

*The Temptation of Jesus*  
(Mk 1.12—13; Lk 4.1—13)

**4** Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. <sup>2</sup> He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. <sup>3</sup> The tempter came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.” <sup>4</sup> But he answered, “It is written, ‘One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’ ”

<sup>5</sup> Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, <sup>6</sup> saying 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 dash your foot against a stone.’ ”

<sup>7</sup> Jesus said to him, “Again it is written, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’ ”

<sup>8</sup> Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor; <sup>9</sup> and he said to him, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.”

<sup>10</sup> Jesus said to him, “Away with you, Satan! for it is written, ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.’ ”

<sup>11</sup> Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him. <sup>1</sup>

Have you ever been tempted to do things your own way at the time that you want things to happen? I’m not going to ask how many of us have given in to temptation. We have all experienced the times when we wanted to take the shortcuts and not do things within the will of God. We are not alone. Most of us are tempted during times of physical and spiritual weakness. Our scripture tells us that Jesus also was tempted. From the high and holy experience of blessing of his baptism at the Jordan, Jesus was led into the wilderness for 40 days of fasting and then testing. However, Jesus was not tempted so that the Father could learn anything about His Son, for the Father had already given Jesus His divine approval at his baptism. Jesus was tempted so that every creature in heaven, on earth, or under the earth might know that Jesus Christ is the Conqueror. He exposed Satan and his tactics, and He defeated Satan. Because of His victory, we can have victory over the tempter.

Just as the first Adam met Satan, so the Last Adam, Jesus, met the enemy (1 Cor. 15:45). Adam met Satan in a beautiful Garden, but Jesus met him in a terrible wilderness.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Holy Bible : New Revised Standard Version*. Nashville : Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1989, S. Mt 4:1-11

Adam had everything he needed, but Jesus was hungry after forty days of fasting. Adam lost the battle and plunged all of humanity into sin and death. But Jesus won the battle and went on to defeat Satan in more battles, culminating in His final victory on the cross (John 12:31; Col. 2:15).

Jesus' experience of temptation prepared Him to be our sympathetic High Priest (Heb. 2:16–18; 4:15–16). Some of us will think, sure if I were the Son of God I could overcome temptation too, but it is important to note that Jesus faced the enemy as man, not as the Son of God. His first word was, “Man shall not live by bread alone.” We must not think that Jesus used His divine powers to overcome the enemy, because that is just what the enemy wanted Him to do! Jesus used the same spiritual resources that are available to us today: the power of the Holy Spirit of God (Matt. 4:1), and the power of the Word of God (“It is written”). Jesus temptations were real as temptation involves the will, and Jesus came to do the Father's will (Heb. 10:1–9).

So let's examine the temptations. The first temptation (vv. 1–4) involved the love of God and the will of God. “Since You are God's beloved Son, why doesn't Your Father feed You? Why does He put You into this terrible wilderness?” This temptation sounded like Satan's words to Eve in Genesis 3! It is a subtle suggestion that our Father does not love us and is trying to keep something good from us. Satan asked Jesus to use his divine powers to meet his own needs. We don't have divine power, however when we put our physical needs ahead of our spiritual needs, we sin. When we allow circumstances to dictate our actions, instead of following God's will, (like the young man who tried to rob the nun in the church last week) we sin. Jesus could have turned the stones into bread, after all he was hungry and even the Bible says that you don't sin as much if you are satisfying a physical need. The desert was littered with little round pieces of limestone rock which looked exactly like little loaves. But Jesus would have been exercising His powers independently of the Father; and He came to obey the Father (John 5:30; 6:38).

Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 8:3 to defeat Satan. Feeding on and obeying God's Word is more important than consuming physical food. In fact, God's Word is our food (John 4:32–34).

Satan is a quick learner, so when Jesus used scripture, Satan used scripture. In the second temptation (vv. 5–7) Satan said: “So You intend to live by the Scriptures, then let me quote You a verse of Scripture and see if You will obey it!” Satan took Jesus to the pinnacle of the temple and quoted from Psalm 91:11–12 where God promised to care for His own. “If You really believe the Scriptures, then jump! Let's see if the Father cares for You!” In effect Satan was reminding Jesus of Malachi's prophecy (Mal. 3:1), which had led to a common belief among the Jews that Messiah would suddenly appear in the sky, coming down to His temple. Satan was saying, in essence, “Why don't You do what the people are expecting and make some marvelous display? After all, the Scripture says His angels will protect You and You won't even hurt a foot as You come down.”

But Satan took the quote out of context. We can prove almost anything by the Bible if we isolate texts from the contexts. Satan had cleverly omitted the phrase “in all Thy ways” when he quoted from Psalm 91. According to the psalmist, a person is protected only when he or she is following the Lord's will. When the child of God is in the will of God, the Father will protect them. God watches over those who are “in God's ways.” For Jesus to cast Himself down from the pinnacle of the temple in some dramatic display to accommodate Himself to the people's thinking would not have been God's will.

Jesus replied with Deuteronomy 6:16: “Do not put the Lord your God to the test.” We tempt God when we put ourselves into circumstances that force God to work miracles on our behalf. The diabetic who refuses to take insulin and argues, “Jesus will take care of me,” may be tempting the Lord. We tempt God when we try to force God to contradict God's own Word. It is important for us as believers to read all Scripture, and study all God has to say, because all of it is profitable for daily life (2 Tim. 3:16–17). We need to study and know Scripture. But most of all, we need to practice its principles.

