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Article: The Temptation of Christ

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(Matthew 4:1–11)¹

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Introduction

Two events in the Old Testament² and one in the New Testament provide the background to understanding the account of the temptation of our Lord in Matthew. The first Old Testament story is that of Adam in Eden. It was Augustine, following the Apostle Paul, who said that the entire moral and spiritual history of the world revolves around two people, Adam and Christ.³ To Adam, called “**son of God**” in Luke 3:38, ⁴ was given the position of king of the

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earth.⁵ He had a position to maintain, but he did not maintain it, and the plight of the world for centuries was decided. And then the last Adam (1 Cor. 15:45, 47) appeared, and the second trial of the race arrived. All was at stake again. Again we were represented by a Champion, by One man who represented us all—whose standing would be the standing of many, and whose fall, if such a fall had been conceivable, would have been the fall of all.

The second Old Testament story is found in Deuteronomy 6–8.⁶ It concerns the nation of Israel, also called God’s “**son**” (Ex. 4:22). “Israel’s sonship was modeled on Adam’s, since God is the Creator-Father [of them both].”⁷ Following the exodus out of Egypt, called by Paul the nation’s “**baptism**” (1 Cor. 10:2), Israel spent forty years in the desert being tested by God. During that time they failed the test, grumbling about food (Ex. 16 [v. 12]), complaining about lack of water (Ex. 17:1–7), and worshipping an idol, a golden calf (Ex. 32). During that time they were exhorted to “**love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might**” (Deut. 6:5).⁸ But they failed to do so.

The New Testament story that is crucial to an understanding of Jesus’ temptation is the account of His baptism (Matt. 3:13–17). The one event follows right after the other as Matthew, Mark, and Luke all make clear. Mark (1:12) says that the temptation took place “**immediately**” (εὐθύς, euthus) after the baptism. At His baptism Jesus had been anointed by the Holy Spirit for His work as Servant of the Lord and Messianic King—to the work of dying for His people and reigning over them. The Father from heaven had solemnly and lovingly saluted Him as His Messianic Son. But God’s calling must be tested, and His servants must pass the test.⁹ Adam and Israel had failed. Will the Son of God

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fail when tried by God and tempted by the devil? That is the question that faces us in Matthew 4:1–11. The big idea of the passage is this: In His temptation Jesus proved Himself to be worthy of the Messianic office and provides a model for His people when they are tested.

Matthew’s Account of the Temptation of Jesus

The Introduction to the Story, verses 1–2

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And after He had fasted forty days and forty nights, He then became hungry.

The Origin of the Account

None of the Evangelists were present at the temptation of our Lord, which raises the question as to where they received their information. The answer can only be that the story went back to Jesus Himself.¹⁰ Manson asks, “Who in the Palestinian Christian community pictured in the first half of Acts could ever have invented the story?”¹¹ As he implied, the story is not an invention; it is a bit of intimate biography told by its subject to His disciples.¹²

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When did Jesus tell them of this encounter with the tempter? Since the spiritual principles in back of Jesus’ Messiahship are at issue in the temptation account, it had to be a time when this subject again arose. Just such a situation later occurs when Peter confessed the Messiahship of Christ, “**Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.**” Immediately after that confession Jesus told the disciples that He had to go to Jerusalem and suffer and die. Peter rebuked the Lord, “**God forbid it, Lord! This shall never happen to You.**” At that point Jesus recalled the tempter saying something very similar and He replied to Peter, “**Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God’s interests, but man’s**” (Matt. 16:16–23). At that moment, perhaps, the Savior sat down with the disciples and told them of His wilderness experience and the dangers of Satanic temptation.¹³

The Time of the Struggle

Matthew’s connection between chapters 3 and 4 is, “**Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.**” Matthew, like Mark and Luke, ties the temptation to Jesus’ baptism. Matthew said, “**Then (τότε, *tote*) Jesus was led up...**” i.e., after His baptism. Mark is even stronger, using the word “**immediately**” (εὐθύς, *euthys*). Jesus had been attested as God’s Son, the Messiah, who was destined to suffer and rule. Then came the trial in the wilderness which was intended to demonstrate whether He was the kind of Son who would love and obey His Father. As Scroggie put it, “After the testimony the test; and after the Dove, the devil.”¹⁴

The fact that the temptation came immediately after His baptism underscored its significance. The tempter would attempt to turn Jesus from the task which God has laid upon Him at His baptism. He would try to deflect Him from obedience to God and thereby render His mission impossible.¹⁵

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The Appointment to the Struggle

Jesus, Matthew said, “**was led up by the Spirit.**” Just as God led Israel through the waters and into the desert, so the Spirit now led Christ. To be led by the Spirit is to be subject to God’s will, so Jesus did as God instructed. It may seem strange to us that the Spirit would lead Jesus to a place where He would be tempted. We must remember two things: (1) God is in control of all that happens, and (2) testing and trials are His way of building up His people (cf. Heb. 12:2–13).¹⁶

The Combatants in the Struggle

In the wilderness Jesus was tempted by the devil. We should note that the name *Jesus* is used—it is the name that was given to Him when He was born as a man into the world. Jesus was led into the conflict as man, and not as God.¹⁷ Godet wrote, “The truly human character of Jesus stands out with the greatest clearness. To be raised above temptation belongs to God only; to tempt is the proper work of the devil; but to be tempted belongs to the state of man.”¹⁸

This is very important. Jesus was not to fight this battle with strength we do not possess. **“He was tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin”** (Heb. 4:15). His weapons were those given to His people—the indwelling Spirit and the Word of God.¹⁹ Because Jesus was a man, the ordeal was real to Him. **“We do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses”** (Heb. 4:15).

The other combatant is **“the devil”** (ὁ διάβολος, ho diabolos), i.e., “the slanderer” or “the accuser.” The Greek word is the one used regularly in the LXX to translate *Satan* (שָׂטָן; Job 2:1; Zech. 3:1–2; 1 Chron. 21:1).²⁰ The verb form (διαβάλλω, diaballō) means “to separate,” and it was often used in contexts meaning hateful accusations, or hostile complaints and denunciations. The work of this adversary is to separate God and man.²¹

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The devil is anti-God and opposed to God’s people. It is his work to separate or split human beings from God. Luther said that his “main object is to lead us to ignore and utterly cast away both God’s Word and works.”²² He is the archenemy of Christ who has from our Lord’s birth sought to destroy Him (Matt. 2:16–18; Rev. 12:1–5). He leads a spiritual host of dark forces that work to promote evil and destruction in the world (John 8:37–44; 2 Cor. 4:4; 1 Pet. 5:8).

The Circumstances of the Struggle

The Jordan River, where Jesus was baptized, is well below sea level. Matthew tells us that **“Jesus was led up into the wilderness”** (ἐρημος, erēmos). This area was to the west and mountainous. It was virtually devoid of water (rainfall was sparse) and permanent settlements. The soil was infertile because of this lack of rainfall, so only Bedouin lived there.²³ Israel was tested in the wilderness, so a parallel with Jesus is clear. There is also a significant contrast with Adam.²⁴ Like Adam He was tested, “but under the worst of conditions, not the best conditions.”²⁵ Adam the first was not tempted in a wilderness but in a garden. He was defeated there and we, with all the race, now inherit a cursed earth.

On the other hand, Jesus, the last Adam, was tempted not in a garden, but in a wilderness, taking up the conflict exactly where the first Adam left it. Mark says that Jesus **“was with the wild beasts”** (1:13). Adam had lived in paradise and was at peace with his world. Jesus found Himself in the wilderness with wild

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beasts—a reminder that our fallen world is lonely and fraught with danger.²⁶ Jesus lived His life surrounded by all the consequences of the first Adam’s defeat, but He was to conquer the devil and win back the garden for the human race whose champion and representative He was.

The contrast between Adam the first and Adam the last demonstrates the falsity of the teaching that all mankind needs for the development of the goodness within him is a suitable environment. In spite of every favorable circumstance, Adam the first failed. In spite of every circumstance encouraging failure, Jesus was to stand firm. “Paradise was lost in a garden and regained in a wilderness.”²⁷

The Purpose of the Struggle

The Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness **“to be tempted by the devil.”** The verb **“to be tempted”** (πειρασθῆναι, peirasthēnai, aor. pass. inf.) suggests purpose, i.e., this was the purpose of the Spirit in leading Jesus into the wilderness. Jesus would learn that the Spirit of God leads us “not only into good things, but into confrontation with bad things.”²⁸

How is this to be reconciled with James 1:13: **“For God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone?”** The solution to the apparent contradiction is to be found in the usage of the verb **“to tempt.”** The Greek word (πειράζω, peirazō) is actually used in two ways, in a good and a bad sense.²⁹ It is used in a good sense of God who tests or proves people in order to reveal and develop character (Gen.

negative sense it means to entice or solicit to evil (1 Cor. 7:5; 1 Thess. 3:5). God does not test in this negative sense, but Satan does.³⁰

Because our God is sovereign, i.e., in ultimate control, the same event may be a testing of God and a temptation of the devil. The classic illustration is found in the life of Joseph. Sold into slavery by his own brothers, he suffered years of injustice and imprisonment. Yet in the end he could tell his repentant brothers, “**You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good**” (Gen. 50:20).³¹

So it was with these testings of Jesus. God clearly decided to test Him in the wilderness, just as He had tested Adam and Israel. Yet He did it by bringing Him into the wilderness and face-to-face with the devil. The Spirit did not lead Jesus into temptation, but He did lead Him to a place where He could be tempted.³²

The Duration of the Struggle

The temptation came at the end³³ of a forty-day period of fasting.³⁴ Why our Lord was fasting, none of the Evangelists say, but it was a natural accompaniment of serious reflection and prayer to God concerning the task ahead.³⁵ The verse does say that He was being led by the Spirit, and this implies that He understood that it was God’s will that He fast—perhaps for no other reason than to set the stage for His temptation.³⁶

The number *forty* (τεσσαράκοντα, tessarakonta) is not arbitrary. In Scripture it is associated with probation, trial, and chastisement.³⁷ It describes the number of days of the flood (Gen. 7:4, 12, 17; 8:6), of the fasting of Moses (Ex. 24:18; 34:28; Deut. 9:9, 11, 25; 10:10), of the time Ezekiel lay on his side to symbolize Israel’s punishment (Ezek. 4:6), of the length of Jonah’s preaching mission (Jonah 3:4), and of Jesus’ post-resurrection ministry (Acts 1:3).

In our passage there is a connection between Israel and Jesus, and it is noteworthy that Israel wandered for forty years in the desert. In a number of Old Testament texts this forty-year period is viewed as a period of testing (Deut. 8:2–3; cf. Num. 14:33; Josh. 5:6). Just as Israel, God’s “son,” was tested for forty years, so Jesus, God’s Messianic Son, will be tested for forty days.³⁸

Luke adds an important element to Matthew’s account. Luke tells us that although these three major temptations came at the end of Jesus’ fast, the devil was actually tempting Him in other ways all during the forty days (Luke 4:2).³⁹ The three temptations following the forty-day fast are apparently only “the concluding act of the drama.”⁴⁰

It is good that Luke has added that important detail. If he hadn’t we might think that Jesus’ temptations were not truly like ours. We might say that His victory is not typical because He had only one day of temptation. It is not the large trial at the end of the fortieth day that we fear so much “as the thirty-nine days of petty assault, guerrilla warfare, of irritating trial.... But Jesus faced those, also. In ways of which we have no record, He was assailed by the devil during the whole period, and the forty-day temptations were but the last, concentrated, and desperate assault of the infuriated foe upon His weakened body.”⁴¹

The Range of the Struggle

There are three temptations recorded in Matthew and Luke.⁴² They are all variations on one great temptation, viz., to remove His Messianic vocation from the guidance of His Father.⁴³ There are different emphases in the tests: First, as many students of the Bible have affirmed, the three forms of temptation are connected with those that brought sin into the world (1 John 2:16), viz., “**the lust of the flesh** (i.e., hunger) **the lust of the eyes** (i.e., worldly power and glory), **and the boastful pride of life**” (i.e., a sensational

jump into the temple crowds). These three forms follow the order of Luke's Gospel, which reverses Matthew's second and third temptations.⁴⁴

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Second, as has also been frequently noted, the three temptations are directed against the three parts of Jesus' human nature (1 Thess. 5:23). Again following Luke's order, they are directed against the body (i.e., sense-consciousness and sense-satisfaction), the soul (i.e., self-consciousness and self-glorification), and the spirit (i.e., God-consciousness and God manipulation).⁴⁵

The quotations of Scripture by Jesus during the temptations seem to follow the sequence of Israel's testing in Exodus: the provision of manna (Ex. 16), the testing at Massah requiring a miracle (Ex. 17), and the worship of the golden calf (Ex. 32).⁴⁶

Finally, as I noted earlier, it has been suggested that all three temptations lead back to the three elements of the Shema' of Deuteronomy 6:5. "**You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.**"⁴⁷

In short, the issue for Jesus was nothing less than complete consecration of Himself to the will of God.

The Three Temptations, verses 3–10

The Personal Temptation: A Temptation to Self-Determination, verses 3–4

And the tempter came and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread." 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.'"

