

# Notes for Those Called Out

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## The Divine and Human Temptations of Jesus

by Dan Trygg

“Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led around by the Spirit in the wilderness <sup>2</sup> for forty days, being tempted by the devil. And He ate nothing during those days, and when they had ended, He became hungry. <sup>3</sup> And the devil said to Him, ‘If You are the Son of God...’”  
Luke 4:1-3

In the parallel passage in Matthew 4:1, we are specifically told that Jesus “was led up by the Spirit ...to be tested by the devil.” Why now? Why in these particular ways? What was the *purpose* of these temptations or tests, and *what can we learn from Jesus’ experience that could be applicable to us?*

To correctly understand what this encounter with Satan was really all about, there is an important part of the backdrop that we have to understand. God tells us, in Hebrews 2:17, that Jesus was *obligated* to be like us in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest, in order to make an effective sacrifice on behalf of the people. *This* was His entire purpose in coming. It was the age-old plan of God, decided before the foundation of the world (Rev. 13:8). **God’s answer to our sin problem required a substitutionary sacrifice.** God’s employment of the blood of a sacrificial lamb to mark the houses of the Israelites at the time of the **Exodus**, so that the angel of death would *pass over* them, was a vivid image of what God intended to do for us. Just as Israel was delivered from death by the mark of a lamb’s blood upon the doorposts and lintel of the house (Ex. 12:1-13), in a similar way Jesus’ blood would be spilled for us, so that God’s wrath could pass *us* by. **The OT sacrificial system** was an expansion of the idea of substitutionary atonement, preparing the minds of the people of Israel for the ultimate sacrifice which God Himself would make in exchange for their lives. Even **Jesus’ public introduction to the world by John the Baptist described Him in terms of a sacrificial Lamb**, One who would take away the sin of the world (Jn. 1:29). The problem of animal sacrifices was that an animal was not an adequate substitute for a human life. God did not desire human sacrifices, as did other religious groups. Those who sacrificed people in exchange for their lives did so because they recognized a human life would be more valuable than an animal’s. It seemed to offer more of an even exchange. There was no person without sin *of their own*, however. If they were to die, they could only pay for their *own* sin, not that of others. **For the ultimate sacrifice to be effective, according to the logic of substitution, a substitute must be found who was fully able to identify with humanity, but had no sin of his own.** If Jesus was to be able to represent us as a substitute, He had to become a human being, and He had to live and operate as one. He had to live within the confines of the human experience, our finitude and limitations. Part of that preparation process included both temptation and suffering (Heb. 2:10,18; 4:15; 5:7-9). Undoubtedly, He had experienced temptation many times in the first 30 years of His life, and had never compromised once (Heb. 4:15; I Jn. 3:5; Jn. 8:46). **Furthermore, in order to pay for the sin of more than one person, the substitute had to be worth much more than a normal human life, yet be fully human.** Only God in human flesh would be unarguably such a sacrifice of *infinite worth*, one whose value would be *much more* than the lives of *all* the people who have ever lived.

The temptations of Jesus by Satan in the wilderness were *not* your average, run-of-the-mill, everyday temptations. These were an out-and-out assault of spiritual warfare against Jesus in response to His consecration to God, and His mission. Note that **these were not typical “human” temptations. Jesus was being tempted to do things because He was the Son of God.** The interesting thing, however, is that the enemy approached Jesus by the *same three avenues* as he had approached Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden, ...three avenues described by the apostle John in I Jn. 2:16 as “*the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful-pride of life*” (cf. Gen. 3:6). Eve saw that the fruit of the forbidden tree was “good for food” (lust of the flesh), “a delight to the eyes (lust of the eyes), and that the tree “was desirable to make one wise” (the boastful pride of life). In a similar way, Satan first suggested that Jesus turn the stones into bread, because He was hungry (lust of the flesh). Next, he showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory, offering to give them to Him if He would acknowledge or “do obeisance” to him one time (lust of the eyes). Finally, he encouraged Him to jump off the pinnacle of the temple in a public display of power to prove He was the Son of God, which would put God to the test and bypass the cross (boastful pride of life). Even though Satan approached Jesus through avenues we all can relate to, *the level of the temptation Jesus experienced, however, was not typical* for most people. Most people would laugh at the suggestion of turning stones into bread, but for Jesus (God in the flesh) this was a very *real* possibility. **The thrust of each temptation was to step outside the confines of human limitation, and dependence upon God, to take matters into His own hands.** (We, too, are tempted to bypass God’s will and provision, and take matters into *our* own hands, but not usually to do what only God can do.) If Jesus had given in to *any* of these, He would have been unable to complete His mission. We would have remained lost in our sin.

