

THE NATURE AND PURPOSE OF THE  
TEMPTATIONS OF CHRIST

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The temptations of Christ are a puzzling aspect of His life on earth. It is the purpose of this paper to discover the purpose of these temptations.

A preliminary question concerning Christ's character is whether or not He could have sinned and if He could not sin, were the temptations a reality to Him. Although Christ was truly human having the nature of a man, He was at the same time God having a Divine nature as well. In instances where a human nature would normally fail the Divine nature of Christ always had supreme control. This being the case, it was impossible for Him to yield to the temptations. This fact, however, does not negate the reality of the temptations. Christ was human with human needs and emotions. He suffered under every stinging attack of Satan just as an invincible army would still have its casualties.

The baptism was the inauguration of Christ's ministry as the suffering Messiah. Immediately following this event Christ was compelled to go into the wilderness by the Holy Spirit which indicates the Father's will being accomplished. After a forty day fast Jesus is confronted by Satan who attempts to foil Christ's ministry. Three times He tempts Jesus. Each time Jesus' complete trust is in His Father's will for His life and in dependence upon the Spirit, He repels Satan's blow with the Word of God.

It is concluded that the primary purpose of the temptations was to show Christ's glory and power as the Messiah. They also show His worthiness as the perfect, sinless sacrifice for the sin of the world, His example for believers in gaining victory over sin, His ability to be the merciful high priest, and His experience of being tempted in all areas of life which indicates that there is no temptation that He cannot understand.

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## INTRODUCTION

A puzzling part of Jesus' life on earth is His temptation experience. Why did Jesus, who was and is God, have to go through such an experience? Since Jesus is God, were the temptations truly an allurement to Him? Could He possibly have yielded to these enticements?

This document assumes Christ's humanity and, therefore, the fact that throughout His human growth and development He faced the normal decisions and temptations which occur in every person's daily life. He grew up in a very real and typical family and apparently upon the death of Joseph He became the family breadwinner in the carpentry business.<sup>1</sup> This would indicate that He was responsible for both business and family decisions and yet His actions and reactions were exemplary as is attested by the Father who said, immediately following Jesus' baptism, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased" (Matt 3:17).

What was God the Father's purpose for exposing Christ to this direct confrontation with Satan? This study is directed toward answering many of these questions in order to determine the purpose for the temptations of Christ.

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<sup>1</sup>Ivan H. French, "The Man Christ Jesus," Grace Theological Journal 1 (Fall 1980):193

It is important in a study of this nature to examine the character of Jesus Christ as well as the character of Satan. The context is also an essential element. Satan's attacks and Jesus' responses will be the key in coming to the proper conclusion. Matthew 4:1-11, Mark 1:12-13, and Luke 4:1-13 are the main passages used in discussing these temptations. The New American Standard Bible will be the version quoted throughout.

## CHAPTER I

### PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS

#### The Impeccability of Christ

Whenever the temptations of Christ are examined a preliminary question arises. Could Christ have succumbed to the temptations? The answer to this question will aid in the arrival at a sound conclusion regarding the nature and purpose of the temptations.

#### The Nature of Christ

Those who believe that Christ could have sinned upon being tempted, reason that if He truly could not sin then the temptations could not have been truly real to Him.

Charles Hodge states it this way:

Temptation implies the possibility of sin. If from the constitution of His person it was impossible for Christ to sin, then His temptation was unreal and without effect, and He cannot sympathize with His people.<sup>1</sup>

This view, however, seems to be based upon philosophical reasoning rather than on biblical evidences. It is true that it was necessary for Christ to feel the reality of the temptation in order to be a merciful and faithful high priest. But this feeling does not necessarily dictate that He must have been able to sin.

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<sup>1</sup>Charles Hodge, Systematic Theology, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1940), 2:457.

Hebrews 13:8, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and today, yes and forever," teaches that Christ is immutable. He never changes. His basic character and holiness are always the same. This being the case Christ could not have possibly sinned for that would indicate that He was not immutable. He would not have been holy, harmless, and undefiled yesterday, today, and forever.<sup>1</sup>

Christ is not only immutable but also omnipotent. Matthew 8:27 indicates that Christ did not set aside this attribute when He became incarnate. He still had all power over the winds and the sea. Since He continued to be all-powerful it seems inconceivable that He, being also God, could be defeated by a finite creature. In fact, it is impossible.<sup>2</sup>

Associated with the word 'temptation' is the idea of deception. 1 Timothy 2:14 illustrates this idea, "And it was not Adam who was deceived, but the woman being quite deceived, fell into transgression." Jesus however, being both God and man, was omniscient (John 1:47-51). A finite intelligence may be deceived, but an infinite intelligence cannot be.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, Christ could not have been deceived into sinning.