The Challenge

The clause at the end of verse 2 provides the introduction to the first temptation: "**He then became hungry.**" He was, no doubt, tired, weak, and vulnerable. When a person is truly hungry there is but one thing on his mind—

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food. The story is told of a famished Bedouin who found a stash of treasure in the desert. Opening it he cried, "Alas, it is only diamonds."⁴⁸

At that point, says Matthew, "**the tempter came and said to Him.**" That the devil is introduced this way may suggest his temptations during the thirty-nine days were internal and psychological attacks. Now, the text implies, Satan makes a personal appearance—although we are not told in what form. That he should appear at all is unusual in Scripture.⁴⁹

The word "**came**" (προσελθών, proselthōn) may serve to emphasize the majesty of Jesus' messianic office. The verb (προσέρχομαι, proserchomai) was often used of worshipping God, approaching kings, and entering courts (e.g., Lev. 9:5; Num. 18:4; Deut. 25:1; Jer. 7:16; Heb. 10:1; 1 Pet. 2:4). It implies, perhaps, reverence and circumspection—even the devil approaches Jesus with some diffidence.⁵⁰

In this first temptation Satan reminded Jesus of the Father's words at His baptism, "**You are My beloved Son**" (Mark 1:11). Forty days earlier Jesus was anointed with power for His Messianic work. Now the devil challenges Him, pointing to some stones on the dry ground, "**If You are the Son of God,⁵¹ command that these stones become bread.**" The devil was not tempting Jesus to doubt His sonship or His call to the Messianic office. The "if" does not imply that the tempter was tempting Jesus to prove to Himself His sonship by performing a miracle.⁵² The devil knew that He was the Son of God. Jesus has

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had the Father's assuring testimony, and He now had the Spirit's assuring presence. In fact, the "**if**" in the

Greek text is in a construction that assumes Jesus' sonship is true.⁵³ It is an "if" of assumption, rather than doubt.⁵⁴ It is the kind of "if" that we use with one another every day. For example, my wife might tell me, "I'm going to the grocery store." And I might respond, "If you're going to the grocery store, please pick up a can of coffee."

Satan said, "If you are the Son of God, and we both know that you are, use your Messianic powers,⁵⁵ and create some food." Satan wanted Jesus to doubt His Father—to become anxious over His physical needs. He wanted Him to act on His own instead of in submission to His Father's will.

We must bear in mind that the New Testament views the temptations of Jesus as real (cf. Heb. 2:18; 4:15), and we must also remember that temptation by the devil in itself is not sin. We, of course, have indwelling sin, and Jesus, an unfallen man, had no sin nature. Like Adam, He was not tempted from within, but from without, by the devil. Yet He did have a true human nature with human instincts, and it is these which Satan attacks. Our Lord felt the tug and the pull of the natural instinct of hunger. He was hungry, and He would have enjoyed some food—the taste of fresh bread was in His mouth.⁵⁶

Incidentally, in that it was a real temptation, the devil also assumed that Jesus could work miracles.⁵⁷ "You're the Son of God, and you're hungry? Surely you,

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the anointed Messiah, have every right to a fine meal." One of the features of the Messiah's kingdom will be a wonderful Messianic banquet (cf. Matt. 8:11). Surely the future host of that great banquet should not be hungry!⁵⁸

It has been suggested that the devil is tempting Jesus to conform to one of three roles which charismatic leaders in His day adopted. In the first temptation He is prodded into using His powers like a magician. Act like a sorcerer, the devil suggested, and make wonder bread.⁵⁹

The events in the wilderness have profound significance when viewed against the Old Testament stories of Adam and Israel.⁶⁰ In the Garden of Eden Satan attempted to undermine Adam's confidence in God as well—and the temptation involved food! There were differences, of course: Adam was well fed and physically fit; Jesus was hungry and weak. Adam was the object of Satan's initial seduction of human beings; Jesus was attacked after His opponent had thousands of years of practice.⁶¹

Israel's rebellion in the wilderness was likewise related to food—their dissatisfaction with the manna the Lord had provided. They "**did not believe in God, and did not trust in His salvation**" (Ps. 78:17–20, 22, 32; cf. Ex. 16; Num. 11; Ps. 106:13–14). The devil's aim is clear. He wanted Jesus to repeat the unbelief and rebellion of Adam and Israel.

The Reply

In all three temptations, there is a pattern. The challenge of Satan is followed by a reply from Jesus who simply quoted Scripture from Deuteronomy. He first quotes Deuteronomy 8:3 (LXX): "**Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.**" Jesus apparently saw that He was recapitulating the experience of Israel in the wilderness. They, too, were tested by hunger, but He did not, like them, murmur against God (cf. Ex. 16; Num. 11). Instead, He took up "**the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God**" (Eph. 6:17).⁶²

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Jesus refused to become anxious or to distrust His Father. He realized that He had been led by the Spirit to this. Apparently fasting and hunger were God's will for the moment. To turn stones into bread would be to disobey God's will.⁶³ He was not going to use His Messianic powers as if He was a magician. He was not going to seek an easy way out of His trial by producing magical manna.⁶⁴ He was not a sorcerer who would try to sidestep God's providence with miracles. No betting on the lottery, by this man, to get out of a jam. He was not going to play the devil's game by treating His Messianic powers like some demonic sorcerer or

psychic charlatan.

When the people of Israel were hungry, God fed them manna; the provision of manna was simply a miracle designed to teach them a fundamental principle of their existence, namely that the basic source of life was God. All means for the sustenance of life—whether it be the normal acquisition of food supplies or the miraculous provision of food—are appointed by the Lord.

Jesus' point in quoting Deuteronomy 8:3 was that Messiah must leave it to God to sustain and nourish His life.⁶⁵ He knew that God could sustain His life

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in extraordinary ways, even without the common supplies of food, by the power of His almighty word and will. He would trust Him to do so. The miracle that Satan suggested would have been similar, in principle, to that which was performed by God in the desert for the Israelites. But Jesus did not perform the miracle, for He knew that He would be sustained by God. And He was, for following the temptation, **“angels came and began to minister to Him”** (Matt. 4:11).⁶⁶

We should note that Jesus did not say, “*Messiah* shall not live on bread alone.” He said, **“*Man* (ἄνθρωπος, anthrōpos) shall not live on bread alone.”** He completely identified with human beings and treated Himself as one of them.⁶⁷

We should also note that He did not say, “Man shall not live on bread *at all*.” People do live on bread (i.e., food), and that is why the devil was able to turn Jesus' hunger into a real temptation. Jesus could easily have reasoned, “Messiah has to live to work, and He has to eat to live. No bread, no Messiah.”

Jesus' temptation was much like Abraham's when the Lord told him to sacrifice his son Isaac. Earlier God had told him that all of the promises He had made were to be fulfilled through Isaac. If Isaac goes, the promises go with him. If Jesus dies of hunger, the Messiah dies with Him. Jesus, like Abraham, hangs on the Word of God.

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Humanity lives on bread, but not just on bread. Bread is the means, not the goal of life. Jesus lives for God. As Buttrick wrote, “The circumference of life cannot be rightly drawn until the center is set.”⁶⁸ The true center of the Christian's life is the answer to the first question of the *Westminster Shorter Catechism* (1648): Question: “What is the chief end of man” Answer: “Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him for ever.”⁶⁹

Our Lord's response demonstrates the quality of His spiritual life. He was a voracious student of Scripture, and He was a man of prayer. Because of this He was ready for Satan. On one occasion Dwight L. Moody found himself on a ship in a terrible storm. Some Christians on board, fearing a shipwreck, held a prayer meeting, but Moody did not attend, and they later upbraided him for his absence. Moody said, “I'm prayed up.” The believer cannot wait until the onset of the devil's attacks to start praying and reading. There may not be time. Jesus had His Bible at His command, and He had prayed much, and He took these weapons with Him to the battle.⁷⁰

The National Temptation:⁷¹ A Temptation to Presumption, verses 5–7

Then the devil took Him into the holy city; and he 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 give His angels charge concerning You’; and ‘On their hands they will bear You up, Lest You strike Your foot against a stone.’” Jesus said to him, “On the other hand, it is written, ‘You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.’”

The Challenge

Having failed in his first assault, the devil now **“takes⁷² [Jesus] into the holy city; and he had Him stand on the pinnacle of the temple.”** How the

movements of Jesus and the devil in the next two temptations are to be explained, the commentators do not agree. Whether we are to understand the going to the temple and the high mountain as visionary experiences or the miraculous transporting⁷³ of Jesus from the wilderness to the temple to the high mountain our text does not say. Matthew implies only that the events were real. Calvin confessed, “The matter is not certain, and there is no harm in admitting ignorance.”⁷⁴ John Milton, too, concluded that we cannot really know. He wrote,

By what strange Parallax or Optic skill
Of vision, multiplied through air, or glass
Of Telescope, were [fruitless] to inquire.⁷⁵

That the second temptation is directed toward the national aspect of Messiah’s ministry is indicated by three things: the mention of “**the holy city**” (“**Jerusalem**,” Luke 4:9), the setting at the temple, and the devil’s quotation of Psalm 91 (vv. 11–12), which in light of its citation here, takes on a Messianic significance.⁷⁶ According to the Old Testament, Jerusalem was at the center of the world; she was the *umbilicus mundi*, i.e., the navel of the earth (Ezek. 5:5; 38:12). It was the city of David with rich historical associations. The Jews also believed that the temple was at the center of Jerusalem, so when the devil took

Jesus to the “**pinnacle of the temple**,” He was, according to Jewish thinking, standing precisely at the center of the world.⁷⁷

The temple was a symbol of God’s presence with Israel and the organizing center of Jewish life.⁷⁸ The word translated “**pinnacle**” (πτέρυγιον, pterygion) literally means “wing.” There were no “pinnacles” in the Jerusalem temple. The term *wing* suggests any pointed roof or gable. It is not explained further. It could be a reference to a balcony in the temple wall, the lintel of the temple gateway, or possibly the roof-edge of Herod’s royal portico (στοὰ βασιλική, stoa basilikē), overhanging the Kedron Valley. Josephus says the 450-foot drop into the ravine was so deep that one would become dizzy looking down into it.⁷⁹

The message of Psalm 91 is that God protects the faithful. The psalm assumes that such a faithful person is guided in all his ways by the will of God.⁸⁰ It is the obedient believer who is given this promise.

The devil said to Jesus, “**If you are the Son of God throw Yourself down; for it is written, ‘He will give His angels charge concerning You;’ and ‘On their hands they will bear You up, lest You strike Your foot against a stone.’**” The Lord Jesus met the first temptation by quoting Scripture. He would live by every word out of God’s mouth. Now the devil shows that he can use the Bible, too. “You live by every word out of God’s mouth. Put your money where your mouth is. Jump! The Bible says God will save you!”

This temptation has a twofold thrust: First, it was, of course, personal, i.e., it was an attempt to get Jesus to presume upon God. By jumping He would force God’s hand to save Him. Second, it was a temptation with nationalistic implications. There would, no doubt, be crowds at the temple. They were Jews

who believed that Messiah would reveal Himself at the temple. The devil told Him to jump—not to destruction, but to rescue by God. The Jews, who loved spectacular signs (1 Cor. 1:22), would see this spectacular “air walk” and immediately embrace Him as Messiah.⁸¹

In Jesus’ day there were false prophets, deluded visionaries who thought they would force God’s hand by claiming to do miracles. Some even claimed the ability to fly.⁸² Satan had deluded others with this gambit; perhaps he could delude the Son of God.

The Reply

Jesus was no deluded visionary. He refuted the devil with Scripture in the first temptation, and He did not

change His method for the second. He then quoted from Deuteronomy 6:16, “**On the other hand, it is written, ‘You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.’**” The Lord was not disputing the truth of Psalm 91. He was refuting the devil’s erroneous application of it.⁸³ This encounter shows us that we must always ask when hearing Scripture cited, “Is this what this text really says?” It also shows that believers will sometimes need to use Scripture to refute those who are using the Bible falsely. Whenever Scripture is used to encourage behavior or beliefs that the rest of Scripture discourages or forbids, “we can tell we are in enemy territory.”⁸⁴

Yes the devil quoted Scripture, but he was using it deceitfully, for he is a liar (John 8:44). Jesus knew the truth of the rabbinical saying, “It is the penalty of a liar, that should he even tell the truth, he is not listened to.”⁸⁵ In its original

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setting in Deuteronomy this verse refers to the time at Massah when the people complained about Moses because there was no water. The people were putting God to the test, and the Lord ordered Moses to strike a rock, and water poured out and met their need (Ex. 17:1–6; Num. 20:2–13). The Old Testament account makes it clear that the behavior of the people was unbelieving. The servants of the Lord cannot demand that God intervene with miraculous provision to meet every difficulty.⁸⁶ Jesus saw Himself being tempted to do what Israel did, to put God to the test. In fact, it would be an even worse sin on His part for those people were in real need.

In this temptation Jesus teaches us that God is God; He is not to be manipulated by His people; He is not a heavenly bellboy. Jesus will not treat God as if He has to prove Himself—as if Jesus was in doubt until God saved Him.⁸⁷ Jesus had a repugnance for sensationalism and signs (Matt. 12:38–42; 16:1–12). He preferred the way of quiet trust in God. He “teaches us to be loyal subjects of God’s Word and to obey God without great display.”⁸⁸

We live in an era which prizes sensational religious displays. Like the Israelites of old many professing Christians demand of God miraculous intervention. Like the Lord Jesus, let us walk the path of quiet submission to God’s Word.

Our Lord’s response demonstrates that He is here to serve God; God is not His servant. He will not presume upon God. We, too, can presume upon the Lord—we, too, can put Him to the test. Think, for example, of a person “maxed out” on credit cards. He or she says, “I’m going to buy that article of clothing (or car or house) in spite of my debt—God won’t let me go bankrupt.” Or think of a young person in love with an unbeliever. The Bible warns against unequal yokes, i.e., covenants and contracts with unbelievers (2 Cor. 6:14). It clearly says we are to marry “**in the Lord**” (1 Cor. 7:39). Yet this young Christian says, “I’m going to marry this unbelieving person, and I am trusting the Lord to convert her/him.” Jesus’ words are to the point: “**You shall not put the Lord your God to the test**” (Matt. 4:7).