Jesus resisted the temptation in every sense of the word, fighting the spiritual warfare as any human being would/could. Not only did He *not* compromise His humanity in each test that the enemy presented to Him, He also refused to confront the enemy in His own strength. Instead, **He appealed to God's truth to counter each attempt of the enemy to entice Him to action independent of His Father.**

## **What can we learn about temptation from this glimpse into Jesus' life?**

**(1.) The enemy often will assault us strongly shortly after, or immediately before, a spiritual advance in our lives.** Notice that this did not happen the very next day, but 40 days later. That is over a month later, yet this temptation was the next major event in Jesus' spiritual life after His baptism/consecration to ministry. Some have called this phenomenon the "Elijah syndrome", referring to the assault that followed that prophet's great victory over the prophets of Baal in I Kg. 18,19, and the resulting depression he experienced. Pastors and Christian workers often experience depression, or an "attack" of some kind, on the day after they do their main ministry activity. **On the other hand, often a spiritual breakthrough or blessing comes *after* a period of testing.** In this case, Jesus returned from the wilderness empowered by the Spirit, and experienced a great advance in His ministry outreach (Luke. 4:14).

**(2.) The devil *waits* until a time of vulnerability.** Jesus was physically depleted after 40 days without food, and He became very hungry. There was no food at hand, however, so the enemy came to suggest that Jesus "make" a little lunch out of some stones. He appealed with a lust of the flesh at the time His flesh was the weakest! **If we pay attention, we will begin to see the same kind of principle operating in our lives.** If we are lonely, he will bring into our lives someone who will keep us company, but will also be a doorway to other temptations and sin. In fact, people in recovery have noticed four scenarios that leave us especially vulnerable to temptation. These are easily remembered, because they can be listed by the acronym, H.A.L.T. When we are Hungry, Angry, Lonely or Tired, we are especially susceptible to responding to a temptation that would help us cover or escape our empty, negative feelings. Instead of addressing the real needs, food, reconciliation, healthy friendships or sleep, we are often tempted to escape our feelings with a mood altering experience. Satan is always ready to suggest avenues which lead *away from* God's will for our lives. (Note that after 40 days of fasting in the wilderness, Jesus would have been dealing with three out of these four dynamics.)

**(3.) Satan suggests ways to "shortcut" the plan of God.** His suggestions to Jesus appeared as "quick-fix" kinds of solutions, ways that appeared to fulfill legitimate needs or wants, but in ways that were not in sync with God's ways of doing things. What's wrong with eating bread? ...or gathering disciples? ...or becoming King of the planet? Weren't these the very things God wanted to do with and for Jesus? They appeared to be, but in reality, of course, they were not at all. We see the same strategy at work in Gen. 3. **In truth, only God's way leads to God's ends. The ends do not justify the means. God's ends grow out of God's means. If you want God's will for your life, then you have to travel His road with Him.** If you take another road, even though it might *claim* the same destination, you will find that *it does not actually lead to the same place!* Or, another way to come at this is to observe that *there are important skills and character developed and built by following God's path*, which the "short cut" will cut short. **We will not be the same for following the short cut**, aside from every other consideration. Of course, if we know anything about the enemy at all, we know he does not want us to grow and become strong in the Lord. Why believe *him*, when he tries to con us into thinking that "short cuts" will work, and are harmless?

**(4.) Satan can quote Scripture, too.** Paul tells us that Satan can appear as an "angel of light", and his servants appear as servants of righteousness (II Cor. 11:14,15). In the end, however, they become evident by their actions, ...especially in how they treat people (II Cor. 11:15-21; Matt. 7:15-20; 25:31-46). We are repeatedly warned in scripture about false teachers who would lead us either into sin or into some kind of bondage, stealing away your time, energy or resources for *their agenda*, instead of *God's will*. **Religious talk and appearances do not necessarily mean right doctrine or counsel.** What does God *really* want from His followers? Isn't it to become like Jesus? (Matt. 10:24,25; Eph. 4:13; Rom. 8:29) If what is being taught does not sound like or look like the Jesus of the gospels, then the source probably is not from Him, either.

**(5.) Jesus showed us the importance of standing firm in the revealed truth of God.** Note that He did not try to reason things out, or argue with Satan. Satan is a master con man and deceiver. He is more crafty than any other creature (Gen. 3:1). When Eve was pulled into his reasonings, things did not look clear, anymore. Furthermore, the Bible says that our sinful hearts are deceitful (Jer. 17:9). *We cannot trust our own judgment.* Jesus made *no* attempt to reason with the enemy. One thing that is very noticeable about Jesus' interactions with Satan is how *brief* and *clear* they were. He simply *applied* what He knew *God had said* about this particular situation, and *stood firm on that*. **The enemy was powerless to deceive Him when He stood firmly and unshakably on the clear truth of God.**