

The Temptation of Jesus

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Introduction

The temptation of our Lord is recorded in each of the synoptic gospels (Matt. 4:1-11; Mark 1:12-13; Luke 4:1-13). Satan tempted Jesus in the same ways that he entices us, i.e., through the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life (1 John 2:15-17).

Matthew 4:1-11 (NASB95) — 1 Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. 2 And after He had fasted forty days and forty nights, He then became hungry. 3 And the tempter came and said to Him, “If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.” 4 But He answered and said, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.’ ” 5 Then the devil took Him into the holy city and had Him stand on the pinnacle of the temple, 6 and said to Him, “If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down; for it is written, ‘He will command His angels concerning You’; and ‘On their hands they will bear You up, so that You will not strike Your foot against a stone.’ ” 7 Jesus said to him, “On the other hand, it is written, ‘You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.’ ” 8 Again, the devil took Him to a very high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory; 9 and he said to Him, “All these things I will give You, if You fall down and worship me.” 10 Then Jesus said to him, “Go, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only.’ ” 11 Then the devil left Him; and behold, angels came and began to minister to Him.

Mark 1:12-13 (NASB95) — 12 Immediately the Spirit impelled Him to go out into the wilderness. 13 And He was in the wilderness forty days being tempted by Satan; and He was with the wild beasts, and the angels were ministering to Him.

Luke 4:1-13 (NASB95) — 1 Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led around by the Spirit in the wilderness 2 for forty days, being tempted by the devil. And He ate nothing during those days, and when they had ended, He became hungry. 3 And the devil said to Him, “If You are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread.” 4 And Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live on bread alone.’ ” 5 And he led Him up and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. 6 And the devil said to Him, “I will give You all this domain and its glory; for it has been handed over to me, and I give it to whomever I wish. 7 “Therefore if You worship before me, it shall all be Yours.” 8 Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God and serve Him only.’ ” 9 And he led Him to Jerusalem and had Him stand on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, “If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down from here; 10 for it is written, ‘He will command His angels concerning You to guard You,’ 11 and, ‘On their hands they will bear You up, so that You will not strike

Your foot against a stone.’ ” 12 And Jesus answered and said to him, “It is said, ‘You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.’ ” 13 When the devil had finished every temptation, he left Him until an opportune time.

1 John 2:15-17 (NASB95) — 15 Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. 17 The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever.

Responding to each temptation, Jesus said, “It is written...” “It is written...” “It is written...” Herein, we are reminded of the words of Psalm 119:11, which says, “Your word I have treasured in my heart, that I may not sin against You” (cf. also Psa. 1:1-3; 40:6-8).

Psalm 1:1-3 (NASB95) — 1 How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, Nor stand in the path of sinners, Nor sit in the seat of scoffers! 2 But his delight is in the law of the Lord, And in His law he meditates day and night. 3 He will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water, Which yields its fruit in its season And its leaf does not wither; And in whatever he does, he prospers.

Psalm 40:6-8 (NASB95) — 6 Sacrifice and meal offering You have not desired; My ears You have opened; Burnt offering and sin offering You have not required. 7 Then I said, “Behold, I come; In the scroll of the book it is written of me. 8 I delight to do Your will, O my God; Your Law is within my heart.”

The First Temptation

In Matthew’s gospel, the tempter came and said to Jesus, “If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread” (Matt. 4:3). Luke records, “And the devil said to Him, ‘If You are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread’” (Luke 4:3).

Here Satan appeals to the lust of the flesh, encouraging Jesus to improperly use His powers to satisfy physical craving. Miraculous powers served to reveal and confirm the truth, but were not for the purely personal benefit of those who exercised such. In a similar way, the devil tempts us to satisfy otherwise legitimate longings in an illegitimate manner.

According to Matthew, Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live on bread alone’” (Matt. 4:4). Luke records, Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live on bread alone’” (Luke 4:4). This quotation is taken from Deuteronomy 8:1-6, with specific emphasis on verse 3. As God allowed Israel to face hunger and thirst in the wilderness, the Son of Man faced the same. Following in the footsteps of Jesus, we must learn to trust in God, and rely upon His revealed word.

Deuteronomy 8:1-6 (NASB95) — 1 “All the commandments that I am commanding you today you shall be careful to do, that you may live and multiply, and go in and possess the land which the Lord swore to give to your forefathers. 2 “You shall remember all the way which the Lord your God has led you in the wilderness these forty years, that He

might humble you, testing you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not. 3 **“He humbled you and let you be hungry, and fed you with manna which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that He might make you understand that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord.** 4 *“Your clothing did not wear out on you, nor did your foot swell these forty years.* 5 *“Thus you are to know in your heart that the Lord your God was disciplining you just as a man disciplines his son.* 6 *“Therefore, you shall keep the commandments of the Lord your God, to walk in His ways and to fear Him.*

The Second Temptation

In Matthew’s gospel, the devil then took Jesus into the holy city and had Him stand on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, “If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down; for it is written, ‘He will command His angels concerning You’; and ‘On their hands they will bear You up, so that You will not strike Your foot against a stone’” (Matt. 4:5-6).

According to Luke’s order, this temptation is the last of the three: The devil led Jesus to Jerusalem and had Him stand on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, “If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down from here; for it is written, ‘He will command His angels concerning You to guard You,’ and, ‘On their hands they will bear You up, so that You will not strike Your foot against a stone’” (Luke 4:9-11).

Here Satan appeals to the pride of life, emboldening Jesus to test God’s promise of protection (cf. Psa. 91:11-12). Sacred Scripture speaks of the security of one who trusts in the Lord, but this does not mean modern-day disciples should jump in front of a speeding 18-wheeler just to prove the point.

