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What You Need to Know About Temptation

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WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT TEMPTATION

The words **tempt**, **tempting**, and **temptation** are key important concepts in the scriptures, being referred to over 70 times in 20 biblical books. This vital study overviews temptation in the life of Christ and temptation in regard to the Christian.

"Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungred. And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread. But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple, And saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone. Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God. Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; And saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me. Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve. Then the devil leaveth him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto him" (Matt. 4:1-11).

Temptation and the Son of God

In what ways can the temptations experienced by the first Adam and the second Adam be compared and contrasted?

1. The comparison—In his first epistle, John separated all temptations into three general categories or groups (1 John 2:16). These are: the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.
 - a. The first Adam was tempted in each area (Gen. 3:6).
 - (1) *"The tree was good for food"* (the lust of the flesh).
 - (2) *"It was pleasant to the eyes"* (the lust of the eyes).
 - (3) *"A tree desired to make one wise"* (the pride of life).
 - b. The second Adam was tempted in each area.
 - (1) *"Command that these stones be made bread"* (the lust of the flesh).
 - (2) *"The devil ... showeth him all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them"* (the lust of the eyes).
 - (3) *"Cast thyself down: for ... he shall give his angels charge concerning thee"* (the pride of life).
2. The contrast
 - a. The first Adam was tempted in a beautiful garden, while the second Adam met Satan in a desolate wilderness.

- b. The first Adam experienced total failure, while the second Adam was completely victorious.

Did Satan know whom he was tempting? He did indeed. The account in Matt. 4:3 and 4:6 is in the indicative mode in the Greek and should be rendered, "*Since you are the Son of God.*" What benefits did Satan offer him?

1. First temptation: To fill his stomach (and thus depend upon his own resources).
2. Second temptation: To jump off the temple (and thus force the hand of the Father).
3. Third temptation: To grasp the kingdoms of this world (and thus refuse Calvary).

What trick did Satan use during the second temptation? He attempted to confuse Christ by quoting Scripture out of context (compare Matt. 4:6 with Psa. 91:11-12). In essence, he did the same thing in dealing with the first Adam (Gen. 3:1).

Why are Jesus' temptations associated with a period of forty days? This number is often one of tempting or testing as found in the Bible. Examples would be:

1. Moses (Exod. 24:18; 34:28)
2. Israel (Deut. 8:2-3)
3. Elijah (1 Kings 19:8)
4. Goliath (1 Sam. 17:16)

Did Satan really have the right to offer Christ "*all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them*" (Matt. 4:8)?

1. In a shallow and temporary sense, yes (see John 14:30; Eph. 2:2; 6:12; 1 John 5:19; Rev. 13:7).
2. In the deepest and most eternal sense, no. "*Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion. I will declare the decree: the LORD hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee. Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession. Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel*" (Psa. 2:6-9). "*And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever*" (Rev. 11:15).

How did Christ answer Satan? By the Word of God.

1. First temptation: "*It is written, man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.*" (Compare Matt. 4:4 with Deut. 8:3).

2. Second temptation: *"It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God."* (Compare Matt. 4:7 with Deut. 6:16).

This temptation was probably an attempt for him to prematurely (and wrongly) fulfill Mal. 3:1: *"Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the LORD of hosts."*

Satan's supreme object in the temptation ordeal was to cause Christ to act by himself, independent of the Father. Just what does it mean to tempt God? Israel is said to have tempted God on ten specific occasions en route to the promised land (see Num. 14:11, 22; Heb. 3:9). It means simply to presume upon the goodness of God. It refers to using this goodness in a selfish way. It means to force God's hand on something. Had Christ actually jumped from this temple pinnacle, God would have been forced to step in and save Christ from smashing his physical body on the ground below.

3. Third temptation: *"Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve."* (Compare Matt. 4:10 with Deut. 6:13. See also James 4:7.)

Dr. Everett F. Harrison writes the following about the third temptation: "In this final episode Satan is unmasked. Gone is any suggestion that he is working for the best interests of the Son of God. No citation from Scripture is offered. Satan reveals the inner most secret of his being. Much as he enjoys the distinction of being the prince of this world, a distinction only sin has enabled him to achieve, he covets something else infinitely more. He would be like the Most High. He would receive to himself what is most characteristically and exclusively the prerogative of God, namely, worship. A true angel abhors the very thought of being worshiped (Rev. 22:8-9), but this fallen angel fiercely, cravenly covets it. That such an offer was extended to Jesus is a testimony to his greatness. The stakes are high. When Satan made Judas his victim, his bait was a mere thirty pieces of silver. Indeed Satan could not well offer a lesser inducement to our Lord, for the nations were the promised inheritance of the Messiah and the uttermost parts of the earth were his anticipated possession (Psa. 2:8). In Psalms this passage follows immediately the divine recognition of the sonship of the Messiah, the focal point of the temptation. 'Ask of me,' says God, but Satan brazenly usurps the place of the Almighty." (*A Short Life of Christ*, p. 90)

As can be seen Christ quotes from the book of Deuteronomy each time. It is no accident that higher criticism in Germany began with Deuteronomy in its vicious attack against the Bible.

