

Jesus' Test in the Wilderness

LUKE 4:1-12

By Mike Burnham

Luke 4:1-12 (KJV) *And Jesus being full of the Holy Ghost returned from Jordan, and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, 2 Being forty days tempted of the devil. And in those days he did eat nothing: and when they were ended, he afterward hungered. 3 And the devil said unto him, If thou be the Son of God, command this stone that it be made bread. 4 And Jesus answered him, saying, It is written, That man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God. 5 And the devil, taking him up into an high mountain, shewed unto him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. 6 And the devil said unto him, All this power will I give thee, and the glory of them: for that is delivered unto me; and to whomsoever I will I give it. 7 If thou therefore wilt worship me, all shall be thine. 8 And Jesus answered and said unto him, Get thee behind me, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve. 9 And he brought him to Jerusalem, and set him on a pinnacle of the temple, and said unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down from hence: 10 For it is written, He shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee: 11 And in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone. 12 And Jesus answering said unto him, It is said, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.*

We last looked at the reason Jesus had to go through this trial and the contrasts between Adam's and Jesus' trial. We saw that Jesus could be tempted, since scripture tells us that He was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin, reminding us that our Savior was subjected to a temptation that was real.

The first approach that Satan make to Jesus involved an enticement to turn stones into bread. Jesus had gone forty days without food, (Luke 4:2-3).

Satan is described in Scripture as being subtle and crafty. When he first appears in Genesis as the serpent who tempted Eve, he is described as more subtle (crafty, wily) than any of the animals the LORD GOD had made. The subtlety of Satan's temptation is seen in the way he phrases his enticement. He says to Jesus, "If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread." The key word is [if]. The devil is subtly raising a question about Jesus' identity.

The temptation has a double force. The first deals overtly with Jesus' hunger. In His human nature Jesus obviously felt the desire for food. A hungry man's desire for food is no sin. But it is a desire. Desire incites many kinds of sins. Let's look at James's explanation of temptation, (James 1:13-15).

James 1:13-15 (KJV) *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: 14 But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. 15 Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.*

James describes how temptation occurs: "But each one is tempted when, by his own lust (evil desire resulting from the diseased condition of the soul) which draws him away. Lust is the bait that lures (entices) him. Then after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin.

Did Jesus have to struggle against His evil desires in order to avoid giving birth to sin? No! When James gives this account of how evil desires lead to actual sin, he is describing the situation that applies to fallen mankind. Remember that Jesus was free of original sin which meant that He was also free of evil desires. One evil desire in the heart of Jesus would have been enough to disqualify Him from being the Savior.

But if Jesus had no evil desires, how could He have been tempted? Here

we must distinguish between two types of temptation, internal and external temptation. Internal temptation has to do with the struggle with evil desires that James discusses. External temptation has to do with enticements that come to us from someone or something outside of ourselves. For example, someone comes to me and says, "Let's rob a bank tonight and get rich." I may have a desire to be rich, but I have no desire to rob a bank. Such a suggestion may not incite any evil desires within me. The temptation is purely external.

Jesus' temptation was purely external. He merely had to listen to Satan offer external incitements to sin without having to endure the inward struggle with evil desires. Jesus had no inward evil desires. But He did have an inward desire. He was hungry. He had a desire for food, which was not sinful. Satan sought to entice Jesus to fulfill a legitimate desire by using illegitimate means. Wanting Bread would have been no sin, but turning the stones into bread would have been. Jesus no doubt had a desire for food, but He had an even greater desire for obedience.

Satan also attempted to raise questions in Jesus' mind about the trustworthiness of the Word of God. The words "If you are the Son of God" subtly raise the issue of Jesus' status with the Father.

Remember the last portion of the record of Jesus' baptism. The heavens opened, a dove descended, and God spoke audibly. The message God gave from heaven was that Jesus was His beloved Son. That is, the last words Jesus heard from the Father before He entered into His temptation were the words declaring Him to be the Son of God.

The attack of Satan focused upon the trustworthiness of the Word of God. He was raising questions about Jesus' trust in what God had declared. It's as if Satan was saying, "How could you be the Son of God and be in this place under these conditions? Would God abandon His Son to this desolation? If you really are the Son of God, then surely you are allowed to fix yourself some breakfast from these stones."

But Jesus responded to Satan's challenge by quoting scripture (Luke 4:44). Jesus' response not only involved a quotation from scripture but was a Scripture that underscored the necessity of living by trust in the Word of God.

The second temptation focuses upon Jesus' mission. Jesus had been promised kingship and all the authority and glory that goes with being the King of kings. But first He had to fulfill the mission of the Suffering Servant of Israel. His kingdom was to be reached through humiliation, suffering, and death. Now Satan offered Him the kingdom without having to pay the price of humiliation. Glory without suffering. All Jesus had to do was give the devil a moment of worship.

Again Jesus responded to the temptation with a quote from scripture (Luke 4:8) For Jesus to submit to Satan would have been a violation of the Word of God. Rather than break the commands of God, Jesus chose the way of suffering and humiliation.

In the third temptation Satan himself appeals to Scripture (Luke 4:9-12). Satan suggests that Jesus prove the Scriptures to be true by putting them to the test. He again turns returns to the question of Jesus' Sonship and the trustworthiness of God's Word.

Jesus again uses scripture to defeat the temptations of Satan. He also gives us a lesson in hermeneutics. He would have nothing to do with a biblical interpretation that would consider one passage in isolation from the whole body of scripture. He would not interpret one passage of Scripture so as to bring it in conflict with another passage of scripture.

With Jesus's victory in the third temptation, Satan left Him alone, at least for the time being (Luke 4:13). Matthew gives some additional information, (Mat. 4:11). Satan had just tried to entice Jesus to prove that angels would take care of Him in a crisis. No angels were visible at the time of the temptation. Yet the moment Jesus resisted the temptation, the angels manifested themselves and ministered to His needs.