

Christ in all of Scripture

The Temptation of Jesus

Luke 4:1-13

Read the Passage

¹Then Jesus, being filled with the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, ² being tempted for forty days by the devil. And in those days He ate nothing, and afterward, when they had ended, He was hungry.

³ And the devil said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread."

⁴ But Jesus answered him, saying, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God.'"

⁵ Then the devil, taking Him up on a high mountain, showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. ⁶ And the devil said to Him, "All this authority I will give You, and their glory; for this has been delivered to me, and I give it to whomever I wish. ⁷ Therefore, if You will worship before me, all will be Yours."

⁸ And Jesus answered and said to him, "Get behind Me, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve.'"

⁹ Then he brought Him to Jerusalem, set Him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down from here. ¹⁰ For it is written:

'He shall give His angels charge over you,
To keep you,'

¹¹ and,

'In their hands they shall bear you up,
Lest you dash your foot against a stone.'

¹² And Jesus answered and said to him, "It has been said, 'You shall not tempt the LORD your God.'"

¹³ Now when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from Him until an opportune time.



"The Temptation of Jesus"



Gospel Preview in the Text

The Gospel writers are aware that the Greek word "graphein" means both "to write" and "to draw." The evangelists recognize that words can be used to draw vivid (graphic) pictures that can tell a "story within a story." By recognizing a passage as iconic, we are alerted to a foreshowing as well as a foretelling of the gospel account of the suffering (cross) and glory (resurrection) of Jesus.

JESUS IN TEMPTATION	JESUS IN SUFFERING
1. After his baptism and the descent of the Holy Spirit upon him, Jesus fasts for forty days . His trial culminates in his triumph over temptation (Luke 4:2).	1. Jesus appears to his disciples for forty days after his resurrection, which culminates in his ascension and the baptism of the church by the descent of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:3-5).
2. Satan challenges Jesus, " If you are the Son of God make this stone into bread" (Luke 4:3).	2. The Jewish rulers challenge Jesus, " If this is the Christ of God , let him save himself" (Luke 23:35).
3. Satan challenges Jesus, " If you will worship me, all (authority over the nations) will be yours" (Luke 4:7).	3. The Roman soldiers challenge Jesus, " If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself" (Luke 23:37).
4. Satan challenges Jesus, "If you are the Son of God, cast yourself down" (Luke 4:9).	4. One of the thieves challenges Jesus, "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us" (Luke 23:39).
5. Satan leaves Jesus for "an opportune time" (Luke 4:13).	5. Satan enters into Judas to engage the "opportune time" (cf. John 13:27).
6. Angels minister to Jesus after his three-fold temptation (Luke 4:2; cf. Matt 4:11).	6. An angel ministers to Jesus after his three-fold prayer about temptation in Gethsemane (Luke 22:40, 43).

Prophetic Narrative of the Gospel in the Text

1. There is a remarkable linear as well as circular symmetry to the earthly life of Jesus. For example, we see a circular symmetry in the parallels between the nativity and the resurrection narratives. These are like book-ends framing the earthly life of Jesus.

But we likewise see a linear symmetry in the parallels between the sorrow and joy of Jesus' parents and then also the sorrow and joy of the Emmaus disciples. Both the parents of Jesus and his Emmaus disciples share in their desperate fear that Jesus is lost and then in their



comfort in seeing him again on the third day (Luke 2:46, 24:21). There is likewise a linear symmetry in the framing of Jesus' ministry by two forty day periods, the first following the baptism of Jesus (an emblem of his death) in the wilderness, which culminates in his triumph over the temptation of Satan and then again in the forty days after the resurrection of Jesus (from the reality of death), culminating in his triumph over sin and death in his ascension. The Holy Spirit descends first upon Jesus in his baptism (Luke 3:22), and then again the Holy Spirit descends upon the church in her baptism (Acts 1:5).

The circular symmetry of the life of Jesus shows its providence and perfection. The linear symmetry demonstrates that his work continues through his apostles. It is a linear symmetry that connects the Lukan Gospel and the Acts. The former treatise to Theophilus describes the things which "Jesus began to do and teach" (Acts 1:1-2) until his ascension, the latter treatise describes the things that Jesus did and taught through his apostles after his ascension. Luke deploys the literary strategy of linear symmetry to show the continuity of the work of Jesus both on earth and then in heaven.