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One more thing should be noted in verse 6. The Old Testament passage the devil quotes is Psalm 91:11–12. There is a bit of irony in this quotation, for the very next verse in Psalm 91 (v. 13) says, “**You will tread upon the lion and cobra, the young lion and the serpent you will trample down.**” In light of the devil’s application of this psalm to Jesus, one immediately thinks of the great promise to the serpent in the Garden of Eden that the seed of the woman would, “**bruise you on the head**” (Gen. 3:15). At the Cross Jesus would inflict a fatal head wound on the serpent (cf. Rom. 16:20).⁸⁹

The Universal Temptation: A Temptation to Compromise, verses 8–10

Again, the devil took Him 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 will I give You, if You fall down and worship me.” Then Jesus said to him, “Begone, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only.’”

The Challenge

Having failed twice, the devil tried a third time to seduce the Son of God. John the Baptist had proclaimed the message of **“the kingdom of heaven”** (3:2). Jesus, too, would preach this message (4:17). In its full manifestation, this kingdom would mean the reign of Messiah upon this earth. But, as Matthew 1:21 indicates, Jesus would first have to remove sin from the people. In short, He would have to first be the Suffering Servant of the Lord (20:28) before He could be the Davidic Sovereign.

The devil, in his third assault on Christ, offered a temptation that relates to the Jewish dream of a Messianic kingdom. He **“takes”** (παραλαμβάνει, *paralambanei*, historical present) Jesus **“to a very high mountain and shows** (δείκνυσιν, *deiknysin*, historical present) **Him all the kingdoms of the world, and their glory.”** This means that the devil showed our Lord, perhaps in a visionary way,⁹⁰ this world and all its wealth, i.e., this world and all it has to offer

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in power, affluence, and fame. The word **“glory”** (δόξα, *doxa*) speaks of the outward splendor of this world.⁹¹

The verb translated **“to show”** (δείκνυμι, *deiknymi*) can sometimes have the significance of trying to explain or demonstrate or convince. The devil was, as it were, trying to make a legal case.⁹² As he showed Jesus **“the kingdoms of the world,”** he said, **“All these things will I give You, if You fall down and worship me.”**

In the first two temptations the devil addresses Jesus as **“the Son of God.”** That form of address is dropped in this temptation because the request is no longer for an act of power; rather it is a request for subjection to one who is not Jesus' father.⁹³

The connection between the third temptation and the first two may be this: “You are not the Son of God, as is evident from your inability to make bread and your refusal to cast yourself boldly upon God's grace. Worship me and receive what I will give you—secular power, influence and wealth.⁹⁴

Luke adds a very significant element to the devil's offer. The devil said to Jesus, **“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”** (Luke 4:6). This would seem to suggest that the devil had such authority to offer. This right was apparently his by virtue of his victory over the first Adam, the rightful heir of creation.⁹⁵ Billy Bray

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(1794–1868), the Cornish evangelist, used to say in his quaint way, “The old vagabond, [to offer Christ] the kingdoms of the world, [why he never possessed so much as] a ‘tater skin.’”⁹⁶ But Mr. Bray was wrong. As Denney pointed out, “This saying, which in Luke is put into the lips of Satan, is not meant to be regarded as untrue. There would be no temptation in it if it was untrue.”⁹⁷ The New Testament views Satan's authority in this fallen world as real. He is called **“the god of this world”** (2 Cor. 4:4) and **“the ruler of this world”** (John 12:31; 14:30).

The temptation was threefold:⁹⁸ First, Christ was offered a political kingdom, not a spiritual one. The first temptation was a temptation to carnality or selfishness. The second was a temptation to super-spirituality—a spectacular act for God. He rejected both. But then the devil offered Him a way to help people—the poor and downtrodden of this world. Surely the world needs a king like this! Satan offers to make Jesus not the Servant of the Lord but *homo imperiosus* (“imperial man”), the new Caesar.⁹⁹ Satan offered to make Jesus the ultimate political revolutionary (a “liberation theologian”) with authority over all the earth—including the hated Romans.¹⁰⁰

Second, there was the temptation to “get it now.” This offer is, in a sense, a parody of what God had already promised the Messianic king: **“Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as Your inheritance, and**

the very ends of the earth as Your possession” (Ps. 2:8; cf. 72:8; Rev. 11:15).¹⁰¹ But what Satan offered was

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not what God had promised. The devil showed the kingdoms to Jesus without their sin. He promised to give Him the kingdom now by sidestepping the cross. At His baptism Jesus had been anointed as both the Suffering Servant and the Davidic Sovereign. Here He is promised the kingdom without the suffering. This would mean, of course, a world forever enslaved to sin and its miseries.¹⁰² What does this imply? “Simply that of Christ He should become Antichrist—nothing short of this.”¹⁰³

Third, there was the temptation to gain the kingdom by an act of worship to the god of this world. What the baby Jesus received from the Magi (“**wise men**,” AV) in Matt. 2:11, viz., worship, Satan desired from Jesus.

The “**if**” in verse 9 (ἐάν, ean) is different from those in verses 3 and 6 (εἰ, ei). The “**if**” here introduces a third class condition, and it suggests that Satan is uncertain of Jesus’ decision, but he thinks it is likely that He will actually fall down and worship him.¹⁰⁴ In fact, the devil was so sure of this last attempt that he made no attempt to hide the price.¹⁰⁵

This calls to mind the very first testing of the human race, a test failed by Adam in the garden (Gen. 3:1–7; Rom. 5:12). The temptation centers on a choice between the will of Satan and the will of God. It involves the rendering of worship to either one or the other. Jesus was clearly being asked to break the first of the ten commandments, “**I am the Lord your God... you shall have no other gods before Me**” (Deut. 5:6–7).¹⁰⁶ It was the temptation of idolatry and compromise: “Serve the devil and rule the world.” In modern terms, “be practical, realistic, and ready to compromise: ‘the end justifies the means.’ To help people you must get position and power.”¹⁰⁷

“The bane of political leadership is its expediency and compromise: ‘The end justifies the means.’ Actually means and ends are joined, like a river flowing into a lake. If there is poison in the means, we arrive at a poisoned lake.”¹⁰⁸ If

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Jesus bowed down He would get a kingdom, but one He would have to share with the devil.

This kind of compromise is seen in the words of King Henry IV (1553–1610) who, realizing that no king could rule in France who was not of France’s religion, gave up his evangelical (Huguenot) faith and became a Catholic. To have France he was willing to give up the truth. “Paris is well worth a Mass,” he said.¹⁰⁹

Some may say, “I was never tempted with kingdoms.” No, with Jesus the devil was playing for high stakes and he offered all he had. But for us fallen children of Adam his bribes do not need to be nearly so extravagant. The Bible has numerous illustrations of Satan’s paltry bribes: some bread and lentil stew (Gen. 25:34), a foreign-made article of clothing (Josh. 7:21), two suits of clothing (2 Kings 5:23), or thirty pieces of silver (Matt. 26:15). For very little, people will make a deal with the devil. As Lancelot Andrewes (1555–1626) pointedly remarked, “Let us stand in our windows or our doors, if he will give us but so much as we can there see, he will tempt us thoroughly.”¹¹⁰

The temptation facing Jesus faces believers on a practical level every day. It faces the man or woman in the Lord’s work who is striving for success. Such a person may be so driven by success that he no longer can distinguish between his work for God and God. He will do *absolutely anything* to keep this work from failing, and the moment he does *absolutely anything*, his work has become his god. Jesus was being tempted by the devil to do absolutely anything to make His work successful.

Love for people is part of this subtle temptation. For example, a student in seminary or Bible College may face a dilemma. His family has provided for his education, and his home church has supported him and prayed for him. The only thing that stands between him and his degree is an exam he cannot pass. What is a cheat sheet—a hidden piece of paper with all the answers—next to a lifetime serving the Lord? After all,

he doesn't intend to be a lifetime cheater. Every Christian is faced with this temptation: good ends—my family's security, my children's education, more money for the church, and the temptation of questionable means—a minor scruple here, a “using of one's head” there.¹¹¹

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The Reply

If Satan expected to win this round he was badly mistaken. Jesus responds for the first time with a command, “**Begone, Satan!**” (ὕπαγε Σατανᾶ, hypage satana). Our Lord chooses the path of duty. The end ordained by the Father, the kingdom of God upon the earth, is to be achieved in the manner ordained by the Father, viz., the Cross.

This is the first time, incidentally, that the name “**Satan**” appears in Matthew. It means “Adversary,” and is essentially the equivalent of “**devil**.” To reject the way of the Cross is to be on the side of Satan. Peter was to find this out when he tried to dissuade Jesus from going to Jerusalem to suffer and die. “**Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's**” (Matt. 16:23).

Jesus again quoted the Book of Deuteronomy (6:13), “**You shall worship** (προσκυνήσεις, proskynēseis)¹¹² **the Lord your God, and serve Him only.**” This Scripture gets right to the heart of the matter. The original context of the Old Testament quotation is instructive. It is found in a warning against idolatry (cf. Deut. 6:14). The warning takes us back to the story of the worship of the golden calf (Ex. 32:1–6). Our Lord will not follow the sinful example of Israel. He turned down the devil's offer of the kingdoms of this world. The day will come when King Messiah will destroy the false kingdom that Satan had to offer. And in its place will stand the Kingdom of Heaven.¹¹³

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The Conclusion of the Story, verse 11

Then the devil left Him; and behold, angels came and began to minister to Him.

The Retreat of Satan

The story ends with the simple, “**Then the devil leaves** (ἀφίησιν, aphīēsin, historical present) **Him.**” Satan had never encountered a man like this. He did not know what to do with someone “who would not do evil that good might come.”¹¹⁴ This is not the end of the struggle, of course. Luke (4:13) adds that **Satan “departed from Him until an opportune time.”** There will be other great battles when the tempter will reappear (cf. Matt. 16:23; 27:40). Yet this battle in the wilderness has been a great victory. The Lord has learned to resist the devil (cf. James 4:7), and He has established a pattern of obedience and trust.¹¹⁵

The Ministry of Angels

Then “**angels came and began to minister to Him.**” The verb “**to minister**” (διακονέω, diakoneō) is translated by the REB as “**attended to His needs.**” The Greek verb originally referred to the service of a table waiter. They “took care” of Him, and the verb (διηκόνουν, diēkonoun, imperfect) suggests sustained action. Their care of Jesus included, no doubt, the serving of food.¹¹⁶

This is all very suggestive: It reminds us that Jesus was truly a man, and after this ordeal He needed care. Yet the angels came to more than care for Him. Their appearances in the Gospels are rare—they come at significant moments in Jesus' life (birth [Matt. 1:20], temptation [Matt. 4:11], Gethsemane [Luke 22:43], resurrection [Matt. 28:2], ascension [Acts 1:10–11]). Their appearance here calls attention to the victory of God's obedient Son.

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Ironically, the One who refused to turn stones into bread is now given food. The One who refused to throw Himself off the temple to get angelic help is now served by angels. The One who refused to take a shortcut to the Kingdom, will now begin to announce the coming of the Kingdom in His preaching ministry (Matt. 4:17).¹¹⁷

It is interesting that in the sacred legends of the Jews God sent the angels to guard Adam and pay him homage.¹¹⁸ What Adam lost due to his disobedience, Jesus has gained by His obedience, viz., the homage and service of angels.¹¹⁹

The Importance of the Temptation of Jesus

The Doctrinal Significance of the Temptation¹²⁰

It Proved that Jesus is Perfectly Qualified Morally to be the “Last Adam”

Jesus’ temptations, wrote Ferguson, “constitute an epochal...[and] cosmic...event.” His temptations “constitute the tempting of the last Adam.”¹²¹ The temptation account is to be seen, he wrote, “as a re-run of Eden.” “Like Adam before Him,” he added, “Jesus was incited to ‘be as God’ and to reject His word. But He chose the way of God-glorifying obedience and suffering instead.”¹²² The terrible encounter took place in “the inhospitable desert, which the world had become through the first Adam’s sin.” Jesus, the second man and the last Adam, regained enemy-territory. In the short term, this meant that Jesus was able to sovereignly dismiss the devil (Matt. 4:10). In the long term, it was a foretaste of Golgotha where He would inflict a deadly wound upon and decisive defeat over “the serpent of old” (Gen. 3:15; cf. Rev. 12:9) and establish His claim as the eschatological Adam (ὁ ἔσχατος Ἀδάμ, ho exchatos Adam, “the last Adam,” 1 Cor. 15:45) to be the King of the earth, Savior of sinners, and Priest of His people.¹²³

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It Proved that Jesus is Perfectly Qualified Morally to be the Davidic King¹²⁴

“It is quite impossible,” wrote Trench, “to exaggerate the importance of the victory which was then gained by the [last] Adam, or the bearing which it had, and still has on the work of our redemption.”¹²⁵ The importance is suggested by John Milton, who wrote an epic poem on Adam’s defeat in Eden called *Paradise Lost*. When he wrote of the last Adam’s victory, *Paradise Regained*, his poem contained nothing more than the story of Jesus’ victory over Satan at His temptation.¹²⁶

Because of His victory over Satan’s temptations, Jesus as the last Adam is worthy to carry out His Messianic task in at least three ways.¹²⁷ First of all, His victory proved that He is perfectly qualified morally to be the Davidic king. At His baptism He was anointed for the dual role of sovereignty and servanthood. The Holy Spirit anointed Him to be the Davidic Son of God—the king—of Psalm 2. And the temptation demonstrated that He was worthy of the office.

In each of the temptations Messiah was invited to take center stage in one way or another. Each time Messiah declined the suggestion and put God in the center of the stage. And each time the significance of Jesus’ action is perfectly clear: “even the Messiah is only God’s servant—indeed, just because He is Messiah He must be preeminently God’s servant.”¹²⁸

His victory in the wilderness, says Johnson, is one in a series that finds its consummation at the end of the Gospel of Matthew in the exultant exclamation,

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“All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth” (Matt. 28:18). And that declaration, made by Christ after His resurrection, is a further step in a process that shall be crowned at the dawning of the millennial age, **“The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ;**

and He will reign forever and ever” (Rev. 11:15).

