lengths to distort what you know about the truth. He'll use discouragement from worldly cares; confusion from false doctrine or religion; or one of his favorites, noise.

Growing up, I saw this change take place in our society. Previously, when you had to wait in line or at the doctor's, you did something constructive to occupy the time. You read a book or magazine or talked to somebody nearby. But over time that changed. At home, in offices, waiting rooms, and restaurants, they began to fill the empty spaces with TV noise. Of course, it was usually something loud and obnoxious, like cable news. It robbed us from enjoying the silence, reading or thinking, or even talking to each other.

And yet, we got used to it. These days, many people can't abide silence. They need to be constantly distracted. And we have at our disposal many devices to help us do it.

All this noise numbs your thinking. It fills your head and can make you forget what God has taught you. Even a seasoned Christian can succumb to this tactic, if they let the enemy's lies take root in their mind.

The solution is simple: guard your heart from doubt by continually filling your thoughts with the truth. Be alert to any thought, suggestion, or comment that would shake your confidence in God's faithfulness. Be proactive to prune away lies that come to your mind, replacing them with Scripture. If you don't, you might stumble, just as Eve did next.

Part 2: Step Two of the Serpent's Scheme

Genesis 3:2–3 (ESV) — **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.’”

You know... I often wonder what Eve was thinking at this moment. Why on earth was she talking to a *snake*? Some people assume that animals used to be able to talk to humans. The Bible's silent on that. Maybe Eden was like Narnia... but something tells me it wasn't.

Regardless of that, you have to wonder at Eve's response. She should have caught onto Satan's ruse right away. Why do I say that? Well, first of all, he is disparaging his own Creator. That's odd. Second, why doesn't this snake know what God said? When God made humanity, you have to assume all of creation was watching. Where was this snake when God explained all this? Was he sleeping? Was he going to the bathroom? Why does he think God said they couldn't eat from the trees?

That's a big red flag. Sadly, Eve doesn't see this. But what is truly worrisome is Eve's response. Notice something off in what she says? This is what God really said in the previous chapter:

Genesis 2:16–17 (ESV) — **16** And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, **17** but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.”

Do you see the discrepancy? She added something. She told the serpent that she couldn't eat nor *touch* the tree. God never said they couldn't touch the tree. The sin was in eating the fruit. Now, maybe that doesn't seem like a big deal to you, but it's not. She is adding to God's word.

She is creating, in reality, a greater burden than God intended. This brings us to our second point: **Step two of the serpent's scheme is: to swap out the Truth.**

First, he'll get you to doubt God's word. Then, when your confidence is shaken, he'll get you to swap out the truth for something that's masquerading as the truth. It sounds like the truth, but it isn't! The best way he does this is by adding to the word of God, diluting it, weakening it, which ends up polluting the purity of God's message.

The Pharisees were pros at adding to God's word. They inflated the commandments God gave to Moses, adding thousands of extra rules that created a massive burden for the Jewish people. Things that were meant to be gifts, like the Sabbath day rest, became frustrating limitations. They couldn't cook on the Sabbath, walk too many miles. They even got mad when Jesus healed on the Sabbath!

As bad as that was, we can all fall prey to adding to God's word, especially when it comes to our behavior. We end up creating burdens God never meant for us to carry. Some Christians can't eat certain foods, wear certain clothes, or go to certain places. In these cases, it's not a matter of conscience: they've been told God's word forbids it.

When I was a teenager, there was a popular book that forbade dating. The writer was a young pastor who condemned Christians teens for wanting to pursue romantic relationships with the opposite sex. In his mind, we were sinning if we weren't only focusing on God; he seemed to suggest that God would magically bring us our spouses without us doing anything. Terrible idea. It created a burden God never intended. The Bible does not forbid dating. In fact, dating can be good for a Christian teen, with the oversight of wise parents and with biblical principles in place.

As it turns out, the writer of this book recently renounced Christianity publicly, left the ministry, and divorced his wife. It's possible that he was never a believer in the first place; he was a wolf among the sheep who led many astray by adding to God's word.

Mind you, I'm not talking about differences in doctrine from church to church. Christians are tasked with studying Scripture and coming to a sincere conclusion. Sometimes that means we disagree on certain things (baptism, end times, spiritual gifts, etc.). That's not the same as adding to God's word, swapping out what he really intended for us to know with lies. Eve was making it harder for she and her husband to obey God. Maybe they had to touch the tree to prune or care for it? I don't know, but what I do know is, God never said she couldn't touch it.

