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The Temptation Of Christ

By the late: C. D. Cole

"Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness, to be tempted of the devil.

And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungered.

And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread.

But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.

Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple,

And saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down; for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone.

Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.

Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them;

And saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me.

Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.

Then the devil leaveth him, and behold, angels came and ministered unto him" (Matt. 4:1-11).

Three historians give us an account of the temptation of Jesus Christ—Matthew, Mark and Luke. Their gospels are called the synoptics because they give us a common picture of Jesus in human and earthly relationships. Matthew presents Him as King; Mark as the perfect servant of Jehovah; and Luke presents Him as a perfect man. John presents Him in His deity.

We shall make some general observations before taking up the details of the temptation.

1. We have before us a personal devil whose objective is the dethronement of God and destruction of man. He began his career in heaven where he sought to usurp the place of God. Sin had its origin in Satan when he said, "I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will be like the Most High." In this rebellion he was followed by a great host of angels who are known as fallen angels in distinction from the elect angels. When God had made man in His own image and likeness, and placed him in the Garden of Eden, Satan successfully tempted him and brought the human race into a fallen state. And since that time, his purpose has been to prevent the salvation of men.

In the temptation of Christ we see one of his efforts to prevent the salvation of sinners. Had he succeeded with Christ, there would have been no Saviour.

All through the Old Testament we see Satan trying to prevent the coming of a Saviour. As recorded in Genesis 3:15, he had heard God

announce that the seed of the woman would bruise the serpent's head. And immediately he tried to prevent the fulfillment of this prophecy by causing Cain to kill his brother, Abel. We are told that Cain was of that wicked one and slew his brother. We see his hand in the corruption of human society that made the flood a necessity when only Noah and his family were spared. And even Noah was spared because he found grace in the sight of God. We see the hand of Satan all through human history as he tried to destroy the Messianic line—the line through which the Messiah was to come.

When he had failed to prevent the birth of the Saviour, he sought to kill Him by having Herod issue his decree calling for the death of all the children of Bethlehem and the vicinity within the age bracket of the infant, Jesus. He must have thought he had succeeded, but God warned Joseph of the danger and told him to flee with the child into Egypt.

I think Satan must have been startled when God proclaimed Jesus as His Son when He was baptized by John.

2. We see the providence of God in the temptation. Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. Mark says He was driven of the Spirit into the wilderness and for forty days was tempted of the devil.

The word "Tempt" in the original means to test, try, or prove. It is used in both a good and an evil sense. Our English word used to carry this twofold connotation, but now it is used only in the evil sense. The moral character of the testing depends upon the object in view and the means employed. If the object is to incite or entice one to do wrong, or if the means used are sinful, then the temptation is bad. If the object is to prove the character of a person and the means used are lawful then the temptation is good. In the sense of enticing one to do wrong, God never tempts any man, but in the sense of proving one's character, He does tempt as in the case of Abraham.

In the temptation of Christ the devil tried to get Him to sin, but God was proving His Son as a qualified Saviour.

3. We should never rush into temptation but should pray not to be led into temptation. To rush into temptation as if we felt able to get the victory is pride. But as James says, "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations. Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience" (James 1:2,3). When we fall into temptation, Christ will be there to succour us and God will not let us fall into temptation without making a way of escape.

Now let us look more closely at the three-fold temptation of Christ in the lesson passage. This was a special temptation, but not the only

temptation for all the days of our Lord were days of temptation. We are told that the devil led Him for a season. When Satan could not prevent His advent into the world, he tried to keep Him from the cross. On one occasion when He was telling His disciples about going to Jerusalem to be put to death, Peter remonstrated and said, "Be it far from thee, Lord." Christ saw the hand of Satan in this and said, "Get thee behind me Satan for thou art an offence unto me." And even while on the cross, the crowd said, "Come down from the cross and we will believe thee."

The time of this special temptation was immediately after His baptism. It was at His baptism that He was proclaimed to be the Son of God. This was the time of His inaugural and marked His assumption of the office of Saviour. Here was hell's response to heaven's challenge in the inauguration.