Psalm 91:11-12 (NASB95) — 11 For He will give His angels charge concerning you, To guard you in all your ways. 12 They will bear you up in their hands, That you do not strike your foot against a stone.

Both Matthew and Luke record Jesus’ response: Jesus answered and said to him, “It is said, ‘You shall not put the Lord your God to the test’” (Matt. 3:7). Jesus said to him, “On the other hand, it is written, ‘You shall not put the Lord your God to the test’” (Luke 3:12). This quotation is taken from Deuteronomy 6:16-19, with special emphasis on verse 16. Additional background information comes from Exodus 17:1-7.

Deuteronomy 6:16-19 (NASB95) — 16 “You shall not put the Lord your God to the test, as you tested Him at Massah. 17 “You should diligently keep the commandments of the Lord your God, and His testimonies and His statutes which He has commanded you. 18 “You shall do what is right and good in the sight of the Lord, that it may be well with you and that you may go in and possess the good land which the Lord swore to give your fathers, 19 by driving out all your enemies from before you, as the Lord has spoken.

Exodus 17:1-7 (NASB95) — 1 Then all the congregation of the sons of Israel journeyed by stages from the wilderness of Sin, according to the command of the Lord, and camped at Rephidim, and there was no water for the people to drink. 2 Therefore the people

quarreled with Moses and said, "Give us water that we may drink." And Moses said to them, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the Lord?" 3 But the people thirsted there for water; and they grumbled against Moses and said, "Why, now, have you brought us up from Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?" 4 So Moses cried out to the Lord, saying, "What shall I do to this people? A little more and they will stone me." 5 Then the Lord said to Moses, "Pass before the people and take with you some of the elders of Israel; and take in your hand your staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. 6 "Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb; and you shall strike the rock, and water will come out of it, that the people may drink." And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel. 7 He named the place Massah and Meribah because of the quarrel of the sons of Israel, and because they tested the Lord, saying, "Is the Lord among us, or not?"

The Third Temptation

In Matthew's gospel, the devil took Jesus to a very high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory; and he said to Him, "All these things I will give You, if You fall down and worship me" (Matt. 4:8-9).

According to Luke's order, this temptation falls in the middle: He led Jesus up and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil said to Him, "I will give You all this domain and its glory; for it has been handed over to me, and I give it to whomever I wish. Therefore if You worship before me, it shall all be Yours" (Luke 4:5-7).

Here Satan appeals to the lust of the eyes, enticing Jesus to achieve His rightful dominion in the wrong but easy way. Satan often promises what he cannot deliver, and is never to be trusted (John 8:44). He is "the god of this world," not by right but by usurpation (2 Cor. 4:3-4).

John 8:44 (NASB95) — 44 "You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

2 Corinthians 4:3-4 (NASB95) — 3 And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, 4 in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

Jesus responds by quoting from Deuteronomy 6:10-15, with a special emphasis on verse 13. Only the Lord God is to be worshipped, not idols, not mammon, and certainly not the devil. The same thought is echoed in Deuteronomy 10:12-22, especially in verse 20.

Deuteronomy 6:10-15 (NASB95) — 10 "Then it shall come about when the Lord your God brings you into the land which He swore to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to give you, great and splendid cities which you did not build, 11 and houses full of all good things which you did not fill, and hewn cisterns which you did not dig, vineyards and olive trees which you did not plant, and you eat and are satisfied, 12 then watch

yourself, that you do not forget the Lord who brought you from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. **13 “You shall fear only the Lord your God; and you shall worship Him and swear by His name.** 14 “You shall not follow other gods, any of the gods of the peoples who surround you, 15 for the Lord your God in the midst of you is a jealous God; otherwise the anger of the Lord your God will be kindled against you, and He will wipe you off the face of the earth.

*Deuteronomy 10:12-22 (NASB95) — 12 “Now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require from you, but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways and love Him, and to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, 13 and to keep the Lord’s commandments and His statutes which I am commanding you today for your good? 14 “Behold, to the Lord your God belong heaven and the highest heavens, the earth and all that is in it. 15 “Yet on your fathers did the Lord set His affection to love them, and He chose their descendants after them, even you above all peoples, as it is this day. 16 “So circumcise your heart, and stiffen your neck no longer. 17 “For the Lord your God is the God of gods and the Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God who does not show partiality nor take a bribe. 18 “He executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and shows His love for the alien by giving him food and clothing. 19 “So show your love for the alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt. **20 “You shall fear the Lord your God; you shall serve Him and cling to Him, and you shall swear by His name.** 21 “He is your praise and He is your God, who has done these great and awesome things for you which your eyes have seen. 22 “Your fathers went down to Egypt seventy persons in all, and now the Lord your God has made you as numerous as the stars of heaven.*

Conclusion

Coming to earth, Jesus left an example for us to follow. In life and in death, He committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth (1 Pet. 2:21-25). Being made like His brethren in all things, Jesus became a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God. For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted (Heb. 2:14-18).

1 Peter 2:21-25 (NASB95) — 21 For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, 22 who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth; 23 and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously; 24 and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed. 25 For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls.

Hebrews 2:14-18 (NASB95) — 14 Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, 15 and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives. 16 For assuredly He does not give help to angels, but He gives help to the descendant of Abraham. 17 Therefore, He

had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. 18 For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted.

Furthermore, we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need (Heb. 4:14-16).

Hebrews 4:14-16 (NASB95) — 14 Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. 15 For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. 16 Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.