- 2-4. The pattern of Christ's suffering on the cross is anticipated by the pattern of the temptations of Satan. There are three challenges to Jesus' messianic self-identity. Satan's three-fold "If you are the Son of God/ the Christ" is replicated by the three-fold "If you are" challenge of the Jewish rulers, the Roman soldiers, and the unrepentant thief. Mocking Jesus at his crucifixion, the Jews, the Romans, and the thief share the dishonor to be Satan's spokesmen (cf. Matt 16:23, where Peter is likewise Satan's spokesman).

The first temptation was for Jesus to prove that he was the Son of God by changing a stone into bread. This temptation appears to correspond to the challenge of the Jewish rulers that if Jesus is the Christ of God, he should save himself from death. Jesus' refutation of Satan was the humble recognition that God's will for Jesus was to have stones and not bread at that season.

The second temptation was Satan's offer to give Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. Jesus could have all of this if he would bow down and worship Satan. There could be no imagination more perverse than that the Creator should bow before his creature! What a demand to come forth from the heart of darkness! Jesus rightly refuses the Evil One, giving his worship to God alone. So it is the Roman soldiers, representing the kingdom that boasts dominion over the nations, who mock Jesus in his claim to be the King of the Jews, challenging him to save himself.

The third temptation is Satan's demand that Jesus hurl himself from the temple in order to prove the truth of Psalm 91:11-12. The psalm promises that **God will send his angels to raise up** his Son lest he strike his foot **against a stone**. Jesus refutes the exposition of the Enemy, recognizing that the Scriptures admonish that he must not tempt God. Satan's crafty exposition of Scripture suggests an alternative interpretation of the psalmist's prophecy, one that does not require death and burial. The true sense of the passage is expositied below under the consequences of Christ's obedience. The **angels** would be deployed to **raise Jesus up**, but they would save him by rolling away the **stone** that sealed the grave. The psalm intended that



Jesus would be delivered from death by resurrection, not that he would be delivered from death itself.

5-6. Satan leaves the victorious Savior after Christ sustained his temptations in the wilderness, waiting for a more “opportune time.” The literary bridge between the temptation account and the account of Calvary make it quite clear that Satan’s more opportune time comes when Jesus is delivered over to the power of darkness (cf. 1 Cor 2:8). The two accounts are uniquely connected by the three-fold protasis/apodosis (“if /then”) challenges to Jesus self-identity. Further, in both accounts of the extreme exertion of Jesus, angels from heaven are sent to minister to Jesus.

What is the meaning of the Lord’s three replies to Satan’s three temptations?

Each of Jesus’ replies involves a charge against Satan himself. Satan tempts Jesus to make stones into bread. Jesus replies that man’s life is not in bread alone, but that life comes forth from the word of God. Satan is condemned, for he himself has taken God’s life giving word of truth and twisted it into a lie that brings forth death. (cf. John 8:44). Satan then tempts Jesus with the glory of the nations of the earth. He claims that all this has been given to him. Jesus’ reply, “you shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve,” can be understood as a rebuke to the Enemy, who should himself be worshipping at the feet of the divine Son of God. For it is to Jesus that universal dominion has truly been given (Acts 1:8). Satan at last tempts Jesus to cast himself down from the temple. Jesus replies that God should not be tempted, which is precisely what Satan himself has attempted to do with the divine Christ in the wilderness. At the last, it will be Satan himself who will be cast down from the heavenly courts (cf. Rev 12:9).

What is the pattern of Satan’s three-fold temptation of Jesus, and does it correspond to his three-fold temptation of Eve?

The three-fold temptation of Jesus recalls the three-fold temptation of Eve. Genesis tells us that when the woman saw 1) that the fruit was good for food, 2) that it was a delight to the eyes, and 3) that it was desirable to man one wise—she yielded to the temptation. Ancient psychology divided the embodied soul into three parts. The Greeks identified these parts as the appetitive (appealing to the cravings of the body, such as “good for food”), the spirited (appealing to “the delight of the eye”), and the rational (desirable “to make one wise”).¹ The description of Eve’s fall in the garden seems to anticipate the Lord’s temptation in the wilderness. Jesus was first met with his hunger (the cravings of the body), then the delight to the eye (seeing the glory of the nations), and finally the skill to reinterpret the biblical text (the “wisdom” to make the Scriptures affirm our personal disobedience). Clearly the most powerful temptation is the one that engages the whole soul, that is, the one that appeals to all three of parts of the soul simultaneously.

