

The Temptation of Jesus and the Call of His First Disciples

by John F. Walvoord

Jesus, the perfect God-man, was tempted by Satan in the wilderness, but He resisted every temptation and demonstrated His authority over Satan, ultimately calling His first disciples and beginning His ministry in Galilee.

Topics: "Temptation Of Jesus", "Spiritual Warfare"

Description

John F. Walvoord delves into the temptation of Jesus, which occurred after His baptism and testimony from John the Baptist and God the Father. The Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan, following a pattern of temptation seen throughout Scripture. Satan tempted Jesus along three lines: the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. Despite the relentless temptations, Jesus resisted each one by quoting Scripture and ultimately commanded Satan to leave. After the temptation, angels ministered to Jesus, symbolizing His victory over Satan.

Transcript

The temptation of Jesus, recorded also in Mark 1:12-13 and Luke 4:1-13, occurred immediately after the testimony to His deity from John the Baptist and God the Father. The Spirit of God, seen descending like a dove upon Him at His baptism, led Him into the wilderness to be tempted of Satan. Mark speaks of the Spirit's "driving" Him into the wilderness. The thought is that Christ is impelled in the will of God into this period of testing which God Himself has recognized as necessary. It was not against the will of Christ but also not of His human choosing. The English word tempted is stronger than the Greek word, *peirazo*, meaning to "try" or "test," and does not imply any inward cooperation with Satan's proposals. Unlike sinful man, Christ has no temptation from within.

The time of trial consisted of forty days of fasting, during which there undoubtedly was constant provocation by Satan. Although Lenski insists that Christ's fast involved no weakening of His power to resist,¹⁹ the physical weakness induced by fasting coupled with the wearing persistence of Satan is better understood as setting up circumstances conducive to Satan's temptations. As Tasker points out, the tempter is described simply as "the devil" (Gr. *diabolos*), his name meaning, "the slanderer" or the "adversary."²⁰ The devil is mentioned in Scripture from the Garden of Eden to his being cast into the lake of fire in Revelation 20. The corrupter of Adam and Eve and the opposer of every good work and person,

Satan was here attempting to corrupt the Son of God. Satan, by nature and program, is committed to usurp God's place, to oppose God's will, and to corrupt all that is holy and good. He could do no other than to attempt here what is absolutely impossible, that is, to induce Christ to sin, even though he knew before he began that such was impossible.

In this temptation of Christ, Satan followed the well-established pattern of temptation revealed in the Garden of Eden and illustrated throughout Scripture. It is defined in 1 John 2:16 as being temptation along three lines: (1) the lust of the flesh; (2) the lust of the eyes; (3) the pride of life. The order of the temptation in 1 John 2:16 is the same as the serpent's temptation of Eve in Genesis 3:6, where the fruit was (1) good for food, the lust of the flesh; (2) pleasant to the eyes, the lust of the eyes; (3) to be desired to make one wise, the pride of life. Luke 4:1-13 presents it in the same order as in Genesis and 1 John. Matthew chooses to present it in what was probably the actual historical order, with the offer of the kingdoms of the world last.

The first temptation was to turn stones into bread. Under other circumstances, this might not have been sinful, but to do it at Satan's suggestion and to make satisfaction of His hunger primary was contrary to the will of God. Christ replied by quoting Deuteronomy 8:3, declaring the priority of the Word of God. Lenski is unrealistic in declaring that the hunger of Christ had nothing to do with the temptation.²¹ The experience of Moses on Sinai (Ex 34:28, Deu 9:9, 18) and that of Elijah going forty days without food (1 Ki 19:8) are perhaps not entirely parallel but illustrate the character of the temptation of Christ.

The second temptation, in order, states that the devil took Jesus into Jerusalem to a pinnacle of the temple, that is, a wing of the temple towering above the rocks and the valley below. This may have been on the south wall or possibly the east wall of the temple building.

Satan's proposal was that Jesus, as the Son of God, should cast Himself down and, by His miraculous preservation, demonstrate His deity. It was the subtle temptation to do miraculous works and thus gain recognition. In support of this, Satan quoted Psalms 91:11-12, significantly omitting the promise that God would keep Him "in all thy ways." Lenski holds that the main point was not the omitted Scripture but its misapplication.²² In either case, the Scripture is deceitfully used.

In this temptation, as in the first, the temptation is introduced, "If thou be the Son of God," literally, "If thou be Son of God." While the omission of the article must not be pressed, and some, like Tasker, consider this a first-class condition which could be translated, "Since thou art a Son of God," there was obviously a subtle challenge to prove His deity.²³ In reply, however, Jesus did not argue but cited Deuteronomy 6:16, forbidding testing God in this way.

In the final temptation, the devil took Him to a high mountain. Lenski argues here, as in the second temptation, that Jesus was actually transported first to the temple and then to the high mountain.²⁴ Tasker regards it more as a mere vision or mental transfer.²⁵ Matthew's account states that the devil took Him to both places, and probably a literal understanding of the passage is better.