It Proves that Jesus is Perfectly Qualified Morally to be His People’s Savior

At His baptism Jesus was anointed not only as sovereign, but as servant. Not only did the voice of God cite Psalm 2, a Messianic psalm, but the Lord also cited Isaiah 42:1, which looks forward to His role as the Servant of the Lord. This role would take Him to the Cross where He would pour Himself out unto death (Isa. 53:12).

In the wilderness Jesus settled once and for all the kind of Messiah He would be. He would not use the Messianic powers given Him by the Holy Spirit for His own ends. Nor would He accept the political concepts of Messiahship that were current in His day. Instead, as the Servant of the Lord, He would trust God for all His needs. He would experience hunger, hostility, sorrow, and frustration and never once seek the easy way out. And when He faced the final challenge, the Cross, He would not call on the twelve legions of angels that were there to help Him should He call (Matt. 26:53). Instead, to the very end He entrusted Himself to the providential care of His Father as He said, **“Father, into Thy hands I commit My spirit”** (Luke 23:46).¹²⁹

To be our Redeemer and Savior, our Lord must be truly human (cf. Heb. 14). Yet He must be an unfallen and sinless man, for only as such could He be the substitute upon the Cross on behalf of sinners. To be our Savior Jesus must be **“a lamb unblemished and spotless”** (1 Peter 1:19). In His steadfast obedience and resistance to temptation Jesus offered a pledge of the crucial victory of Golgotha where He would disarm **“the rulers and authorities”** (Col. 2:15).

It Proves that Jesus is Perfectly Qualified Morally/Experientially to be a Sympathetic High Priest

This is the principal lesson that is drawn from our Lord’s temptation by the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews. He wrote, **“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”** (2:18). He also said, **“For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in all**

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things as we are, yet without sin” (4:15). Jesus was truly human and assailed by every kind of temptation.¹³⁰ Because of this He is able to sympathize with every tempted man and woman. And unlike the sinful priests of His day and our own, Jesus is a sinless priest—**“holy, innocent, undefiled”** (Heb. 7:26)—and therefore trustworthy and effective.

The Practical Significance of the Temptation¹³¹

God’s People Will be Tested/Tempted

As the Living Bible puts it, “But remember this—the wrong desires that come into your life aren’t anything new and different. Many others have faced exactly the same problems before you” (1 Cor. 10:13a). Yet to read or hear many people on the spiritual life one might think that the so-called victorious Christian never experiences temptation. Charles Ryrie was perusing a number of volumes as he researched his own book on the spiritual life. Of the several he examined only one mentioned temptation and then only in two paragraphs.¹³²

Jesus is the great exemplar of the Christian life, and if there is one thing that His life on earth makes clear, it is this: being a child of God does not mean that we are immune to trials, testings, and temptations. The temptations will be in the very same areas exemplified in the wilderness experience of Jesus: **“the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life”** (1 John 2:16).

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Jesus Provides a Model for Tested/Tempted Believers

The author of Hebrews tells his readers to fix their eyes on Jesus and to “**consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you may not grow weary and lose heart**” (Heb. 12:2–3). Some might argue that Jesus is unfit to be an example for a weak and sorely tempted believer—after all, He was victorious. Just because our Lord overcame His temptations does not mean that His conflict and victory were easy for Him. His victory cost Him tears and blood: “**His appearance was marred more than any man**” (Isa. 52:14). The prophet speaks of His “**griefs...and...sorrows,**” and the “**anguish of His soul**” (Isa. 53:3–4, 11). In His last great struggle He cried, “**My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me!**” (Matt. 26:39).

“Because an army is victorious, it by no means follows that the victory was a cheap one.” “One more such victory will ruin me,” said Pyrrhus after the battle of Asculum.¹³³ The physical suffering of a martyr is not lessened by the strength given to him by God to endure it. The fire is as hot, and the pain as intense, in his case as in that of an unbeliever. Divine grace does not act like an anesthetic, and deaden pain. The grief of a believer due to the death of a loved one (or the anguish of some other burden) is no less sore and heavy, because of the grace which helps him/her to bear it. The promise of Scripture is, “**Cast your burden upon the Lord, and He will sustain you**” (Ps. 55:22). The promise is that He will sustain *you—not the burden*, the sorrow, the trial, or the temptation. There is no promise that He will necessarily remove the thorn in the flesh, yet He will give grace to help you stand (cf. 2 Cor. 12:7–9). In short, victory over temptation does not imply that the temptation is a small one; that because Jesus could not be overcome by temptation, His temptation was less severe than those of His people.¹³⁴

Erwin Lutzer, pastor of Chicago’s famed Moody Memorial Church, has said that Jesus was tempted to turn from: (1) the will of God, (2) the Word of God, and (3) the way of God, i.e., the Cross.¹³⁵ We are tempted in the same way. Jesus apparently knew from the Spirit when His fast was to be over, and it was not yet God’s time for Him to eat. We learn from this that Satan takes legitimate needs and tells us to satisfy them in illegitimate ways. Just think of our passions that scream at us: “Desires, not duties! Power, not poverty.” Temptation is powerful

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because that which is offered is good—in the right time and place. Sexual desire is good—within marriage. Good grades are good—so long as I don’t cheat to get them. A lovely home is wonderful—if I don’t steal to get it. The challenge is to ask God for faith to believe that His way is best—even when it doesn’t appear to be. We must not turn from the will of God.

Our Lord believed that if the command directed Him to do something or go somewhere, the command should be obeyed. “Shortage of food or water, lack of strength, or any other excuse would be insufficient, for the command of God contained within it the provision of God.”¹³⁶ Physical limitations are not sufficient excuse. As the old adage goes, “God’s commandments are God’s enablements.”¹³⁷

Nor must we turn from the Word of God. Three times Jesus said, “**It is written**” (γέγραπται, gegraptai). This revealed His complete submission to the authority of God’s Word, and it points the way to victory for believers. It should not be overlooked that His three citations come from the Book of Deuteronomy, a book that is not often studied or memorized. The lesson for us today is that the church must feed voraciously on the truths of Scripture where she will find the guidance she needs to minister to people. Christ-centered, truth-centered Scripture study is the great need of God’s servants.¹³⁸

We cannot emphasize too much Jesus’ approach to trials. He did not take recourse to immediate, direct conversation with the Father. He did not seek special revelations or signs and wonders. He went along the lowly path of mediate, indirect, Bible knowledge. There is no higher way to God in this life than through the written Word. Theological mystics and Charismatics¹³⁹ seek to get out from under the “obscuring umbrella”

into the direct sunlight of the immediate presence of God. It cannot be done and should not be tried. The Son and His church have dependable [conversation] with God the Father only through God's chosen [medium of Scripture.]”¹⁴⁰

From the example of Jesus and the teaching of the Apostles (cf. 2 Tim. 3:16–17) we learn that the Scriptures equip us to do God's will. Lutzer challenged a young man who was struggling with pornography to memorize five verses on moral purity. He promised he would recite them the next time he was tempted to buy a pornographic magazine. Little did he know that temptation would soon come his way. Within a few days of his promise a pornographic magazine was placed in his apartment mailbox by mistake. He wanted to open it and read it, but a promise is a promise. So he recited the five verses out loud, and to his own delight he was able to dispose of the magazine without opening it. Of course, Dr. Lutzer was not offering a simplistic technique for conquering habits—five verses and my temptations disappear. What he was suggesting is that the believer will be given growing strength to resist the devil as he gains skill in using **“the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God”** (Eph. 6:17).¹⁴¹

Jesus also refused to be turned from the way of God, i.e., the way of the Cross. Jesus refused **“the kingdoms of the world,”** choosing instead the *Via Dolorosa* (“the Way of Sorrows”) that would lead to Golgotha. Today Jesus is in heaven, and Satan can no longer tempt Him to avoid the Cross, but He can tempt believers to belittle it. The cross is cheapened whenever we think we must do some form of good deed or penance to earn God's forgiveness. It is cheapened if we think that we have committed a sin that cannot be forgiven. Satan's seductions continue as he seduces people into believing that there can be a crown without a cross; salvation without a Substitute.¹⁴²

Jesus Provides Help for Tested/Tempted Believers

The author of Hebrews reminded His readers that Jesus was not only human and temptable, but He is divine and able to help His struggling people—**“to come to the aid of those who are tempted”** (Heb. 2:18; cf. 1:8; 7:3, 16). In the words of the prophet, He is **“mighty to save...marching in the greatness of His**

strength” (Isa. 63:1). The author of Hebrews also referred to Jesus as **“the mediator of a new covenant”** (8:6; 9:15; 12:24). As the God-man He is the perfect mediator (“middle-man”) between God and man. He is not only able to lovingly sympathize with us in our trials and temptations, He is able to help.

Satan is Real, Personal, and Malevolent

Modern theologians are inclined to speak of the devil and his demons as metaphors for the riddle of existence or evil.¹⁴³ They deny the personal existence of Satan and his hordes. Instead they speak of the evil of systems and structures. Evil is caused by social, political, and economic institutions. This is not the teaching of the Bible. Jesus and His apostles taught that the devil—a real, personal, and malevolent angelic being—truly exists. He is a liar and a murderer (John 8:44), and he and his fellow fallen angels are ever working to urge individual human beings to evil—i.e., to rebellion against the will of God revealed in Scripture.

Russell addressed the relevant issue when he wrote, “The central message of the New Testament is salvation: Christ saves us. What He saves us from is the power of the Devil. If the power of the Devil is dismissed, then Christ's saving mission becomes meaningless.”¹⁴⁴ It is the teaching of the New Testament that Jesus came into the world to defeat the devil and thereby save His people (1 John 3:8; Heb. 2:14). In

His anguish at Golgotha Jesus fused the wrath and mercy of God and put to flight the demonic host (Col. 2:15). Luther wrote,

In devil's dungeon chained I lay
The pangs of death swept o'er me,
My sin devoured me night and day
In which my mother bore me.
My anguish ever grew more rife,
I took no pleasure in my life
And sin had made me crazy...

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Thus spoke the Son, "Hold thou to me,
From now on thou wilt make it.
I gave my very life for thee
And for thee I will stake it.
For I am thine and thou art mine
And where I am our lives entwine,
The Old Fiend cannot shake it."¹⁴⁵

Years ago Archbishop Trench (1807–86) asked the question, "What is the profit of getting rid of the *devil*, so long as the *devilish* remains? Of explaining away an Evil *One*, so long as the evil *ones* who remain are so many?" Ironically this doctrine of "an Evil Spirit, tempting, seducing, deceiving, prompting to rebellion and revolt...is full of consolation, and [provides]...a gleam...of hope...[in this dark world]." Without the biblical revelation of a personal devil we might: (1) despair of ourselves, having no choice but to believe that the strange and evil thoughts were born in our own hearts. (2) We might well despair of the human race, having no choice but to believe that the hideous sins and monstrous crimes are only human. But we have hope when we realize that, "**An enemy has done this**" (Matt. 13:28). Yes, the *soil* in which these wicked thoughts and deeds have grown up is the heart of mankind; yet the *seed* from which they have sprung was sown by another.

This doctrine of a personal devil gives us insight into the moral history of the world—insight invariably ignored in secular analyses of contemporary violence and crime. (1) It explains why people not only depart from God but defy Him. (2) It explains why unbelievers do not merely forget God and let Him go, but utter His name from their lips in blasphemy—they mention Him more than those who love and serve Him. (3) It explains the active hatred of God that is obvious in the lives of some people. (4) It explains the delight that some people have in inflicting pain on others, their sheer inventiveness in devising wicked things to do. (5) It explains the love of crime and evil that some choose—their fierce joy in violating the law, the violation itself being the chief attraction. (6)

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And it explains the terrible occultic bondage that has enslaved so many in modern times.¹⁴⁶ The existence of evil is inexplicable and dreadful so long as we ignore its spiritual origins. It is, however, easy to understand when we recognize that man's evil is not altogether his own. Behind human transgression is transgression in the spirit world.¹⁴⁷

The account in Matthew 4:1–11, in agreement with the rest of the New Testament, simply assumes the existence of the Evil One, called here, "**the devil**" (vv. 1, 5, 8, 11), "**the tempter**" (v. 3), and "**Satan**" (v. 10). Elsewhere in Matthew he is called, "**the evil one**" (Matt. 6:13), "**the enemy**" (13:39), and "**Beelzebul, the ruler of the demons**" (12:24; cf. 10:25; 12:27).¹⁴⁸ Some of his methods in temptation may be learned from our Lord's experience: First, Satan often attacks after a time of deep communion with the Lord or after a time of joyful service. This can be seen in the lives of Abraham (Gen. 16:1–4; cf. chap. 15), David (e.g., 1 Sam. 18:11; cf. vv. 6–9; 2 Sam. 11; cf. 2 Sam. 10:17–19), Peter (Matt. 26:69–75; cf. v. 20), and here in the

experience of the Lord Jesus.¹⁴⁹ The Lord had no sooner been baptized by John, anointed by the Holy Spirit, and praised by His Father, than He was led into the wilderness. Right after that glorious moment of consecration He was confronted by the devil. This should serve as a warning to all who would serve the Lord that the devil seeks to seduce at the moment one feels closest to God and most fruitfully engaged in His service.

Second, the devil often attacks with his temptations when the believer is weak. Jesus had been fasting for an extended period, and He was vulnerable because of His physical weakness. This is one of the devil's most obvious tactics.

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He will mount his offense when we are tired, depressed, and discouraged.¹⁵⁰ Third, our passage may imply that the devil especially attacks those who are alone or the lonely. He certainly attacked Eve that way, and also our Lord in the wilderness.