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<sup>1</sup>William G. T. Shedd, Dogmatic Theology, 2 vols. (Charles Scribner's Sons, 1891), 2:331.

<sup>2</sup>John F. Walvoord, "The Impeccability of Christ," Bibliotheca Sacra 118 (July-September 1961), :201.

<sup>3</sup>Shedd, Dogmatic Theology, 2:331.

Many of the attributes of Christ's divine nature have been mentioned and it is very important to analyze Christ's human nature in relation to His divine nature. Christ has the divine nature which is beyond temptation and sin (James 1:13) and the human nature which is both temptable and peccable.<sup>1</sup> When the two are brought together the divine controls the human. Therefore, when Christ is confronted with a temptation, His divine nature is in control of His person so that He cannot fail. If His human nature were left to itself it would fail just as Adam did. Jesus' human nature bonded to His divine nature made it impossible for Him to fail. William Shedd says it well:

Consequently, Christ, while having a peccable human nature in His constitution, was an impeccable person. Impeccability characterizes the God-man as a totality, while peccability is a property of His humanity.<sup>2</sup>

Not only were the two natures joined but two wills, the divine and the human, were also joined at the incarnation. A problem would arise if the human will were to act contrary to the divine will.<sup>3</sup> Christ's human will, however, was always subservient to His divine will.

Again, the impeccability of Christ is proved by the relation of the two wills in His person to each other. Each nature, in order to be complete, entire, and wanting nothing, has its own will; but the finite will never antagonizes the infinite will, but obeys it invariably and perfectly.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Shedd, Dogmatic Theology, 2:336.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 2:333.

<sup>3</sup>Walvoord, "The Impeccability of Christ," p. 200.

<sup>4</sup>Shedd, Dogmatic Theology, 2:335.

Christ's immutability, omnipotence, omniscience, and His inseparable union of human and divine natures all lead to the conclusion that He was indeed impeccable.

#### The Reality of the Temptations

The true impeccability of Christ leads to a second question. If Christ could not sin, then were not the temptations a mere formality? Would they not lack reality because of the certain outcome?

While it is true that there is no doubt as to the outcome it does not mean that the temptations were not real. Shedd likened the situation to that of any army which cannot be conquered.<sup>1</sup> The fact that the army cannot be conquered does not mean that it will not suffer the reality of the attacker's blow. Christ was open to all forms of the attacker's blow and He felt and experienced them all. In fact, Christ probably experienced stronger temptations than any man. The stronger the metal the more heat is needed to melt it (except that this metal could not be melted). A man who has little resistance to sin needs little temptation, but the man who resists will feel the deceiver's hand more strongly.

Not only were the temptations stronger but Christ also felt them to a greater degree. His body being without sin was far more sensitive to hunger and abuse than that of

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<sup>1</sup>Shedd, Dogmatic Theology, 2:336.

other men. Yet, in full experience of these longings, Christ was completely in control of Himself.<sup>1</sup>

It must be noted that Christ's temptations were not completely like man's. Many times man's temptations are a result of lust (James 1:12) which is a product of the sin nature. Christ had no sin nature and, therefore, no inner lust. Christ experienced all His temptations from outside Himself (Heb 4:15).

Christ did experience the reality of the temptations. They exhausted Him. He truly suffered. From this it is evident that the purpose of the temptations was not to see if Christ would succeed or fail. However, the purpose, at least in part, was to develop the faithful and merciful high priest so that He could come to the aid of those who are tempted (Heb 2:17,18).

#### The Baptism of Christ

The baptism of Christ immediately preceded His temptation experience and, therefore, gives important contextual information regarding His temptations. It is essential, first, to determine why Jesus was baptized.

There are several different reasons given for Christ's baptism, but only two need to be seriously considered. First is the view that Christ was baptized in

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<sup>1</sup>Walvoord, "The Impeccability of Christ," p. 199.

order to be identified with sinners.<sup>1</sup> When Jesus came to John to be baptized, John refused Him. Jesus said, "Permit it at this time; for in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness" (Matt 3:14). His baptism symbolized His atoning, vicarious work on the cross, thus fulfilling all righteousness.