It is up to you to guard against this tactic. Don't believe something just because a Christian told you it's true. Paul urges us to test everything (1 Thessalonians 5:21). It doesn't matter if you heard it on a popular podcast or a good friend believes it. It doesn't even matter if a renowned preacher said it; even they are fallible. Take everything back to the Word of God,

wrestle with it, pray, and see if it lines up. Not knowing the Scriptures is deadly. And, when Eve made this grievous error, Satan swooped in with the killing blow.

Part 3: Final Step in the Serpent's Scheme

Genesis 3:4–5 (ESV) — 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.”

Let's take a moment to recognize the subtlety of these lies. If Satan had to defend these statements in court, he could claim everything he said was 100% true. That sounds crazy, but let's take a look:

1. “*You will not surely die*” - Technically, Adam and Eve didn't die when they ate the fruit.
2. “*Your eyes will be opened*” - That's true as well, in a sense.
3. “*You will be like God, knowing good and evil.*” - Well, at least part of this was true.

While this all has the ring of truth, **what he leaves out** makes these lies. Yes, Adam and Eve won't die physically when they eat the fruit. But they died spiritually. When they disobeyed God, they fell from right standing with him. They sinned. Sin brings condemnation: a guilty sentence and the expectation of punishment. That punishment comes in the form of alienation from God and ultimately separation from him in Hell.

Second: their eyes did open, but not in a good way. The result was that they immediately felt ashamed. Satan said they'd be like God knowing good and evil. But knowing good and evil didn't make them more like God. This knowledge tainted their consciences and they ended up being separated from God. They lost their place in the garden and were reduced to toiling and struggling to live. In reality, this act of sin made them *much less* like God than they were before.

Again, Satan was being subtle. He didn't outright force Eve to eat the fruit. He said just enough to get her to entertain the thought of sinning. He gave her just enough half-truths to get her thinking the way he wanted her to think. As they say, “He gave her just enough rope to hang herself on.”

Let's take a step back and consider the underlying lie. He said a lot of things here that were untrue. But what is the BIG LIE? What was the thought that he so subtly planted in her mind that compelled this woman, who lived the perfect life, to break God's one rule and eat from this tree?

It's this: Satan wanted her to believe that God was denying her the very thing she needed. That God was withholding good from her. Satan wanted Eve to think that God didn't want her,

nor her family to thrive or succeed. So, she needed to take matters into her own hands, even if it meant sinning. This is our third point: **Step three in the serpent's scheme is: to convince you that God is not good.**

Why do I say this is his big lie? Because this lie, in the end, is why we sin. Satan has convinced humanity that sin is actually good for us. That sin is something you and I need. And he wants us to think that the only reason we “can’t” or “shouldn’t” sin is because God is cruel and he doesn’t want you to be happy. He’s a killjoy. A bully. The only reason you can’t sin is because it’ll make God angry. In fact, he doesn’t really care about you at all. In the end, you have to live for yourself, because God is not good.

Many Christians have unconsciously accepted this lie. We hate sin; we know we aren’t supposed to do it. But somewhere, deep down inside, we think... we actually have to. This is just a part of who we are. But... we can’t upset God, so we need to “crucify our flesh” no matter how much we want to indulge! The truth is, we need to see sin for what it really is: poison. And God loves us too much to watch us kill ourselves, so he warns us, tells us, and teaches us to flee from sin at all costs. Not because he’s a killjoy, but because he wants us to *live*.

God wants us to realize that sin is a deadly substitute for what we really need. It’s like eating gravel instead of bread. It’s a counterfeit for our true bread of life: Jesus Christ. But Satan wants you to think otherwise. He wants us stuck in a mindset that God is unkind, unloving, and he just wants us miserable. When you think like that, even on an unconscious level, you’ll never go to God for help when you need it. So, you are running from the very thing you need: the love of the Father in Christ Jesus.

But here is the truth: **God is good.** He’s so much better than we realize. Even in man’s darkest moment, after Adam and Eve disobeyed him, God came to them. He didn’t smite them. He didn’t kill them. In fact, he promised salvation. He says in Genesis 3:15 someone was going to come from the woman--the very woman who fell for Satan’s lies-- who would crush the head of our enemy.

And while we were dead in our sins, he sent that Serpent Crusher: Jesus Christ. God is so full of love for his creation that he became a man, lived among us, and carried our sins on the cross. All our evil actions, all our disobedience, Jesus carried on himself. The punishment Adam and Eve, and you and I deserved, Jesus took.