Martin Luther (1483–1546), the great reformer, suffered great depression due to the attacks of Satan. He described some of his bouts with the Evil One. “When I go to bed, the Devil is always waiting for me. When he begins to plague me, I give him this answer: ‘Devil, I must sleep. That’s God’s command, “Work by day. Sleep by night.” So go away.’ If that doesn’t work and he brings out a catalog of sins, I say, ‘Yes, old fellow, I know all about it. And I know some more you have overlooked. Here are a few extra. Put them down.’ If he still won’t quit and presses me hard and accuses me as a sinner, I scorn him and say, ‘St. Satan, pray for me. Of course you have never done anything wrong in your life. You alone are holy. Go to God and get grace for yourself. If you want to get me all straightened out, I say, ‘Physician, heal thyself.’”

Luther knew of Satan’s power to tempt and depress. So he warned believers against trying to argue with the devil—“He has had five thousand years experience.” Luther was a wise pastor. He counseled the reading of the Word, and he advised seeking out Christian company. Put the subject of your temptation and depression out of your mind. Seek out Christian friends and discuss some irrelevant matter as, for example, what is going on in Venice. Make sure you are strengthened by the fellowship of the church.

Luther had an astonishing faith in the grace of God. But he knew that there were times when you simply had to leave your depression and despondency with God. He warned against lonely prayer and fasting—the very thing that more mystical people would recommend. What you need, he said is “convivial company, feminine company, dine, dance, joke and sing.”

We might find his advice worldly, but as those who have counseled the spiritually oppressed know, he was wisely telling people that the worst thing to do is be alone and inactive. The worst thing you can do at a time of depression, despondency, and temptation is sit alone and think about the devil’s lies and half truths.

We might not give the same counsel as the rambunctious German pastor, but we know that he knew the problem with which he was dealing. He knew there were believers enduring Satanic oppression who would retreat into lonely isolation and destructive introspection. And he knew that loneliness was a target of the devil. Entrust all of your guilt feelings with the Lord and go find some Christian fellowship.

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He especially commended music. “The devil hates it because he cannot endure gaiety. Luther’s rules for dispelling despondency were: (1) faith in Christ, (2) get angry at the Devil, and (3) the love of a woman! Luther was sharply criticized for his marriage—he had been a Catholic priest. His home life was a comfort and a diversion, and so was the presence of his dear wife when the devil assaulted him.

He recommended manual labor as a relief. A good way to get rid of the devil, he suggested, is to harness the horse and spread manure on the field. Was Luther being carnal and foolish? Anyone who has counseled lonely, inactive, and depressed Christians knows that he was not. I have known people who wouldn’t get out of bed, and would not spend time with people, and the devil was crushing them spiritually.

Luther believed, rightly I think, in the restorative power of God, who operates in the subconscious, healing and curing our depressions while we occupy ourselves with extraneous things, i.e., frivolous things, irrelevant things, secular things. Today Luther might say, “Have friends over to talk, sing hymns, or watch a video!”

Above all things Luther believed in the power of the Word of God. We need to search the Scriptures, i.e., we need to regularly and attentively read the Bible, and sit under its teaching in the meetings of the church. It is our greatest weapon in the spiritual warfare.¹⁵¹

To sum up: (1) Study the Word and sit under the Word, (2) Seek Christian fellowship, and (3) get active for the Lord!

Finally, we should note that the devil’s attacks are subtle. In the temptations Satan did not deny Christ’s Messiahship. There was no point-blank denial of the truth. His methods have not changed. A modern minister or theologian will not deny the virgin birth—he will say the doctrine is unnecessary. They will not openly deny Christ’s deity; instead they will speak of Jesus as our example, not the object of our faith. We must reject the Devil’s subtle lies and confess what the true church has always confessed, that Jesus is a man, true, but that He is also God incarnate.¹⁵²

Scripture Can Be Quoted for Evil Motives

Satan’s knowledge of Holy Scripture (cf. v. 6) suggests another important lesson in the temptation account, viz., Scripture can be quoted for evil motives. The

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Devil knows more of the Bible than most Christians, and so do many of his ministers who pose as “**ministers of righteousness**” (2 Cor. 11:15).

G. Campbell Morgan (1863–1945), the famed minister of London’s Westminster Chapel, wrote, “Every false teacher who has divided the Church, has had an ‘it is written’ on which to hang his doctrine. If only against the isolated passage there had been the recognition of the fact that, “**On the other hand, it is written...**” [v. 7], how much the Church would have been saved!”¹⁵³ Morgan wrote that all of the heresies of the church have been based upon Scripture as the devil uses it—Scripture taken out of context and out of its relation to the whole of revelation.

In Shakespeare’s play, *The Merchant of Venice*, Antonio says,

Mark you this Bassanio,
The Devil can cite Scripture for his purpose.
An evil soul, producing holy witness,
Is like a villain with a smiling cheek,
A goodly apple rotten at the heart.
O, what a goodly outside falsehood hath!¹⁵⁴

Every person who has spoken to representatives of false cults knows this is true. The heretical teachings of baptismal regeneration, soul sleep, universalism, and denial of Christ’s deity are all supported by adherents of false cults with the Word of God. How important it is for the believer to be able to refute these errors by saying, “**On the other hand, it is written**” (v. 7).¹⁵⁵

We might note, incidentally, that the Scriptures can be used superstitiously as well as Satanically. There was a celebrated bookseller in England named Lackington who told of an occasion in his youth when his parents would not allow him to attend a Methodist evangelistic meeting. Not knowing much about the Bible he opened it, asking the Lord for direction. His finger fell upon Matthew 4:6, “**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.**” “This was quite enough

for me,” he said, “so without a moment’s hesitation, I ran up two flights of stairs to my own room, and out of the window I leaped, to the great

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terror of my poor mother.” He was, of course, severely hurt and had to spend the next two weeks confined to a bed under medical care.¹⁵⁶

God Brings Victory to Those Who Remain Faithful

We must learn not to expect to be free from temptation .

Donald Campbell, retired Dallas Seminary president, suggests five guidelines for the believer.¹⁵⁷ First, we must accept the reality of temptation. All of God’s people have faced it—including the great heroes of the faith: Noah (Gen. 9:20–21), Abraham (Gen. 16:1–3), Jacob (Gen. 27:5–29), Moses (Num. 20:10–11), David (2 Sam. 11:1–5), Jonah (Jon. 1:1–3), and Peter (Matt. 26:69–75).

We must distinguish between temptation and sin .¹⁵⁸

Many a Christian with a tender conscience has concluded that he/she is a poor Christian because he has been tempted so much. Our passage proves, however, that temptation is not necessarily sin. The real issue is, “Do you yield to temptation?” Joseph was tempted in Potiphar’s house and did not yield (Gen. 39:7–20). David was tempted by the sight of Bathsheba, and he did yield (2 Sam. 11:1–5). How relieved Jesus’ disciples must have been when He told them the story of His own temptation. That the purest, cleanest, noblest man on earth suffered temptation should settle the issue once and for all for troubled, sensitive souls—temptation is not sin.

We must understand that we do not face temptation in our own power and strength .

Jesus was “**led by the Spirit**” during this great time of trial and temptation (cf. v. 1). As believers we must remember that we are indwelt by the Holy Spirit (John 14:17; cf. Rom. 8:9), and, as the Apostle John said, “**Greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world**” (1 John 4:4). God did not leave Jesus to face the enemy in His own strength, and He does not leave us alone either.

We need to realize that the way to victory is to know and use the Word of God .

Our Lord defeated the devil by quoting three verses from the Book of Deuteronomy (Deut. 8:3; 6:16; 6:13). As many preachers have asked themselves and their listeners, “How would we fare against the temptation of the devil today

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if our victory depended upon verses we had memorized from the Book of Deuteronomy?”¹⁵⁹ The Psalmist wrote, “**Thy word I have treasured in my heart, that I may not sin against Thee**” (Ps. 119:11). The Apostle John pointed to the secret of victory: “**I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one**” (1 John 2:14).

We must remember that Jesus prays for us .

Jesus said to Peter, “**Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat; but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail**” (Luke 22:31–32). God’s help comes through our High Priest, the Lord Jesus Christ. In Hebrews we read this exhortation: “**Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need**” (Heb. 4:16). We also read there these words of encouragement: “**He is able to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them**” (Heb. 7:25). “With God’s help we can be victors and not victims in temptation.”¹⁶⁰

Conclusion:

“The generation of Israelites who were delivered from bondage in Egypt represents one of the standing biblical types or examples of human disobedience to the will of God.” The experiences of the Israelites are seen in the New Testament as a relevant warning to present-day Christians (1 Cor. 10:1–13; Heb. 3:16–19).¹⁶¹ For Christians there is another example of temptation, and that is Jesus who was, like Israel, called of God and proved. But unlike Israel, Jesus proved to be obedient.

Like Israel, Adam, the first man, is a type or illustration of temptation and disobedience to the will of God (Rom. 5:12). But Adam the Last, the Son of God, has been proven by God to be victorious—and tempted by Satan to the devil’s chagrin. “The devil challenged the first man. The second Man [1 Cor. 15:47] challenged the devil. The devil ruined the first Adam. The last Adam [1 Cor. 15:45] spoiled the devil. The first Adam involved the race in his defeat. The last Adam included the race in His victory. The first Adam stood as the head of

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the race, and falling, dragged the race down with him. The last Adam stood as the Head of the new race, and being victorious, lifted that race with Him.”¹⁶²

Jesus the last Adam is worthy to be king, savior, and priest—and to be our model in times of testing/temptation. Christians, therefore, look unto Jesus as their great champion and leader. “Because Christ is our brother,” says Thielicke, we are not alone in our temptation. He suffers it with us, down to the lowest depths which Satan has conceived. And because He is the Lord, who stands in the purity of heaven beyond all sin, we may pray Him to keep us from temptation.... Christ not only marches on our right hand against death and the devil; but He upholds us, too, from His height, because He is the Lord.”¹⁶³

Addendum: The Question of Impeccability

The temptation accounts inevitably raise the question of the impeccability of Christ. The term *impeccability* is from the negative Latin prefix *in + peccare* (to sin). The late medieval Latin term *impeccabilis* means, “not capable of or liable to sin.”¹⁶⁴ The question is this: Was the last Adam just like the first in every respect? Was He characterized only by the *posse non peccare* (able not to sin)? Or did He differ, being characterized by the *non posse peccare* (not able to sin)?

Neither Matthew nor any other NT writer answers this question explicitly, yet there are clear affirmations in Scripture concerning Jesus’ life and person that do point the way to an answer. First, Scripture insists upon two facts about His life: (1) Jesus never sinned [2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 7:26; 1 Pet. 1:19; 2:22; 3:18; 1 John 3:5]. (2) Jesus was tempted, and these were real temptations, as the author of Hebrews clearly believed [Heb. 4:15]. Second, Scripture also teaches two things about His person: (1) He was fully man [Heb. 2:14], and (2) He was fully God [Col. 2:9].

Christian writers have long reflected on the way in which Jesus’ human nature and divine nature work together so that He could be tempted and yet not sin. The following solution is suggested by Edersheim, Shedd, and Grudem: First, Christ’s human nature was real and unfallen, i.e., it was like Adam’s before the Fall. Human nature before the Fall was, we know, sinless and peccable, i.e., able to sin. Jesus took upon Himself human nature with all its weaknesses [Heb. 4:15]. Whatever the constitutional susceptibilities of human nature, Jesus had

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them all [“in all things,” Heb. 2:17], and since temptability depends upon the constitutional susceptibility of human nature, Jesus could be tempted. These temptations, says the author of Hebrews, give Jesus a fellow feeling for sinners [Heb. 4:15], not because He sinned but because He resisted and felt the full intensity of temptation which is unknown to those who fall—“The resistance of temptation may be torture to a good man, whereas a bad man yields easily.”¹⁶⁵

Second, the human nature of Jesus is not autonomous or self-existent, it has no personal existence of its

own apart from union with the divine person. At the incarnation the eternal Son of God did not unite Himself with a human person, but with a human nature. It must be remembered that the base of Christ's person is His deity. He is not a human person who has been deified; rather He is a divine person who has assumed an additional [i.e., human] nature.¹⁶⁶ The divine nature clearly leaves the human nature alone to experience full human life and limitations [hunger, thirst, fear, sorrow, ignorance]—so far as sin is not involved. Yet the divine nature cannot leave the human nature alone, permitting it to sin. If Jesus as a person had sinned, this would have involved both His human and His divine natures, and God Himself would have sinned. The Bible flatly says that God “cannot be tempted by evil” (James 1:13).

Our answer, then, must be that Christ was impeccable during His life on earth. He had a peccable human nature, true, and was therefore susceptible to temptation. Yet the human nature of Jesus cannot be viewed apart from its union to the person of the Second Person of the Trinity. By virtue of the union of the two natures in one person we must conclude that He was an impeccable and not a peccable person. He was, in short, incapable of sinning. There is something better than the choice of the good, says Trench, and that is the *beata necessitas boni*, the happy necessity of the good.¹⁶⁷ Having said this, it must be noted that our text implies that Jesus did not take recourse to His divine nature, but fended the devil off with the Word of God and the enabling power of the Spirit. Because of this He can be the believer's example in temptation.¹⁶⁸

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The question is one that has divided theologians through the centuries. Those arguing for the peccability of Christ included Theodore of Mopsuestia (ad 350–428) and theologians leaning toward Nestorianism. The impeccability of Christ was defended by Augustine (ad 354–430). Later, in the Middle Ages, Abelard (1079–1142) followed Theodore of Mopsuestia, and Anselm (1033–1109) followed Augustine.¹⁶⁹ Among Reformed theologians in the nineteenth century Charles Hodge (surprisingly!) held to peccability, arguing that genuine temptation required that Christ be able to sin, while William Shedd defended impeccability. More recently peccability has been defended by Erickson (“while he could have sinned, it was certain that he would not”), Garrett, Blomberg, and Seesemann, among others, and impeccability has been defended by, among others, Berkhof, Berkouwer, Johnson, Ryrie, and Grudem.¹⁷⁰

One of the most recent discussions of the impeccability question is that of Canham. In an attempt to plow new ground, he argues that Jesus was both peccable and impeccable, but, in effect, he opts for peccability. To say that Christ was peccable is to say that He could have sinned, and this is what Canham seems to suggest. Scholars such as Shedd, however, would argue that while the human nature of Jesus was peccable in the abstract, it was impeccable by virtue of its union with the divine person of the Son. Canham does not adequately work out the implications of the hypostatic union. Jesus was one person and not two. In His assumption of human nature He chose voluntarily not to use His divine attributes. During the temptation, for example, Jesus was not hungry and without hunger at the same time—He was hungry. In the end, Canham's view borders on Nestorianism, or so it seems to me.¹⁷¹

1

This is the fifth in a series of occasional articles on the Life of Christ.