¹ The differentiation of the soul was expressed by its formal names in Plato’s *Republic*. There are the epithymotic (appetitive), thymotic (spirited), and noetic (rational) aspects.



What is the force of the temptations of Satan?

Dostoyevsky's portrayal of the skeptic Ivan tells the captivating story of the Grand Inquisitor (*The Brothers Karamazov*). The inquisitor challenges an emaciated Christ who appeared in medieval Spain and was arrested by the church. The inquisitor reproved Jesus for resisting the temptations of Satan. He depicted the consequences of Jesus' obedience for the world, which he maintained had been disastrous. The inquisitor's arguments are cogent and memorable. But they fail, as do all the charges of skepticism, if in fact Jesus did actually rise up from the grave. Only the infernal counsels of the gates of Hades could have engineered the temptations of Jesus. They are designed with one purpose in view, to dissuade the Savior from going to the cross. Everything that the Father promises to the Son, Satan offers to Jesus. Jesus can have all the inheritance he is destined to possess, he can have all the titles to rule that are justly his, and he can fulfill all that the Scripture has ordained. He can have it all, claims the Adversary—without the cross!

What were the true consequences of Jesus' obedience?

The first temptation, where Jesus obeyed his Father by having stones instead of bread, meant that the Savior would have to deliver over his own life to death, trusting in the providence of God. That providence was to show how by Jesus' death many might have life, where the Son of God himself would become their Bread of Life! What a precious Savior is Jesus, who knew both hunger (Luke 4:2) and thirst (cf. John 19:28) that we might have the bread and water of life!

The second temptation corresponded to the mockery of the Roman soldiers before the cross. Their scorn recalls the fact that Jesus refused the illicit offer to take dominion over the nations from Satan. Because of his obedience, however, Jesus would be given authority over all the nations (cf. Matt 28:19) and the one mocked by the soldiers as the "King of the Jews" would be given the heavenly "throne of his Father David" (Luke 1:32; Acts 7:56).

The third temptation turned upon the true exposition of Psalm 91:11-12. The fulfillment of the psalm was for another season, a time after the cross, when **God would send his angels** to cause his Son to **rise up** from death, on the day when they would roll away the **stone** sealing the tomb. It is interesting that Satan focuses his infernal strategy upon the *foot* of the Savior in the temptation. He cites the appropriate verse (Psa 91:12), pretending to be solicitous of the safety of Jesus' foot. In light of the prophecy of Genesis 3:15, which foretells Satan's attack upon the heel of the Seed of the Woman, the temptation takes on a deep irony. Because of Jesus' obedience, however, Jesus' foot would in fact not be crushed by the stone, but would rather crush the head of Satan himself!

Gospel Takeaways from the Text

The Hero Son of God endured the unendurable in his suffering and death. He was challenged to save himself from death on the cross by an attack on each of his three titles (Son of God, Christ of God, and King of the Jews; Luke 23:35-38; Matt 27:39-43). Jesus himself came close to staggering in



Gethsemane. He cried out that he knew that with God all things are possible (Matt 26:39). Then he asked that if possible, his cup could be removed (Luke 22:42). This agony was not theatre. It was a struggle in sweat and blood. The Son of God, who promised never to forsake us was himself forsaken by his Father (Mark 15:34). The Christ of God was cursed of God, for he had to be hanged on a tree (Deut 21:23). And the King of the Jews was charged with blasphemy by none other than the High Priest of Israel (Mark 14:60-64). Jesus endured all this so that we might have the benefits of his cross and the blessings of his resurrection.

Jesus had need of the ministry of angels to withstand the hour of his temptation. How much more needy are we! But God sends his ministering spirits to succor the heirs of eternal life. He promises not to permit us to be tempted beyond our ability to sustain the trial.

The essence of Satan's temptation of both Eve and Jesus is the implication that God is not good. Why would a good God withhold from Eve the fruit that would make her like God himself? Didn't Jesus himself also teach that if a son asked his father for bread, how would he give him a stone? (Matt 7:9). Why then would a good God ordain a stone for his Son instead of bread. Jesus endured the unendurable in his suffering both temptation and death—all so that we might have a Savior.

