

THREE ARENAS OF TEMPTATION

Matthew 4:1-11; see also Luke 4:1-13

Jesus, the Pattern Son, was tested at three different levels. Jesus knew that the heavens were opened unto Him; He had heard the Father's voice of approval, and He knew that the Holy Spirit had descended upon Him as a dove; Matthew 3:16-17. It was in the wilderness, after an extended fast, that the devil began to tempt Jesus. He challenged His authority, using different tactics. The enemy's strategy toward the Son of God was based upon an appeal to satisfy self without regard to God's will or His Word. The methods and the motives used against the Pattern Son, and every son of God, are as follows:

- The devil sought to hinder Jesus from "emptying Himself", from abandoning His own human will; only through this, could the will of the Father be operative.
- The devil encouraged Jesus to "prove His Sonship" in a way that was contrary to the will of God.
- Jesus was tempted to use His anointing, ability and position to serve His own self interest, to attain popularity and please the people.
- With each temptation, the devil suggests the following: you don't have to deny yourself, you can achieve a shortcut to power, you can utilize the power of the flesh, you don't have to wait, and you don't have to suffer (no Cross).
- Each temptation began with: "If thou be the Son of God". At each point of testing, Jesus answered the accuser with the Word of God: "It is written".
- Like Jesus, every son of God must refuse the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life; 1 John 2:16.

1. The first temptation was directed toward His physical, bodily appetites.

- a. The devil suggested to Jesus: "prove your divinity" by making stones into bread. Jesus knew that He was the Bread of Life; John 6:41, 66.
- b. Jesus could have silenced the taunts of the devil and the people by making a demonstration of His power. (Remember, the people sought to make Jesus "king" after He fed the 5,000 with loaves and fishes); John 6:15.
- c. The devil sought to pressure Jesus to turn aside from His assignment, from what pleased His Father. "Use your power to make bread, feed yourself". Similarly, today the devil could say "if you care about hungry people, use your power to end the problem of world hunger"; John 8:28-29.
- d. Jesus passed the test where Esau failed; He chose the higher life by denying Himself, turning from His own personal appetite. Esau lost his birthright when he said that he was about to die from hunger, trading it for a "mess of pottage"; Gen. 25:32; Heb. 12:16-17
- e. Natural food (bread) was not Jesus' primary concern. The Word of God gave Him strength to stand against temptation; He also said "My meat (food) is to do the will of Him that sent me, and to finish His work"; John 4:34

2. The second temptation was directed toward His emotional, soulish appetites:

a. The devil took Jesus up to the holy city, the pinnacle of the temple in Jerusalem, suggesting to Him: “if you throw yourself down, the angels will save you.” He offered Jesus a plan to force the hand of God to reveal Him as God’s Son in a spectacular way.

b. It was suggested to Jesus to do that which was wrong, foolish, unwise or dangerous, thereby testing exceedingly, the Lord your God; Deuteronomy 6:16.

c. The devil tried to entice Jesus to pander to the people, by gratifying the desire of the crowds for wonders: “Do something sensational to get their attention, and awe them into obedience. If you do these things, then the crowds will listen to you, and believe that you are the Messiah”; Matthew 12:39; 16:4.

d. The devil suggested that Jesus could achieve a shortcut to power through a miracle: “wow the crowds and convince the people through a supernatural act”. Jesus refused to be forced or pushed to make a rash display of God’s power. The “pressure to perform” was felt by the Son of God.

e. Jesus refused to evade the perils, the hardships, the humiliation or the insults to purchase comfort, at the expense of fulfilling His Father’s will. He was tempted up to the last hour of His life by those who said: “He saved others; let him save Himself, if he be Christ, the chosen of God”; see Luke 23:35-39.

3. The third temptation was spiritual:

a. The prince of this world (the devil), took Jesus (Who is the King), up to an exceedingly high mountain, and showed Him the kingdoms of this world: the power, the influence, the glory, the wealth, the riches and the prestige; 1 John 5:19. The devil offered Jesus a shortcut, another way, to gain influence over the kingdoms of the earth. But Jesus’ Kingdom in this age is not a kingdom of this world; John 18:36-37.

b. The devil realized that Jesus was invading and threatening his domain; Jesus had plans to build the Kingdom of Heaven within the boundaries of the devil’s kingdom. So his objective was to turn Jesus aside from His purpose: to give His life as a ransom for many.

c. He told Jesus that all of these kingdoms (and the souls within them), would be His, if He would “bow down and worship me”. The devil tried to persuade the Son of God to commit treason against His Father, to be disloyal to God’s plan - the way of the Cross.

d. Jesus refused to seek a kingdom for Himself through worldly methods of political maneuvering, popularity or compromise. A heavenly Kingdom is gained through self-denial, humility, meekness and through complete obedience and devotion to God.

e. Jesus knew that in due time, the kingdoms of this world would become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of His Christ; Revelation 11:15. But before Jesus can rule over the earth, He first has to rule over the hearts of men, and this would be accomplished through cross-carrying obedience. He who overcomes will sit with Him in His throne; Revelation 3:21.