

The Temptations of Jesus: A Lesson for Us

written by Tim Jennings, M.D. | November 23, 2020



According to Scripture, Jesus was tempted **“in every way just as we are yet without sin”** (Hebrews 4:15 NIV84). As we praise God for the victory of His Son, we can simultaneously examine how the devil approached our Savior and discover the evil tactics that he uses against us.

We will see that all of Satan’s temptations are rooted in lies – but his lies come at us from different angles, aiming at different points of vulnerability, ultimately leading us to exchange our trust in God for something or someone other than God.

The Temptations of Jesus

The first temptation of Jesus came after He had fasted for forty days and was hungry. Purporting to be an angel from heaven, Satan approached our Savior and tempted Him to turn a stone into bread, if He was the Son of God (Matthew 4:3).

Note the layers of deceit:

- The devil presented himself as an angel of light, a friend, someone from God, a being interested in

Jesus' welfare; this was a lie – not a lie of words, but of action and presentation. He was an enemy, not a friend.

- How many people today get deceived because they cannot discern a friend from an enemy? They believe that someone really cares about them, when, in reality, the person just wants to take advantage in some way.
- Satan, in his disguise as an angel of light and pretending to be interested in Christ's welfare, approached Jesus *in a time or situation of need*. Jesus was hungry; He was in a desert without easy access to food. The devil also presented another deception – tempting Jesus to doubt God and doubt Himself. "Surely, the Son of God wouldn't be left to suffer and starve alone in the desert? God is love, and a God of love wouldn't leave one of His children to starve to death, would He? Don't let this mischaracterization of your Father stand. If you are God's Son, turn this rock into bread and save yourself." Satan tempted Jesus to take matters into His own hands, to act selfishly to fix the situation Himself and prove who He was to this so-called friend from God.
- How many of us find ourselves in positions of real need and are tempted by people to doubt God, and instead of waiting patiently for God to lead, we listen to the so-called friends and act outside of God's will, trying to fix the problem ourselves?

The first temptation is to deceive us by pretending to be a friend or an agent from God sent to help us in a time of real need, but instead of helping, this fake friend leads us away from trusting God and toward trusting ourselves or trying to prove what we don't actually need to prove.

For the second temptation of Jesus, the devil took Him to a high place, showed Him all the power and wealth of the world, and then offered it to Jesus, claiming it was his to give, if our Savior would only recognize Satan as the rightful ruler of Earth and worship him.

Note the layers of deceit:

- The devil again presented himself as something he is not. This time, instead of an angel of light, he represented himself as the rightful ruler of Earth, the one with the authority to give what he claimed he could give. This was a lie. Jesus is the rightful ruler of Earth. Adam, in Eden, was Jesus' subordinate governor. When Adam sinned, Jesus remained the rightful ruler – Satan was a usurper, and his claim was false.
- But, in his disguise as the rightful ruler of Earth, Satan's second temptation is that of *inducement, bribes, payoffs* – more wealth, fame, power, glory, control, or ability. If only Jesus would acknowledge Satan as ruler and worship him, He could have it all and not have to suffer and die. Why suffer? Why take the hard way? Wouldn't it be better to take the easy way?
- In society today, we see this temptation all the time; people have exchanged their belief in God or their devotion to God for material possessions, more wealth, power, or fame – or anything else to exalt self.

The first temptation was to exchange trust in God for trust in self when a false friend deceives in a time of need; the second temptation was inducement, bribe, payoff of wealth, power, fame, or some ability – that is, don't trust God with your situation, but take matters into your own hands and advance yourself; no need to suffer; you can get ahead the easy way.

For the third temptation, Satan took Jesus to the top of the temple, quoted Scripture out of context, and then tempted our Savior to jump off the tower to prove that He was the Son of God.

- This temptation was again a deception but through the misquoting of Scripture and attempting to introduce doubt into Jesus' mind; this was to get Him to act outside of God's will in a way that would injure Jesus, harm the mission, or interfere with God's purpose, *all the while purporting to be in harmony with Scripture*. In other words, the final temptation was again to distrust God but this time through false religion, false religiosity, and false application of Scripture.
- How many people throughout history have been deceived by those who misuse Scripture to advance the purposes of God's enemy? How many religious leaders have acted the role of Satan's agent and led people on crusades, inquisitions, suicide bombings, or other acts outside of God's will while claiming to be working for God?