Is this the only time Satan tempted Christ? No. In Luke 4:13 we are told: *"And when the devil had ended all the temptation, he departed from him for a season."* Note

especially the last three words. Satan tempted Christ all through his ministry. At least three specific instances come to mind here in which, at a later date, Satan continued his tempting work against Christ.

1. As expressed by the 5,000 men Christ fed— *"When Jesus therefore perceived that they would come and take him by force, to make him a king, he departed again into a mountain himself alone"* (John 6:15). "Bypass the cross and grab the crown!"
2. As expressed by Simon Peter— *"From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day. Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee. But he turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men"* (Matt. 16:21-23). "Don't even talk about the Cross!"
3. As expressed by the mob at Calvary— *"And they that passed by reviled him, wagging their heads, And saying, Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself. If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross"* (Matt. 27:39-40). "Come down from the cross!"

What happened after the wilderness temptation? *"Then the devil leaveth him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto him"* (Matt. 4:11). Heaven's angels played an important part in the earthly ministry of Christ.

1. They announced his birth (Luke 1-2; Matt. 1).
2. They later ministered to him in Gethsemane (Luke 22:43).
3. They announced his resurrection (Matt. 28:6).

Could Christ have sinned during the temptation experience? He could not; God cannot sin. The Bible declares:

1. He knew no sin (2 Cor. 5:21).
2. He did no sin (1 Peter 2:22; Heb. 4:15).
3. He had no sin (1 John 3:5; John 14:30). (See also Heb. 7:26.)

What then was the purpose for the temptation? The purpose was not to see if he would, but to prove that he could no sin. During the settling of the West a railroad company faced a problem. A bridge spanning a deep chasm gained the reputation of being unsafe. Careful examination by railroad officials showed this to be totally unfounded, but the rumor persisted. Finally, a train was formed made up of only heavy locomotives. For an entire day as hundreds watched, this train crossed and recrossed the bridge. Why was this done? Did the railroad engineers arrange the experiment to see if the bridge would hold, or did they do it to prove it would hold? The obvious

answer here may be applied to the purpose of Christ's temptations. The purpose was to provide the believer with an experienced high priest (see Heb. 4:15; 2:18).

Temptation and the Saint of God

Were both God and Satan involved in the temptation of Christ? Is this the case also, when we are tempted? The answer to both questions is yes. The reason for this is seen in the two-fold meaning of the word temptation.

1. First meaning—To test in a good sense with the goal of confirming one in matters of righteousness
 - a. As experienced by Jesus—*"Then was Jesus led up of the spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil"*(Matt. 4:1). *"For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin"*(Heb. 4:15).
 - b. As experienced by believers—*"And it came to pass after these things, that God did tempt Abraham, and said unto him,, Abraham: and he said, Behold, here I am"*(Gen. 22:1).
2. Second meaning—To entice one into evil
 - a. As experienced by Jesus—Satan made a desperate attempt to entice Jesus into evil.
 - b. As experienced by believers—*"And Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel"*(1 Chron. 21:1). *"Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed"*(James 1:13-14).

In light of this, is it ever (or always) a sin for the believer to be tempted? It all depends upon just who has led us into the temptation itself!

1. If our guide has been the Holy Spirit (as was the case here in Matt. 4), then it can be said that not only is temptation not a sin, it is actually both an honor and an opportunity.
 - a. It is an honor because it demonstrated that God can trust us. He knows just how much we can withstand (Psa. 103:13-14), and will not allow the temptation to go beyond that limit (1 Cor. 10:13). This is why both James and Peter could describe temptation in such a positive light. *"My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations ... Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him"*(James 1:2, 12). *"Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth,*

though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 1:6-7).

- b. It is an opportunity because we can use it to grow spiritually and to strengthen our faith. Paul writes of this: *“And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong” (2 Cor. 12:7-10).*

2. If, however, our guide has been the old nature (as is often the case with us), then the temptation will prove harmful and even disastrous. James had this kind of guide in mind when he warned: *“Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death” (James 1:13-15).*

James was saying that we should not “tempt” temptation. Note the admonition of Solomon: *“Can a man take fire in his bosom, and his clothes not be burned? Can one go upon hot coals, and his feet not be burned? So he that goeth in to his neighbour's wife; whosoever toucheth her shall not be innocent” (Prov. 6:27-29).*

It has been correctly observed that while a believer may find it impossible to control himself under certain circumstances, he or she can always control the circumstances themselves.

An airline captain who had flown gigantic Boeing 747 passenger jetliners for years was once asked to define what constituted a great pilot. He replied: “A great pilot is an expert flier who never allows his plane to encounter those flying conditions which would require all of his greatness and expertise.”