2

Most scholars see an Adam typology and an Israel typology in the account of the temptation. Mark, with his reference to the “wild beasts” (1:13), and Luke, with his positioning of the genealogy (“Adam, the son of God,” 3:38) just before the temptation account, seem to stress the Adam typology. Matthew's account is generally regarded as stressing the Israel typology because of the repeated references to Deuteronomy 6–8. Cf. D. A. Carson, “Matthew,” in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 12 vols., ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 8:111; W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, ICC, 3 vols. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988), 1:356, 357, 359, 360, 363 and *passim*; Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, WBC (Word: Dallas, 1993), 61–62; Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on*

His Handbook for a Mixed Church Under Persecution (2d ed., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 53.

3

“As a result, two men, the first and the second, are in a sense the whole human race.” Cf. Augustine, *Unfinished Work in Answer to Julian* 2.163, in *Answer to the Pelagians*, 4 vols., trans. Roland J. Teske, WSA (Brooklyn: New City Press, 1999), 3:237; idem., *Sermon 90.7* in *Sermons*, 11 vols., trans. Edmund Hill, WSA (Brooklyn: New City Press, 1991), 3:452. Cf. Richard Chenevix Trench, “The Temptation,” in *Studies in the Gospels* (3d ed., London: Macmillan, 1874; reprint ed., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 5.

4

Adam was the first man created by God’s hand. According to Genesis, all the human race descends from him. The title “son of God” (υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ) is here grounded in God’s having formed humanity. Cf. Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 1:1–9:50* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 360.

5

Cf. Erich Sauer, *The King of the Earth*, trans. G. H. Lang, Michael Bolister, and H. L. Ellison (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), 72–100.

6

Tertullian was one of the first to see a parallel between the wilderness experience of Israel and that of Jesus. Cf. *On Baptism* 20, in *ANF*, 3:679.

7

Don B. Garlington, “Jesus, the Unique Son of God: Tested and Faithful,” *BSac* 150 (1994): 288, n. 15. As Garlington notes, in Psalm 80:17 Israel is called “the man of Thy right hand,” the term *man* (מַן) being the same used of Adam in Genesis 1–3.

8

Gerhardsson has argued that the temptation of Jesus is aimed at the three elements of the *Shema* (Deut. 6:4–5), i.e., heart, soul, and might. Cf. Birger Gerhardsson, *The Testing of God’s Son* (Lund: CWK Gleerup, 1966), 71–83; idem., “The Parable of the Sower and Its Interpretation,” *NTS* 14 (1968): 170–71.

9

Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 138.

10

Cf. Alfred Plummer, *An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew* (London: Robert Scott, 1915; reprint ed., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1982), 36. So also most older commentators. Lange notes that the older writers debated the mode of the temptation, some arguing that there was a literal apparition of Satan, while others argued that it was a true supernatural vision. In his day there were already critical scholars arguing that the story was a myth, a parable, or the record of an inward psychological conflict. Cf. John Peter Lange, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, in *CHS(L)*, 8:82–83.

11

T. W. Manson, *The Servant-Messiah* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953), 55. Cf. also G. B. Caird, *Saint Luke*, PNTC (New York: Viking Penguin, 1963), 76.

12

S. Lewis Johnson, Jr., “The Temptation of Christ,” *BSac* 123 (1966): 346. Modern scholarship tends to minimize the historicity of the temptation account. It is classified as “myth” (Beare), “haggadic midrash,” i.e., fanciful, legendary commentary on Deuteronomy 6–8 (Gerhardsson), subjective, psychological struggle (Leivestad), or polemical document, i.e., the composition of a learned Christian to counter his Jewish opponents (Pokorny). Cf. Francis Wright Beare, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981), 104; Gerhardsson, *The Testing of God’s Son*, 7; R. Leivestad, *Christ the Conqueror* (London: SPCK, 1954), 51; Petr Pokorny, “The Temptation Stories and Their Intention,” *NTS* 20 (1974):

125; Anton Fridrichsen, *The Problem of Miracle in Primitive Christianity*, trans. Roy A. Harrisville and John S. Hanson (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1972), 121–28. Modern Form Criticism assumes that much of the theological interpretation in the NT accounts of Jesus' life (i.e., the Canonical Gospels) is the product of the post-Easter church as it creatively put into writing the various strands of oral tradition. Evangelicals do not deny that there was a period of church history in which no written documents existed (cf. Luke 1:1–4), but they affirm that the theological interpretation originated with the inspired authors of Scripture and not with later "creative communities." Cf. the pointed remarks of J. Andrew Kirk, "The Messianic Role of Jesus and the Temptation Narrative: A Contemporary Perspective," *EvQ* 44 (1972): 12-16.

13

Manson, *The Servant-Messiah*, 55; Johnson, "The Temptation of Christ," 344; Carson, "Matthew," 111.

14

W. Graham Scroggie, *The Gospel of Mark* (London: Marshall, Morgan, and Scott, n.d.; reprint ed., Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), 29–30.

15

H. Seesemann, "πειρα," *TDNT*, 6 (1968), 34.

16

Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, 63–64. Cf. Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew, A Commentary*, 2 vols., vol. 1: *The Christbook* (Waco: Word, 1987), 100.

17

W. Graham Scroggie, *Tested by Temptation* (London: Pickering & Inglis, 1923), 7–8.

18

F. Godet, "Jesus Christ," in *Studies in the New Testament*, ed. W. H. Lyttelton (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1879), 97.

19

For my defense of the complete impeccability of Christ, see the addendum at the end of this article, pages 29–32.

20

Cf. *BDAG*, s.v. "διάβολος," 226–27.

21

W. Foerster, "διαβάλλω/διάβολος," *TDNT* 2 (1964), 71–73. Foerster concedes that it is an open question as to whether the verb influenced the usage of the noun.

22

Martin Luther, *Large Catechism* 119, quoted by Bruner, *The Christbook*, 101.

23

Cf. Robert W. Funk, "The Wilderness," *JBL* 78 (1959): 205-14. Funk notes that the term generally refers either to the wilderness of Sinai or the wilderness of Judea.

24

It has been argued that the wilderness is also significant for another reason, viz., it was a place where eschatological events were expected to occur. Building on Isaiah 40:3–5 the Essene Community at Qumran believed that Messiah would one day lead a new exodus from the wilderness. During the first century a number of anti-Roman revolutionary movements originated in the wilderness (Acts 21:38; cf. 5:36–37). This approach grows out of the sense that the *Sitz im Leben*, i.e., the particular historical situation of Jesus Christ in a revolutionary era, must be taken into account in interpreting His life. Cf. Kirk, "The Messianic Role of Jesus and the Temptation Narrative: A Contemporary Perspective," 15–21, 97; Garlington, "Jesus, The

Unique Son of God: Tested and Faithful,” 294–95. That Matthew intends the wilderness to have these eschatological overtones is not clear from the text. The OT and not contemporary Messianic expectation seems to provide the background to the story. Cf. G. H. P. Thompson, “Called—Proved—Obedient: A Study in the Baptism and Temptation Narratives of Matthew and Luke,” *JTS* 11 (1960): 5-6.

25

Garlington, “Jesus, The Unique Son of God: Tested and Faithful,” 289.

26

The significance of the wild beasts has been understood in two ways: (1) In a negative way suggesting the fall of creation [e.g., William L. Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 61]. (2) In a positive way suggesting the proleptic redemption of creation [e.g., Trench, “The Temptation,” 9–10; R. A. Guelich, *Mark 1:1–8:26*, WBC (Dallas: Word, 1989), 39]. To assume that Jesus was living peacefully with the animals and turning the wilderness back into paradise, as Trench and Guelich suggest, is to miss the point. The present creation was not then reconciled to God, and it would take the Cross and the Second Advent to accomplish such a reconciliation (Col. 1:20; cf. Rom. 8:20–22). The portrayal of Jesus walking peacefully among the wild beasts borders on the fancifulness found in the early apocryphal gospels.

27

Scroggie, *Tested by Temptation*, 14.

28

“There is no dominically instituted rite of confirmation in the Gospels except temptation. Temptation (trouble) is the sacrament of confirmation.” Bruner, *The Christbook*, 100.

29

Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary*, 55; cf. Davies and Allison, *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, 1:355.

30

France argued that Jesus’ wilderness experience was not a temptation but simply a test conducted by God Himself to prove Jesus (R. T. France, *Matthew*, TNTC [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985], 96–97). This hardly does justice to Matthew’s description of the personal involvement of the devil. Cf. Seesemann, “πεῖρα,” 34, n. 58.

31

Carson, “Matthew,” 112.

32

Bruner, *The Christbook*, 100.

33

Luke (4:2) indicates that Jesus was being tempted during the forty-day period. The three temptations following the forty-day fast are apparently only “the concluding act of the drama.” Cf. Bock, *Luke 1:1–9:50*, 370.

34

Chrysostom argues that the temptation story teaches the value of fasting as a powerful shield against the devil. Cf. *Homilies on the Gospel of St. Matthew* 13.2, in *NPNF*, 1st Series, 10:80. Gundry concurs that one of the implications of this passage is that Christians are to practice fasting during the whole period of Jesus’ absence (cf. *Matthew: A Commentary*, 55). Luther had little regard for fasting, believing that it encouraged trust in good works; right fasting is to accept God-sent hardships (Cited in Bruner, *The Christbook*, 104). Calvin pointed out that neither Jesus nor Moses fasted every year, but only once in their lives according to the biblical records (cf. Ex. 34:28; Deut. 9:9). Cf. John Calvin, *A Harmony of the Gospels Matthew, Mark,*

and Luke, trans. A. W. Morrison (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 1:134–35.

35

Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 72.

36

There is no contradiction between Matthew 4:2 and later passages (Mark 2:19; Matt. 11:19) according to which the disciples did not fast and Jesus came “eating and drinking.” These later passages “simply preserve the memory of the overall impression left by Jesus: He was no ascetic.” Cf. Davies and Allison, *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, 1:358.

37

Cf. Ethelbert W. Bullinger, *Number in Scripture* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1894; reprint ed., Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1969), 266–67.

38

Cf. Davies and Allison, *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, 1:358–59.

39

“We know from the Gospel of Luke that, in the case of our Lord, there was a very long-continued temptation of Satan, of which we have no details.” Cf. William Kelly, *Lectures on the Gospel of Matthew* (2d ed., London: Morrish, 1896; reprint ed., Sunbury, PA: Believers Bookshelf, 1971), 72.

40

Cf. Bock, *Luke 1:1–9:50*, 370.

41

Scroggie, *Tested by Temptation*, 18.

42

The order in Matthew and Luke is different with Luke inverting the order of Matthew’s second and third temptation. Most scholars accept the Matthean order as original, although most do not give a reason for the alteration. Donaldson is an exception to the rule, judging Luke’s order to be original. Matthew’s use of τότε (“then”) in vv. 1 and 5 does suggest that he follows the chronological order. Furthermore, Matthew’s order keeps the two Son of God temptations together which seems more original. Also the most blatant temptation (“worship me”) is put off until the end where it has the most dramatic effect. Finally, the words, “Begone, Satan!” would hardly occur in the middle of the temptation account (so Trench). Luke probably changed the order due to his interest in Jerusalem and the temple (Fitzmyer). For him, says Garlington, the most dramatic temptation has in view divine aid for the Son of God in the capital city. Kelly agrees: “Luke puts them in the order of magnitude, and rises from the natural trial to the worldly one, and then to the religious temptation.” Trench adds that Luke saves the subtlest temptation for the last. “Those who have overcome all other, are exposed to, and sometimes overcome by, these; the white devil, as one has said, being more to be feared than the black.” It has also been noted (Allison and Davies) that there is an upward spatial progression, from a low place to a high place, in Matthew’s order: (1) Jesus is led up from the Jordan into the wilderness [v. 1]. (2) He is placed on the pinnacle of the temple [v. 5]. (3) He is taken to “a very high mountain” [v. 8]. “This progression corresponds to the dramatic tension which comes to a climax with the third temptation.” So: Davies and Allison, *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, 1:352; cf. Trench, “The Temptation,” 45; T. L. Donaldson, *Jesus on the Mountain: A Study in Matthean Theology* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1985), 89–90; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke 1–9*, AncB (New York: Doubleday, 1981), 507; Garlington, “Jesus, the Unique Son of God: Tested and Faithful,” 294; Kelly, *Lectures on the Gospel of Matthew*, 86

43

Godet (“Jesus Christ,” 98) summarized the three temptations as follows: (1) The use of His miraculous

powers to ameliorate His personal condition, thus abandoning His true state as man, (2) provoking a miracle that was morally unnecessary, which would be an “act of indiscretion towards God His Father, and an abandonment of His filial character, and (3) playing the part of a political Messiah, thus abandoning the office of a redeeming Messiah.