In the third temptation (vv. 8–11) Satan offered Jesus a shortcut to His kingdom. Jesus knew that He would suffer and die before He entered into His glory (Luke 24:26; 1 Peter 1:11; 5:1). If He bowed down and worshiped Satan just once (this is the force of the Greek verb), He could enjoy all the glory without enduring the suffering. But there are no shortcuts to the will of God. If we want to share in the glory, we must also share in the suffering (1 Peter 5:10). As the prince of this world, Satan could offer these kingdoms to Jesus (John 12:31; 14:30). But Jesus did not need Satan's offer. The Father had already promised Jesus the kingdom! Jesus answered with Deuteronomy 6:13: "Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him." Satan had said nothing about service, but Jesus knew that whatever we worship, we will serve. Worship and service must go together.

Satan left Jesus for a time, but he did not stop trying to tempt Jesus. We know Satan used Peter to tempt Jesus to abandon the cross (Matt. 16:21–23); and through the crowd that had been fed, Satan tempted Jesus to an "easy kingdom" (John 6:15). Remember that one victory never guarantees freedom from further temptation. If anything, each victory we experience only makes Satan try harder.

After Jesus had defeated Satan, He was ready to begin His ministry. No one has a right to ask others to obey if they have not obeyed themselves. Jesus proved he was the perfect high priest and Lord who is worthy of our respect and obedience.<sup>2</sup>

Interestingly Satan's temptations of Eve in the Garden of Eden correspond to those of Jesus in the desert. Satan appealed to the physical appetite (Gen. 3:1-3; Matt. 4:3), the desire for personal gain (Gen. 3:4-5; Matt. 4:6), and an easy path to power or glory (Gen. 3:5-6; Matt. 4:8-9). And in each case Satan altered God's Word (Gen. 3:4; Matt. 4:6). Satan's temptations of people today often fall into the same three categories (cf. 1 John 2:16). But Jesus who had identified Himself with sinners by baptism and who would

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<sup>2</sup>Wiersbe, Warren W.: *The Bible Exposition Commentary*. Wheaton, Ill. : Victor Books, 1996, c1989, S. Mt 4:1

provide righteousness proved He is righteous, and revealed His approval by the Father.

Satan then left Jesus. At that moment God sent angels to minister to His needs.<sup>3</sup>

Have you noticed in life that after every great moment there comes a moment of reaction—and again and again it is in the reaction that the danger lies. That is what happened to the prophet Elijah. With magnificent courage Elijah in all his loneliness faced and defeated the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18:17–40). That was Elijah’s greatest moment of courage and of witness. But the slaughter of the prophets of Baal provoked the wicked Jezebel to wrath, and she threatened Elijah’s life. “Then he was afraid, and he arose and went for his life and came to Beer-sheba” (I Kings 19:3) The man who had stood fearlessly against all comers is now fleeing for his life with terror at his heels. The moment of reaction had come. We are vulnerable to doubts and fears when things go wrong for us. That is when we need to remember that God does love us and that we are to live by faith.<sup>4</sup>

It seems to be the law of life that just after our resistance power has been highest it nose-dives until it is at its lowest. The tempter carefully, subtly, and skillfully chose his time to attack Jesus—but Jesus conquered him. We will do well to be specially on our guard after every time life has brought us to the heights, for it is just then that we are in gravest danger of the depths.

One thing stands out about this story—the temptations are such as could only come to a person who had very special powers and who knew that they have them. Sanday described the temptations as “the problem of what to do with supernatural powers.” The temptations which came to Jesus could only have come to one who knew that there were amazing things which he could do.

We, like Jesus, are tempted through our gifts. God has given every person a gift, and every person can ask one of two questions. “What can I make for myself out of this gift?”

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<sup>3</sup>Walvoord, John F. ; Zuck, Roy B. ; Dallas Theological Seminary: *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL : Victor Books, 1983-c1985, S. 2:25

<sup>4</sup>Richards, Lawrence O.: *The Bible Readers Companion*. electronic ed. Wheaton : Victor Books, 1991; Published in electronic form by Logos Research Systems, 1996, S. 605

or, “What can I do for others with this gift?” A person may possess a voice which is good to hear; may “cash in on it”, and refuse to use it unless paid. Another person is gifted with charm will be tempted to use that charm “to get away with anything.” The person who is gifted with the power of words will be tempted to use their command of words to produce excuses to justify their own conduct. The person with a vivid and sensitive imagination will undergo agonies of temptation that a less creative person will never experience. The person with great gifts of mind will be tempted to use these gifts for themselves and not for others, to become the master and not the servant of humanity. It is the grim fact of temptation that it is just where we are strongest that we must be for ever on the watch.<sup>5</sup>

My brothers and sisters, temptation will come. We can resist them by using the same defense that Jesus used: the Spirit of God and the Word of God. Jesus overcame temptations so that He could help us through. Thanks to unto God!

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<sup>5</sup> Barclay, William, lecturer in the University of Glasgow (Hrsg.): *The Gospel of Matthew : Volume*. Philadelphia : The Westminster Press, 2000, c1975 (The Daily Study Bible Series, Rev. Ed), S. 61