That is our God. He is not withholding good from us. He’s not up in heaven, thinking up new ways to hurt us. In fact, the Bible says he is close to the brokenhearted. He binds up our wounds. He comforts us in all our troubles. His plans for us are good, pleasing, and perfect. Even the very best plans you have for yourself are not *perfect*. But God’s plans are. That’s how good he is.

How was Satan able to convince Eve that God was not good? The same way he tries to convince us. He got Eve focusing on the wrong thing. He got her to look away from all the good things God gave her: her life, her husband, their beautiful home, all the good trees--including the tree of life! Instead, drew her away from all that good and made her fixated on the one thing that seemed bad: the one tree she couldn't eat from.

He does the same thing to us. Satan will get you preoccupied with the problems in your life to forget all the blessings. He'll get you to worry about your mortgage, medical report, gas prices, too much rain--not enough rain. All to cover up the abundant good God give to you every day. He'll make the smallest issues look like mountains, including the issues God has already promised to take care of. So, what do we do about it?

The Solution:

We'll let's review: Satan's intentions are to get you to sin, condemn you, so you'll keep sinning. We've seen his scheme: he wants you to doubt the truth, swap it out for something else, to convince you God's not good.

You know, he tried to use the very same tactic against Jesus? If you remember, in the Gospels Jesus spends forty days in the wilderness going toe-to-toe with Satan. The enemy levels three powerful temptations at Christ. What did he say to him? "If you are the Son of God..."

Why did he phrase his temptations that way? Because just before Jesus went into the wilderness, he was baptized by John. God spoke to him and said this:

Matthew 3:17 (ESV) — 17 and behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."

We see the same thing happening: Satan tried to get Jesus to doubt God's word "If you are..." He tried to swap out the truth. This time, not through adding something, but by dropping something out: "beloved son," in whom he was "well pleased!" He wanted Jesus to think, "God left you in the wilderness to die! What kind of Father is that? You better take matters into your own hands before you die!"

Satan's schemes haven't changed. He will distort God's word so you'll doubt the Father's faithfulness. He come at you during a time of trial to get your eyes off of Jesus and what he's done for you.

But the moment you remember that God loves you so much he sent Jesus to die for you, all of Satan's schemes will fall apart. Satan's lies cannot stand against the Gospel. The good news that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, endured the agony of the cross to save sinners like you

and me? How could we ever doubt God's love for us? How could we ever question that he has the best in mind for us?

Write this down as our final point: **The serpent's scheme is defeated by the good news.** The remedy to Satan's lies is the Gospel. It's always the Gospel. You cannot doubt God's goodness if you are remembering what Jesus did for you. All the allure of sin erodes in comparison to the beauty of our Lord and Savior. Satan's lies sound like such foolishness, in light of what Jesus has done.

But that doesn't mean he's going to stop. The devil will continue to play the same game, again and again, while you're on this earth. He has no other ammunition. He repackages the same scheme. Different wrapper, same trick. He'll say whatever he can to get your eyes off God's word, get you overwhelmed by this world, all so you doubt God's favor toward you.

And when you stumble and sin... well, Satan will be right there to kick you when you're down. Weigh you down with so much condemnation that you'll think God could never accept you again. So, you might as well keep sinning. And the cycle continues.

That is why we need to be rooted and grounded in the Gospel. God loves you. Jesus died to save you. He rose again to give you grace: unmerited favor that restores you to fellowship with God. You are forgiven, born again, righteous, and holy. You have access to God's continual support, so you never have to go back to the cesspool of sin.

The grace of God will always demolish Satan's schemes. Which is why he will make you focus on anything but Jesus.

So this is what you do, Christian. When you are tempted to sin, when you are dealing with stress, when you are wrestling with doubts about your life, when you are facing difficult problems: You put time aside, each day, to meditate on the good news. Even a short time will yield results. Take the lie that has been plaguing you. Hold it up to the truth. Remind yourself of the Scriptures: *God is for me... He'll never leave me... I am accepted in the Beloved...* Seek the wisdom and prayers of your brother and sisters. The truth will always win out over lies.

There might be people here tonight, who have never received God's grace. You've been overwhelmed by Satan's lies and didn't even know it. But now you see. God is not far away. He's not withholding anything good from you. In fact, he sent his only Son to save you and give you his heavenly kingdom. To be saved and forgiven, you must believe in Jesus. Ask him to forgive you and be your Lord and Savior.