In the third temptation, Jesus was shown supernaturally "all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them" (4:8). Here was the temptation to become King of kings without a cross and without a struggle. That Satan could offer them temporarily seems to be supported by his role as the god of this world, but Satan had no right to offer them as a kingdom forever. To accept would have made Jesus his slave, not his victor. Again, Jesus quoted Scripture, this time Deuteronomy 6:13 and Deuteronomy 10:20. Significantly, all three scriptural quotations come from Deuteronomy, the object of great attack by the higher critics. This

time, Jesus not only quoted Scripture but commanded Satan to go. This supports the conclusion that in the historical order of events this was the last of three temptations.

Satan had failed in every avenue of temptation open to man, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. Jesus, because of His humanity, could be tested, but the perfect God-man could not be made to sin. Ordinary men, subject to similar temptations, can anticipate Satan's strategy of attack, the temptation to indulge the flesh, the temptation to doubt God, and the temptation to attain divine goals by worldly means, which encourages human pride. Believers are always promised a way of escape (1 Co 10:13).

Although Satan later continued, in subtle ways, to tempt Christ to turn to the left or right from the path that led to the cross, after being vanquished in this encounter, Satan never recovered from his defeat. Once Satan had left, it was fitting that the angels would come and minister to Jesus, undoubtedly providing food to restore His physical strength and prepare Him for the task ahead.

Jesus Moves from Nazareth to Capernaum, 4:12-16

While Jesus was engaged in the activities described in Matthew 3-4, John the Baptist continued his ministry. In his fearless preaching, John had attacked Herod the Tetrarch for his adulterous relationship to his brother Philip's wife, with the result that Herod had imprisoned him, probably in the fortress of Machaerus on the east side of the Dead Sea (cf. Lk 3:19-20). The report that John had been imprisoned indicated an unfriendly atmosphere in Jerusalem for a prophet, and was probably the occasion for Christ's departing into Galilee. Instead of returning to Nazareth, His childhood home, He established residence in Capernaum at the north end of the Sea of Galilee, referred to as "the sea coast, in the borders of Zabulon and Nephthalim" (Mt 4:13).

Ruins of Capernaum are visible today, a testimony to the scathing judgment of Christ on this city for not recognizing its day of opportunity. In Matthew 11:23-24, Jesus pronounced a solemn judgment on Capernaum, declaring that it would "be brought down to hell." His sojourn there was anticipated by Isaiah 9:1-2, and quoted by Matthew to still the criticism of Jews that Jesus was a Galilean (4:16). The quotation attests both that Isaiah was a prophet and that God spoke through him. As in other instances, the quotation is not word for word, but gives the substance of the prophecy. Characterizing the people as those who sit in darkness correctly anticipated the mixed character of this population, partly Gentile, partly Jewish, but living in spiritual darkness.

The message of Jesus to Capernaum was similar to that of John the Baptist, "Repent; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." This was the theme of His ministry until it became evident that He would be rejected. The kingdom being at hand meant that it was being offered in the person of the prophesied King, but it did not mean that it would be immediately fulfilled.

Call of First Disciples, 4:17-22

Because of Capernaum's proximity to the Sea of Galilee, it was natural for Jesus at this time to call His disciples who were fishermen (cf. Mk 1:16-20; Lk 5:1-11; Jn 1:35-42). To Peter and Andrew, fishing in the sea, He extended the invitation, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men" (Mt 4:19). In like manner, He called James and John, the sons of Zebedee, who were mending their nets. They too left their occupation and their father and followed Christ. Matthew here records the early call of these disciples. Lenski, because of the disparity between this account and that of Luke 5:1-11, holds that between this first

call of Matthew and the call in Luke, the early disciples continued to fish for a time and not until the call in Luke 5 did they forsake all.²⁶ While Matthew's gospel indicates that they followed Jesus, there is no clear statement that they left their fishing occupation for good.

Early Preaching Ministry of Jesus in Galilee, 4:23-25

In the days which followed, ceaseless activity characterized the ministry of Jesus (cf. Mk 3:7-12; Lk 6:17-19). Going from one synagogue to the next, He preached the gospel of the kingdom, performed countless acts of healing, and was followed by great multitudes, who came not only from Galilee but from Jerusalem in the south and from the territory of Decapolis and Perea on the east of Jordan. His miracles dealt not simply with trivial diseases but with incurable afflictions, such as epilepsy, palsy, and demon possession. No affliction was beyond His healing touch. The kingdom blessings promised by Isaiah 35:5-6, due for fulfillment in the future kingdom, here became the credentials of the King in His first coming.

19 R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel*, p. 141.

20 R. V. G. Tasker, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew*, p. 52.

21 Lenski, p. 139.

22 *Ibid.*, p. 150.

23 Tasker, p. 52-53.

24 Lenski, pp. 153-54.

25 Tasker, p. 53.

26 Lenski, p. 171.

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