Jesus, identified with this Servant of Yahweh, takes His stand with the people, identifying Himself with them and their repentance shown in their obedience to the baptism of John, and through His sinlessness fulfilling that which they could not.<sup>2</sup>

Richard Placeway goes further to say that the 'fulfilling all righteousness' was ultimately Christ's death on the cross. Christ's whole purpose in coming to earth was to die on the cross for sinful men, thus fulfilling all righteousness.<sup>3</sup>

The second view to consider is best explained by Alfred Edersheim:

He had no ulterior motives of any kind: it was an act of simple submissive obedience on the part of the Perfect One and submissive obedience has no motive beyond itself . . . and thus it was 'the fulfillment of all righteousness.' And it was in perfect harmony with all His previous life.<sup>4</sup>

The basis for this view is the belief that in exegeting Scripture it is important not to read too much

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<sup>1</sup>J. K. Howard, New Testament Baptism (London: Pickering and Ingles Ltd. 1970), p. 27.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Richard Placeway, "A Critical Investigation of Matthew 3:15" Grace Theological Seminary, Winona Lake, Indiana, 1956.

<sup>4</sup>Alfred Edersheim, The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co. 1905), 10:280.

into the text. The text must be taken at its word. In this passage (Matt 3:1-15) John is identified as the "one crying in the wilderness" (Matt 3:3). He was called to baptize with water in preparation for the Messiah. Therefore, when Jesus heard of John's baptism He was baptized in obedience to the plan of God. In this way He was 'fulfilling all righteousness.'

The first view, that Christ was identifying with sinners, has a tendency to formulate its position on subsequent action rather than what happened at the time.

Its motive is to resolve the subsequent theological problem of sinless repentance--baptism; its method is to read back into the account of Christ's baptism, the later apostolic connection of Christian baptism with Christ's death; and neither motive nor method is appropriate to sound exegesis.<sup>1</sup>

Based upon literal exegesis it seems best to conclude that the second view of simple obedience is the most reasonable. This being the case, the next question which arises is 'What was the meaning of Christ's baptism?' The baptism of sinful man was to indicate repentance of sins. Christ, however, was without sin.

The occurrences immediately following Christ's baptism indicate the purpose of His baptism. First, the Holy Spirit descended upon Christ. This fulfilled the

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<sup>1</sup>R. E. O. White, The Biblical Doctrine of Initiation, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1960), p. 101.

prophecy found in Isaiah 42:1 which says, "I have put My Spirit upon Him . . ." Here in Isaiah the Spirit had been promised to come to Jehovah's Servant in order that the Servant would carry out the mission further described in the text. Jesus Christ later confirmed this fulfillment Himself, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor" (Luke 4:18). Peter also speaks of the Lord's anointing at the time of His baptism in Acts 10:37,38.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, the descending of the Spirit at Christ's baptism signifies the inauguration of His mission.

The second occurrence following Christ's baptism was the speaking of God the Father to His Son. He said, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased" (Matt 3:17). These words refer to Psalm 2:7 and Isaiah 42:1 and indicate that Christ was truly the Messiah "born to suffer, born a King."<sup>2</sup>

These two occurrences, therefore, indicate that the baptism of Christ marks the inauguration of His suffering Messiahship which would ultimately lead Him to the cross so that He might redeem mankind. It is understandable that Satan, the deceiver, would desire to foil this plan of redemption.

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<sup>1</sup>S. Lewis Johnson, Jr., "The Baptism of Christ," Bibliotheca Sacra 123 (491:66), p. 225-6.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

The Compelling of Christ

Immediately following Christ's anointing with the Spirit and commissioning by the Father He is led by the Spirit into the wilderness. The Greek word for 'led' is ἐκβάλλει which very literally means 'to throw or cast out.'<sup>1</sup> It is the same word that Jesus used to expel demons.<sup>2</sup> It does not mean, however, that Jesus was led out against His will but rather that He went with a strong sense of the Spirit's compulsion.<sup>3</sup>

The Spirit constrains Christ from the Jordan River into the wilderness to fast and ultimately to be tempted. The exact location of this wilderness is unknown,<sup>4</sup> but it was probably quite forbidding.<sup>5</sup>

Satan

In understanding the nature and purpose of Christ's temptations it is important to know something of the nature and purposes of Satan, the tempter. Satan is an angel who

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<sup>1</sup>Edmond D. Hiebert, Mark: A Portrait of a Servant (Chicago: Moody Press, 1974), p. 39.

<sup>2</sup>James Morison, A Practical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Mark (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1889), p. 13.

<sup>3</sup>Hiebert, Mark: A Portrait of a Servant, p. 39.

<sup>4</sup>William Hendriksen, New Testament Commentary. Exposition of the Gospel According to Mark (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1975), p. 39.