44

Cf. Augustine, *Expositions on the Book of Psalms* 8.13, in *NPNF*, 1st Series, 8:32; C. J. Ellicott, *Historical Lectures on the Life of Our Lord Jesus Christ* (London: Parker, Son, and Bourn, 1861), 112–13; Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown, eds., *A Commentary, Critical, Experimental, and Practical on the Old and New Testaments*, 6 vols., vol. 5: *Matthew-John*, by David Brown (1868; reprint ed., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), 19; cf. Trench, “The Temptation,” 55–56; Scroggie, *Tested by Temptation*, 26; Johnson, “The Temptation of Christ,” 345.

45

Cf. Ellicott, *Historical Lectures on the Life of Our Lord Jesus Christ*, 112–13; Scroggie, *Tested by Temptation*, 26; Johnson, “The Temptation of Christ,” 345.

46

Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary*, 56.

47

Cf. Gerhardsson, *The Testing of God's Son*, 71–83; idem., “The Parable of the Sower and Its Interpretation,” 170–71.

48

George A. Buttrick, “The Gospel According to St. Matthew: Exposition,” in *The Interpreter's Bible*, 12 vols., ed. George Arthur Buttrick (New York: Abingdon, 1951), 7:271.

49

Cf. Davies and Allison, *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, 1:355.

50

Davies and Allison, *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, 1:360.

51

The anarthrous υἱός is correctly rendered “the son” due to Colwell’s rule. Cf. Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 256–66 (esp. 264).

52

Contra Alan Hugh M ‘Neile, *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew* (London: Macmillan, 1915), 38; Bruner, *The Christbook*, 104; Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, 693. Nor is the devil tempting Jesus to perform a messianic miracle. It has been suggested by Manson, Jeremias, and others that the devil was tempting Jesus to perform an economic miracle, i.e., like Moses create manna for the hungry and fulfill a popular Messianic expectation. Jesus, they argue, rejected a political Messiahship in favor of the way of the cross (cf. Manson, *The Servant-Messiah*, 56–57; idem., *The Work and Words of Jesus* [rev. ed., Philadelphia: Westminster, 1973], 45; Joachim Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*, trans. John Bowden [New York: Scribner’s, 1971], 71, 74). It is true that there is some evidence that the Jews expected the Messiah would repeat the miracle of the manna. However, it would be manna from heaven not from stones. Furthermore, if the temptation were to prove His Messiahship by performing a miracle to feed the masses one would expect onlookers, but there are none. Tellingly, the devil does not use the title “Messiah” in Matthew 4:1–11. Cf. Davies and Allison, *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, 1:361–62, n. 20.

53

The construction (εἰ + indicative εἶ) is a first class condition, i.e., it is assumed true for argument’s sake. Wallace argues that “since” is never a good translation in first class conditions. Cf. Wallace, *Greek*

Grammar Beyond the Basics, 690–94. In such conditions only context can tell us whether the speaker actually affirms or believes the truth of the protasis (“If you are the Son of God”). Matthew 27:40 is an example of a first class condition where the protasis was not believed by the speakers: “If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross.”

54

David Hill, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NCB (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 100.

55

The question of whether the subject here is ontological (essential/eternal) sonship or messianic sonship affects exegesis. Carson, assuming ontological sonship says that Jesus is being enticed to use powers rightly His but which He had voluntarily abandoned the use of to carry out His Father’s mission (“Matthew,” 113). If, however, the subject is messianic sonship, then Jesus is being enticed to use wrongly powers that were conferred at His baptism.

56

Cf. F. L. Anderson, “Temptation of Christ,” *ISBE* 5 (1939), 2944.

57

This account is in itself evidence of Jesus’ miracle-working powers. It is He who is the source of this account—He told it to His disciples. “It is incredible that anyone should have told such a story about himself to persons who knew that he had never done any mighty work” (Plummer, *An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew*, 38).

58

Johnson, “The Temptation of Christ,” 346.

59

Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel According to Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 139–40; cf. Lange, *Matthew*, 88. Significantly Jesus’ opponents would later attribute His miraculous powers to Satan as if He were a magician (cf. Matt. 12:24).

60

Cf. Garlington, “Jesus, the Unique Son of God: Tested and Faithful,” 296–97.

61

Johnson, “The Temptation of Christ,” 342.

62

Davies and Allison, *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, 1:362–63.

63

Hagner, *Matthew 1:1–13*, 65.

64

Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel According to Matthew*, 140; Lange, *Matthew*, 88.

65

Deuteronomy 8:3 has been interpreted in two ways: **View # 1**: “Man does not live by material food alone, but also by spiritual nourishment.” In other words, man needs not only food to survive but also spiritual sustenance, such as the Word of God. According to this first view, the application in Matthew 4:4 is, “Messiah does not live by material bread only, but also by trusting in the sustaining Word of God.” In this view, the connection between the phrases is “but also” (כי .. וְ), and the phrase “everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord” refers to spiritual nourishment, i.e., the word of the law. This view misses the point of Deuteronomy 8:3 for three reasons: (1) In the object lesson the manna represents “everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord,” and not “bread alone.” (2) The manna was not spiritual nourishment

but another form of physical nourishment. (3) The context of Deuteronomy 8 indicates that “everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord” includes physical necessities. The Israelites had become self-sufficient, forgetting that the Lord had provided their wealth, and thinking it was the product of their own efforts (vv. 14, 17). Proponents of the first view include: S. R. Driver, *Commentary on Deuteronomy*, ICC (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1895), 107–8 [Note: Driver argues that view # 2 is the correct interpretation of Deuteronomy 8:3, but that the text is applied according to view # 1 in Matthew 4]; Joseph Reider, *The Holy Scriptures: Deuteronomy* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Association of America, 1937), 90; J. A. Thompson, *Deuteronomy*, TOTC (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 1974), 135 [“there are deeper dimensions to life than physical hunger”]; Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, NAC (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 185–86. **View # 2:** “Man does not live by bread alone, but rather man lives by means of everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord,” i.e., by every means designated by the Lord for the sustenance of life. In other words, it is God, not bread, which sustains man. According to this second view, the application in Matthew 4:4 is, “Messiah does not live by material bread, but by the sustaining word of God.” In this view, the connection between the phrases is “but rather” (כי . . . אֲבָל), and the phrase “everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord” refers to the divine word of power itself, i.e., the creating and sustaining power that emanates from God. It is the power of God that preserves the life of man in whatever way He sees fit. “Everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord” includes all means designed and appointed by the Lord for the sustenance of life. Proponents of this view include: Wilhelm Julius Schröder, “Deuteronomy,” trans. Samuel T. Lowrie and A. Gosman, in *Commentary on the Holy Scriptures*, ed., John Peter Lange, vol. 2: *Numbers-Ruth* (1879; reprint ed., Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1960), 104 [“But if the life of men rests upon the mouth of God, then men must cleave to the mouth of God and obey Him.”]; C. F. Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. 3: *The Pentateuch*, trans. James Martin (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1875; reprint ed., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, n.d.), 331; Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 185–86; J. Ridderbos, *Deuteronomy*, BSC, trans. Ed M. van der Maas (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 127; Duane L. Christensen, *Deuteronomy 1–11*, WBC (Dallas: Word, 1991), 175; Jeffrey H. Tigay, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Deuteronomy* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1996), 92, n. 7 (p. 361); John Huff Fish III, “Our Lord’s Use of the Old Testament” (Th.D. dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1974), 81–84.

66

Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, 185–86.

67

Bruner, *The Christbook*, 106.

68

Buttrick, “The Gospel According to St. Matthew: Exposition,” 7:271.

69

The Larger Catechism asks, “What is the chief and highest end of man?” Answer: “Man’s chief and highest end is to glorify God, and fully to enjoy Him for ever.” Cf. Thomas F. Torrance, *The School of Faith* (London: James Clarke, 1959), 185, 263.

70

Buttrick, “The Gospel According to St. Matthew: Exposition,” 7:269.

71

Trench calls this the “theocratic temptation.” Cf. “The Temptation,” 39.

72

The verb παραλαμβάνει is a historical or dramatic present, i.e., the present is used here to add vividness. Cf. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, 526–27.

73

Trench (“The Temptation,” 37–38, 61–63) rejects the notion that Jesus was carried through the air as an inconsistent yielding of Himself to the will of the adversary. He also rejected the visionary interpretation, suggesting that Jesus went to the temple and mountain “by ordinary means.” Others have objected to the visionary interpretation because it would have mixed Jesus up in the devil’s wizardry. Calvin was not troubled by either view “as long as we do not imagine Christ to be in any way affected inwardly, i.e., in His mind or soul.” Cf. *A Harmony of the Gospels Matthew, Mark, and Luke* , 1:139–40.

74

He goes on, “Hence I prefer to leave it with judgment suspended, rather than give a loophole for contentious disputation.” Cf. Calvin, *A Harmony of the Gospels Matthew, Mark, and Luke* , 1:140.

75

John Milton, *Paradise Regained* 4.40-42, in *The Complete Poetry of John Milton* , ed., John T. Shawcross (rev. ed., New York: Doubleday, 1971), 556. Milton actually says, “curious,” not “fruitless.” By “Parallax” he means the apparent displacement of an object seen from two different positions.

76

Johnson, “The Temptation of Christ,” 347. It should be noted that the psalm is not directly quoted elsewhere in the NT. Davies and Allison say that the psalm did not receive a Messianic interpretation in Judaism. Cf. *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew* , 1:367.

77

Davies and Allison, *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew* , 1:365.

78

Garlington, “Jesus, the Unique Son of God: Tested and Faithful,” 298. It was also a scene of intense Zealot activity in Jesus’ day. Cf. Kirk, “The Messianic Role of Jesus and the Temptation Narrative,” 92, n. 58, 97.

79

Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 15.411-12, in *Josephus*, LCL, 10 vols., trans. Ralph Marcus and Allen Wikgren (Cambridge: Harvard, 1963), 8:198–201.

80

The devil quoted verbatim the LXX of Psalm 91:11–12, omitting the phrase “to guard you in all your ways.” Tasker understands the omission to be a key to the temptation account. In this he follows Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153), according to Trench (“The Temptation,” 162). The devil omits the key phrase which suggests that God will keep the believer safe wherever his way may lead, provided he is obedient to the divine will, i.e., walks in “a way” appointed by his heavenly Father. R. V. G. Tasker, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew*, TNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961), 54; cf. Davies and Allison, *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, 1:366. Others think that the omission is insignificant. Cf. Carson, “Matthew,” 113 (“the quotation is well within the range of common NT citation patterns”); Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, 67.

81

Tasker, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew* , 53–54; Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary* , 56; Johnson, “The Temptation of Christ,” 347. Others argue that because no onlookers are mentioned that the temptation is only personal and has no reference to a Messianic sign (Davies and Allison, *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, 1:367; Carson, “Matthew,” 113; Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, 67). However, this does not explain why Jesus was taken from the wilderness to the temple. The wilderness would have provided many cliffs or precipices from which Jesus could be tempted to jump if the temptation was only one of private significance. The temple implies a public display (Gundry).

82

Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel According to Matthew* , 140–41.

83

“Only as we enter into the unity of Scripture, as it balances, completes, and explains itself, are we armed against error and delusion, excess or defect on this side or the other” (Trench, “The Temptation,” 42).

84

Bruner, *The Christbook*, 110.

85

Sanhedrin 89b, *The Babylonian Talmud*, 18 vols., Seder Neziqin, 4 vols., ed., I. Epstein (London: Soncino, 1935), 3:596; cf. Davies and Allison, *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, 1:353.

86

Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 76; cf. Davies and Allison, *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, 1:368.

87

Trench, “The Temptation,” 41. “In this refusal of Christ are implicitly condemned all who run before they are sent, who thrust themselves into perils to which they are not called; all who would fain be reformers, but whom God has not raised up and furnished for the work of reformation;...all those who presumptuously draw drafts on the faithfulness of God, which they have no scriptural warrant to justify them in believing that He will honor” (p. 44).

88

Bruner, *The Christbook*, 110; cf. Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 76.

89

Garlington, “Jesus, the Unique Son of God: Tested and Faithful,” 299.

90

The mountain is not identified, but no mountain is so high that one can literally see all the kingdoms of earth. Cf. W. Foerster, “ὄρος,” *TDNT*, 5 (1967), 486. Donaldson suggests Mt. Zion due to influence of Ps. 2:7 upon the narratives of the baptism and temptation (“The nations...Zion...My Son”). “The place of the enthronement of the Son—and thus, because of the messianic interpretation of Ps 2, against a background of eschatological Zion, the place where the world-throne would be established” (Donaldson, *Jesus on the Mountain*, 95; cf. also Garlington, “Jesus, the Unique Son of God: Tested and Faithful,” 301). Davies and Allison (*The Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, 1:370) wonder whether this third temptation on the mountain is intended to recall Moses going to the top of Mt. Pisgah, adjacent to Mt. Nebo. In the past others have suggested Mt. Nebo, Mt. Tabor, and the Mt. of Olives. Alexander opted for the Mt. of Olives. Cf. Joseph Addison Alexander, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (New York: Scribner, 1860; reprint ed., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 85.

91

Cf. Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, 68. Matthew uses κόσμος (the orderly arrangement of the universe), but Luke (4:5) uses οἰκουμένη (inhabited earth).

92

Cf. Davies and Allison, *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, 1:370.

93

Davies and Allison, *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, 1:372.

94

Cf. Trench, “The Temptation,” 46.