1. The first temptation was in the wilderness. "If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread." Let us not be misled by the word "if." The Son is emphatic and the mood is the indicative, not the subjunctive. Satan was too smart to begin his temptation by expressing a doubt about the Sonship of Jesus. The "if" has the sense of since—Since thou art the Son of God make bread out of these stones. The first temptation assumes the Sonship with power to work miracles. Since thou art the Son of God, and able to do wonders, being faint with hunger, convert this stone into a loaf of bread and satisfy thy hunger. This was very subtle. What is wrong in satisfying physical hunger? Christ replies by quoting Deuteronomy 8:3: "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." Christ is saying that obedience to the Word of God must come before the satisfaction of physical desires. Christ knew He was where God wanted Him and He would trust God to take care of Him. This was a temptation to take Himself out of the hand of God and provide for Himself. It has been called temptation to under-confidence or lack of trust in God.

Whether it was wrong to make bread or not depended upon who was suggesting it, and the reason for it. Christ would not make bread at the suggestion of Satan, neither would He make bread to meet His own needs. He would remain in the hand of God and trust Him for bread. Christ could and did make bread—He fed 5,000.

2. The second temptation was in the holy city. Here is a change of scene and a change of tactics. From the pinnacle of the holy temple the devil said, "Since thou art the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give His angels charge concerning thee; and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at

anytime thou dash thy foot against a stone." The devil quotes from Psalm 91. The devil is never more dangerous than when dealing with Scripture. He misquotes and misapplies Scripture; you do well to trust God for food; now carry your trust a little further; trust God to keep you from being hurt in jumping off the temple. Christ's reply comes like a bolt of lightning. "It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God." Here the word "Tempt" is used in the evil sense. You can test God wrongly and also rightly. To put God to the test at the suggestion of Satan would have been wrong. But if God had said, "Cast thyself down," the passage quoted by Satan would have been pertinent. In Malachi 3:10, we have an example of testing God in the good sense. There He commands His people to bring the whole tithe into the storehouse and prove Him.

To rush into danger or create a difficulty in order to prove God's protecting care is to tempt God in the bad sense.

3. The third temptation was on a very high mountain. From this point the devil shows Christ all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them and offers to give them to Him on the one condition of falling down and worshipping him, the devil. The devil no longer quotes Scripture as in the two previous temptations. There was no Scripture that could be twisted to justify such a thing. Here the devil throws off the mask of piety and appears in his true form as God's rival. In the previous temptations he appears to be the friend of God and recommends trust in God. But here he claims supremacy and demands trust in himself as God's competitor. Here the devil offers a bribe for worship. I will give you all the kingdoms with all their glory if you will ACKNOWLEDGE ME AS SUPREME. The devil usurps the place of God as owner of this world and all that is in it. "The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein" (Ps. 24:1). But the devil denies this and claims it all as his own.

Three times Christ calls the devil the prince of this world and Paul speaks of him as the god of this world. This can only mean that the devil is god only by human suffrage and not by divine ordination. Humanity has willingly subjected themselves to the devil's rule. They have rebelled against the true God and become the ally of the devil. This is the essence of sin. God did not deliver the human race to the devil; the devil captured the race in Eden. II Tim. 2:24,26.

Christ no longer deals with the devil as a pretended friend but calls him Satan and sends him away with Deuteronomy 6:14 ringing in his ears. "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve."

Matthew tells us that the devil left him and that angels ministered unto Him. Luke says he left Him for a while.

The devil was trying to keep Christ from the cross. He knew that at the cross Christ would destroy him that had the power of death. He knew that it would be on the ground of His cross work that Christ would spoil him of his goods. Satan knows, if some men do not, that redemption is by the blood of Christ. He wanted to keep Christ off the cross as the Redeemer.

Jesus was tempted objectively, but there was no inner conflict in resisting the temptation. Men yield in temptation to escape the pressure, but Jesus faced the pressure without any desire to do what He was asked to do. He suffered, but He would not yield. He wanted food, and protection, and dominion, but not at the cost of disobeying God. Truly, our Saviour could say, "The prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me" (John 14:30).



FAMOUS LAST WORDS

1. "I am going to give up my class, but don't worry, I'll continue to be faithful in my church attendance."
2. "Lord please make her (him) well, and I promise you, I'll never miss another church service."
3. "Lord, if you'll let me have this better paying job, I'll give You your portion."
4. "Lord let me have this new car and I'll dedicate it to You."
5. "O Lord, please let our child be born healthy and whole, and we both promise You we'll have him in Sunday School and Church Service every Sunday."
6. "Please Lord, if I can have this woman as my wife, I vow unto You we'll both serve you faithfully."
7. "We're going to get some of our big bills out of the way and then we'll begin to tithe."
8. "Aw listen, we can miss a few weeks of tithing and then catch up later."
9. "Don't worry, if we can't think of something by Sunday morning, we can always say the baby isn't feeling too well."

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