The third temptation was to distrust God and exalt self through the application of Scripture and claims of devotion to God and advancement of His kingdom.

How Jesus Overcame: A Lesson for Us

Jesus defeated all of these temptations by knowing God and having a personal relationship with His Father. Jesus knew God's character, methods, principles, motives, purposes; thus, He knew the true meaning of Scripture. For this reason, Jesus was able to quote Scripture that exposed each temptation for the lie that it was.

We, too, must know God for ourselves. This requires that we know God's methods, design laws, principles, and purposes so that we can rightly understand and apply God's Word. And this means that we must know and study God's Word for ourselves to know its true meaning and develop by practice the ability to discern truth from error (Hebrews 5:14).

However, Jesus' temptations did not end in the wilderness with deceit, inducement, or false religion – nor will our temptations end with these three.

If we, like Jesus, are not deceived by those claiming to be from God but are not; if we are not bought off with the riches or fame of this evil world; if we are not tricked by false religiosity, then the devil will attack us with the fear of rejection, ruined reputation, loss of position, and eventually physical pain, suffering, and ultimately death through false allegations and acts of injustice. The evil one uses his agents to lie about the righteous, betray them, imprison them, and torture and kill them if he can't get them to choose him and his methods. All of these pressures are designed to get us to embrace his methods of power and coercion to stop the injustice and protect ourselves or *others*.

Jesus' final temptation came during crucifixion weekend when He was repeatedly tempted to stop the greatest injustice in history and save Himself.

This final temptation was so diabolical because it tempted Jesus to do justice by acting selfishly. The action to stop His own execution would have been an act of judicial justice because He was innocent – but to do so would have been an act of selfishness.

Let's examine this a little more closely:

- Jesus was publicly misrepresented and lied about repeatedly (Matthew 12:24).
- Religious and political leaders threatened His followers (John 9:22).
- Corrupt leaders bribed one of His followers to betray Him (Matthew 26:14-16).
- Witnesses were hired to perjure themselves at His trial (Matthew 26:59-61).
- The Sanhedrin violated its own laws in conducting His trial at night, as it was forbidden to conduct legal matters between the evening and morning sacrifice.
- They lied to the Roman governor.
- They hired mobs to riot and intimidate Pilate and silence any who would speak in favor of Jesus.
- They voted for a known criminal over the Messiah (Matthew 27:16-21).
- They hit Jesus and beat Him without cause (John 18:23).
- They crucified Him though He was innocent.
- They mocked Him and berated Him.

All of these events were orchestrated by Satan to tempt Jesus with outrage at the injustice, in the face of the most extreme torture of His physical body, maximizing the temptation to become angry and say to Himself, "This is wrong! It's not fair! I don't deserve this!" and then act to save self.

Each one of us, if we do not give in to the lies, the bribes, and the false religion, will face similar temptations either directly or vicariously. We will face our worst fears – fear of rejection, fear of being cast out of our churches, fear of imprisonment, physical abuse, torture, and even death. And all of this mistreatment will be based on lies and falsehood. It will be a gross miscarriage of justice.

In the face of this terrible social injustice against us or people we love, we will be confronted with the most intense temptation: to use the methods of this world to put down the wrong. It is then that our faith(trust) in Jesus must be exercised. It is then that the final remnants of the carnal nature will be purged from our hearts and minds. It is then we must choose to say no to fear, no to selfishness, no to the methods of force and coercion, and remain surrendered in trust to our Savior. It is then, in the face of the most intense human passion, with anger boiling over at the injustice, with fear crushing us down and tempting us to give in, that we must choose to follow Jesus, who said:

Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? **Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect** (Matthew 5:44-48 NIV84).

When our fears are the strongest, when our anger is the most intense, when the temptation to strike back seems so right, it is then, if we want to be free from sin, free from fear, free from selfishness, free from the power of Satan, that we must trust Jesus and love our enemies. It is only then that we will be fully healed children of our Father in heaven, perfect like He is perfect!