95

Johnson, “The Temptation of Christ,” 349; cf. Richard H. Hiers, “Satan, Demons, and the Kingdom of God,” *SJTh* 27 (1974): 40-41; Alan Hugh M’Neile, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew* (London: Macmillan,

1915), 41; Beare, *The Gospel According to Matthew* , 112; Bruner, *The Christbook* , 112. That the devil has such authority has been denied. It is argued that (1) Satan is a liar [John 8:44], (2) the notion of Satanic authority is incompatible with the sovereignty of God, (3) Jesus had authority on earth to forgive sins [Matt. 9:6], and (4) the risen Christ now has worldwide authority [Matt. 28:18]. Cf. Sydney H. T. Page, *Powers of Evil: A Biblical Study of Satan and Demons* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 98. None of these objections are relevant in face of the fact that this is a real temptation. In response, we should note: (1) Satan is a liar, but the lie is in the kind of kingdom he could offer, not in the offer itself. (2) Satan does have authority, albeit a usurped authority, as is evidenced by the clear statements of the NT. (3) Christ's authority to forgive sin does not negate Satan's authority in this world. Satan's authority was overturned *de jure* at the cross, but it will not be overturned *de facto* until the return of Christ, the binding of the devil, and the millennial reign on earth. (4) The authority mentioned in Matthew 28:18 had not been given at the time of the temptation. Furthermore, it is a proleptic authority to be realized gradually through the age and ultimately in the millennial age (Rev. 19:11–20:6).

96

F. W. Bourne, *The King's Son; or, A Memoir of Billy Bray* (London: Henry Hooks, 1890), 114.

97

James Denney, *Jesus and the Gospel* (New York: Armstrong, 1908), 189; cf. David Gooding, *According to Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 79. "But whatever dominion he possesses in it, he possesses not of right, but by usurpation on his part, by permission upon God's even as he himself must acknowledge here" (Trench, "The Temptation," 48).

98

M'Neile, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew* , 41.

99

Cf. Ethelbert Stauffer, *Christ and the Caesars* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1955), 103–4.

100

Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel According to Matthew* , 141–42.

101

Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, 68.

102

Cf. Carson, "Matthew," 114.

103

Trench, "The Temptation," 53.

104

Cf. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* , 696–97. The construction here (ἐάν + προσκυνήσης, aor. subj.) plus a future indicative (δώσω) in the apodosis is a true third class condition, involving a more probable future occurrence.

105

Buttrick, "The Gospel According to St. Matthew: Exposition," 7:273.

106

Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, 68.

107

Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew* , 77.

108

Buttrick, "The Gospel According to St. Matthew: Exposition," 7:273.

109

Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of Christianity*, 2 vols. (rev. ed., San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1975), 1:767.

110

Cf. Trench, "The Temptation," 48–49.

111

I am here following Bruner, *The Christbook*, 112.

112

The verb προσκυνήσεις is an imperatival future, i.e., the future indicative is used for a command. This usage is almost always in OT quotations. Cf. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, 569–70.

113

One of the assumptions of form-critical *Leben-Jesu-Forschung* (i.e., "Life of Jesus Research") is that Jesus did not regard Himself as Messiah, nor did His disciples ascribe that office to Him until after "the Easter event." Bultmann, for example, maintains that Jesus appeared as a prophet, a rabbi, and an exorcist, but never as a king (Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, 2 vols., trans. Kendrick Grobel (New York: Scribner's, 1955), 1:26–27). This approach is marred by tragic and unbelieving eisegesis which adduces fictitious situations to account for the "legends" that permeate the Gospels. Taken as they stand, however, they make perfectly good sense, and it is evident that at the very beginning of His public ministry Jesus was governed by God's call to suffering servanthood and royal kingship. At the beginning and during His ministry He was conscious of a Messianic ministry that would touch the whole world (Mark 14:9; cf. Carson, "Matthew," 114; Johnson, "The Temptation of Christ," 349; Kirk, "The Messianic Role of Jesus and the Temptation Narrative," 12–15).

114

Alexander Balmain Bruce, "The Synoptic Gospels," in *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, 5 vols., ed. W. Robertson Nicoll (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1910; reprint ed., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 1:91.

115

Carson, "Matthew," 114. Ferguson wrote, "His testing was set in the context of a holy war in which He entered the enemy's domain, absorbed his attacks and sent him into retreat (Matt. 4:11, and especially Luke 4:13). In the power of the Spirit, Jesus advanced as the divine warrior, the God of battles who fights on behalf of His people and for their salvation (cf. Ex. 15:3; Ps. 98:1). His triumph demonstrated that 'the kingdom of heaven is near' and that the messianic conflict had begun." Cf. Sinclair B. Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit*, CCT (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 48–49.

116

Cf. H. W. Beyer, "διακονέω," *TDNT*, 2 (1964), 84–85.

117

Carson, "Matthew," 114–15.

118

Books of Adam and Eve 12–17, in *APOT(Charles)*, 2:137.

119

Davies and Allison, *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, 1:374.

120

"This narrative underlines the biblical principle that God's calling must be tested." Cf. Craig S. Keener, *Matthew*, IVPNTC (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 89.

121

Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit*, 48.

122

Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit*, 49.

123

Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit*, 49. Ferguson notes that in the Lukan account the genealogy of Jesus, which traces His lineage back to Adam (Luke 3:23–38), forms a bridge between His baptism and His temptation. “Here the *inclusio* of the whole of human history between Adam and Jesus suggests that the temptation and victory of the latter are to be interpreted in the light of the testing and defeat of the former with all its baneful entail. The second man-Son thus undid what was done by the first man-son; He obeyed and overcame as the last Adam, and now no further representative figure is needed.”

124

It may be possible to see in the wilderness experiences temptations addressed to Jesus in each of His anointed offices: (1) The third temptation with its reference to “the kingdoms of the world” clearly relates to the kingly office. (2) The second temptation with its setting at the temple in Jerusalem would most closely touch the priestly office. (3) The first temptation with its creation of bread in the wilderness may find a parallel in the prophet Moses providing manna from heaven (Ex. 16:13–21). I would not want to press the connection in that the temptations seem to be primarily addressed to Jesus’ role as king and suffering servant of the Lord. However, see the remarks of Lange, *Matthew*, 87.

125

Trench, “The Temptation,” 4–5.

126

There is, of course, a deficiency in Milton’s theology here. The victory over Satan in the wilderness was a *victory* which led to *the ultimate victory* at the Cross (Col. 2:15).

127

In setting forth the doctrinal significance of the temptation, I am following Johnson, “The Temptation of Christ,” 351–52. Cf. also: Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, 2:345–49.

128

Manson, *The Servant-Messiah*, 57.

129

Robert H. Stein, *Jesus the Messiah* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 110.

130

The author of Hebrews does not mean that Jesus literally suffered every single temptation known to man. What he means is that He experienced all the forms of temptation in principle, i.e., every kind of temptation. Cf. Brown, *Matthew-John*, 19.

131

Ferguson (*The Holy Spirit*, 48) objects to interpreting Jesus’ temptations as being analogous to or being a model for the temptations of Christian believers. “This leads to a partial and negative interpretation of His experiences. His temptations constitute an epochal event. They are not merely personal, but cosmic. They constitute the tempting of the last Adam.” Ferguson almost grudgingly concedes that there is a common bond between His temptation and ours, but “the significance of the event does not lie in the ways in which our temptations are like His, but in the particularity and uniqueness of his experiences.” Two things should be said in response: (1) It is true, as noted above [“The Doctrinal Significance of the Temptation”], that our Lord’s temptations constitute an epochal and cosmic event of great theological importance. (2) It is equally

true, because Holy Scripture says so [Heb. 2:17–18; 4:15–16], that “there is an analogy between our temptations and [those] of Jesus.” There was a personal dimension to His temptations. It is, in fact, the practical significance of His temptations, not the epochal, that is the focus of the Epistle to the Hebrews. Cf. Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* (1948; rev. ed., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 333–34.

132

Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *Balancing the Christian Life* (Chicago: Moody, 1969), 135.

133

Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, 2:345–46. Pyrrhus (318–272 bc) was the king of Epirus in what is today NW Greece.

134

I am here following Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, 2:346.

135

Erwin W. Lutzer, “What Satan Wants,” *Moody* (March, 1998): 27-29.

136

Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, 185. “The complete dependence on the word of God and God’s ability to provide is always a hard lesson for man to learn, whether in ancient times or modern. Man knows that he must work in order to provide the essentials for physical existence, but in that very labor, he may easily forget that, in the last resort, it is God who makes provision for man’s life. Ths, when the divine command comes, or when a period of testing is entered, man’s self-sufficiency is undermined, for his own ability to provide for his needs is removed and he must learn again that his existence, physical and spiritual, can only be grounded in God.”

137

Christensen, *Deuteronomy 1–11*, 175.

138

I am here following Bruner, *The Christbook*, 107–8.

139

Keener warns his fellow Charismatics against the approach advocated by some of their leaders wherein one is to “claim” blessings on the basis of spiritual formulas. Followers of this approach, he says, “may encounter some uncomfortable surprises.” Jesus’ response to His own trials simply does not support such approaches. Nor does the narrative support the claim of some Charismatics to be able to send angels to immediately relieve problems. Far better is the method of our Lord who sensitively followed the Spirit’s leading to do what God had called Him to do. “When God has genuinely spoken and His servants act in obedience, He will accomplish His purposes—even if those purposes must lead us through the cross.” Cf. Keener, *Matthew*, 92.

140

Bruner, *The Christbook*, 106.

141

Lutzer, “What Satan Wants,” 29.

142

Lutzer, “What Satan Wants,” 29.

143

Beare (*The Gospel According to Matthew*, 107–8) wrote that the devil “is a mythical conception that has lost appeal to the minds of men; we cannot ourselves accept it without falling victims to superstition.” Our

modern era of rising occultism and rising Satanism shows that the notion of a personal devil still has great appeal to the minds of men. The real issue, of course, is whether or not the Bible teaches that such a personal being exists.

144

Jeffrey Burton Russell, *The Devil: Perceptions of Evil From Antiquity to Primitive Christianity* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 229.

145

Martin Luther, "Dear Christians, Let Us Now Rejoice," in *Luther's Works*, 55 vols., vol. 53: *Liturgy and Hymns*, ed. Ulrich S. Leupold (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1965), 217–20. This hymn of ten verses is to be found in various translations and with various melodies. The translation offered here is found in Bruner, *The Christbook*, 103. For yet another, cf. *Lutheran Book of Worship* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1978), # 299.

146

Caird, who describes the devil as a "mythological figure," nevertheless says there are five important truths that are safeguarded by belief in the devil: "(1) Evil is real and potent. It is not just the sum total of individual bad deeds, but a power which gets a grip on human life and society. (2) Evil is personal. The very distinction between good and evil can arise only where there is free choice to obey God or to rebel against Him. (3) Evil is distorted good. In a world which God has created good, evil exists only by perverting the good gifts of God. The devil himself is a fallen angel. (4) Evil masquerades as good. The devil is the 'slanderer' who misleads men by telling them lies about God. (5) Evil is the enemy. The armchair sociologist may tell us that certain deplorable types of human behavior are 'normal,' because they occur regularly in his statistical surveys; but those who love the people concerned know better." Cf. Caird, *Saint Luke*, 79.

147

Trench, "The Temptation," 17–20.

148

The derivation of Βεελζεβοούλ is uncertain with several possible meanings suggested by the commentators: (1) "lord of flies," (2) "Prince Baal," (3) "lord of dung," (4) "lord of the heights," (5) "head of the house." Cf. Davies and Allison, *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, 2:195–96; Carson, "Matthew," 253.

149

Lange, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 88; Brown, *Matthew-John*, 18.

150

Bruner, *The Christbook*, 104.

151

I am here following the account of Luther's depressions found in Roland Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* (New York: Abingdon, 1950), 362–72.

152

Cf. Johnson, "The Temptation of Christ," 346.

153

G. Campbell Morgan, *The Crises of the Christ* (London: Pickering & Inglis, 1945), 131.

154

William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, Act 1, Scene 3, YS (New Haven: Yale, 1923), 16.

155

Cf. Johnson, "The Temptation of Christ," 348.

As told in *Anecdotes Illustrative of New Testament Texts* (New York: Doran, n.d.), 3.

Donald K. Campbell, "The Temptation Trap," *Kindred Spirit* 17 (Sept., 1993): 12-15.

Cf. James S. Stewart, *The Life and Teaching of Jesus Christ* (New York: Abingdon, n.d.), 45.

Campbell, "The Temptation Trap," 15; cf. Johnson, "The Temptation of Christ," 350–51.

Campbell, "The Temptation Trap," 15.

Thompson, "Called—Proved—Obedient: A Study in the Baptism and Temptation Narratives of Matthew and Luke," 1.

Morgan, *The Crises of the Christ*, 115.

Helmut Thielicke, *Between God and Satan*, trans. C. C. Barber (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958), 76.

Cf. *OED*, s.v. "impeccable," 2:79.

H. R. Mackintosh, *The Person of Jesus Christ* (2d ed., Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1913), 403.

William G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, 3 vols. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1889; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, n.d.), 2:269.

Trench, "The Temptation," 29.

Cf. Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, 2 vols. (3d ed., London: Longmans, Green, 1886; reprint ed., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), 1:298–99; Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, 2:330–35; Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids; Zondervan, 1994), 537–39.

Cf. Trench, "The Temptation," 28.

Cf. Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. (New York: Scribner, 1872; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 2:457; Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, 2:330–35; Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 2:720; Garrett, *Systematic Theology*, 1:572; C. L. Blomberg, "Temptation of Jesus," *ISBE* 4 (1988), 784–86; Seesemann, "πεῖρα," 33; Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (4th ed., Grand Rapids; Eerdmans, 1949), 318–19; G. C. Berkouwer, *The Person of Christ*, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids; Eerdmans, 1955), 251–67; Johnson, "The Temptation of Christ," 342–43; Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology* (2d ed., Chicago: Moody, 1999), 304–307; Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 537–39.

Cf. Michael McGhee Canham, "*Potuit Non Peccare Or Non Potuit Peccare*: Evangelicals, Hermeneutics, and the Impeccability Debate," *TMSJ* 11 (Spring, 2000): 93-114.

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