<sup>5</sup>Ezra P. Gould, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Mark (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1896), p. 13.

like any other angel is a created being (Col 1:16). His creation probably occurred before the creation of the world.<sup>1</sup> Ezekiel 28:12-17 gives the account of Satan who was the greatest of all angels but because sin was found in him he was cast down. His personality turned from moral perfection to one of corruption. His power was no longer for good, but for destruction.<sup>2</sup> Although Satan can do nothing apart from God's control (Job 2:6) he is intent upon trying to overthrow God in order that he might become ruler of all. This is the very desire that caused Satan to sin initially (Isa 14:13-14).

Satan was no easy foe. He is the strongest of all created beings and a fierce enemy of God. He hated Christ and wanted desperately to defeat Him in order to claim supremacy.

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<sup>1</sup>Lewis Sperry Chafer, Major Bible Themes, revised by John F. Walvoord (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1974), p. 118.

<sup>2</sup>Fred Dickason, Angels Elect and Evil (Chicago: Moody Press, 1975), p. 134.

## CHAPTER II

### THE TEMPTATIONS

The stage has been set for the temptations. Christ has been inaugurated into His ministry as the suffering Messiah by His baptism. From His baptism Christ is compelled by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the archenemy, Satan.

Each of the three temptations will be studied with regard to the nature of the temptation, followed by Christ's response. These two aspects will shed light on the result of the particular temptation.

#### "Command That These Stones Become Bread . . ."

##### The Nature of the Temptation

The basic meaning of the first temptation, "If you are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread" (Matt 4:3), is dependent upon how the conditional clause is to be understood. Some scholars feel that it expresses doubt, while others believe it expresses agreement.

Those who hold to the former view interpret the 'if' as truly questioning the fact that Christ is the Son of God. Satan wants Christ to furnish proof of the fact.<sup>1</sup> He is

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<sup>1</sup>Norval Geldenhuys, Commentary on the Gospel of Luke (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1951), p. 142.

attempting to put doubt in Jesus' mind.<sup>1</sup> Alan M'Neile states it even more strongly, "The temptation lays in the 'if' in doubt as to the truth of His Sonship, the realization of which He had just experienced."<sup>2</sup> Canon Morris agrees, "Satan raises doubt as to His divine Sonship . . . Satan suggests that He verify His Sonship by turning a stone into bread."<sup>3</sup>

Therefore, Satan's point of attack is in his attempt to cause Jesus to doubt His identity and to perform a miracle to assure Himself that He really is the Son of God.<sup>4</sup> Lenski asserts that there was nothing wrong with performing a miracle, but that to do it in order to prove Himself would imply distrust of His father.<sup>5</sup> While this view is held by many competent men, it is grammatically advisable to translate the "if" as a relative clause.

A. T. Robertson believes that "Satan challenges this address by a condition of the first class which assumes the condition to be true."<sup>6</sup> The Greek particle  $\epsilon\iota$  introduces a

<sup>1</sup>R. C. H. Lenski, The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1961), p. 159.

<sup>2</sup>Alan Hugh M'Neile, The Gospel According to St. Matthew (London: MacMillan and Co. Limited, 1915), p. 38.

<sup>3</sup>Canon Leon Morris, The Gospel According to St. Luke (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; reprinted Downers Grove: InterVarsity 1974), p. 102.

<sup>4</sup>Peter Doble, "The Temptations," The Expository Times 72 (3 1960), p. 92.

<sup>5</sup>Lenski, The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel, p. 143.

<sup>6</sup>Archibald Thomas Robertson, Word Pictures in the New Testament (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1930), 1:31.

conditional sentence which assumes the condition to be a reality and the conclusion logically and naturally follows from that assumption. The devil assumes the Deity of the Son.<sup>1</sup> Alford strongly reinforces this view that "At all events, there is no doubt expressed."<sup>2</sup> A more adequate translation of this clause would render, "Since you are the Son of God . . ."<sup>3</sup>

The temptation, then, was not directed toward the reality of Christ's identity as the Son of God. Satan assumes that. Rather the temptation seems to center in on the fact that Jesus is the Son of God and that He is hungry. Satan knew that Jesus was hungry and he was offering a solution to the problem.

Vincent suggests that the stones may have even looked like bread to further escalate the temptation.

These stones were perhaps those 'silicious accretions' which assume the exact shape of little loaves of bread, and which were represented in legend as the petrified fruits of the cities of the plain . . . The very appearance of these stones, like the bread for which the faint body hungered, may have added force to the temptation. This resemblance may have been present to Christ's mind . . .<sup>4</sup>

Jesus had a legitimate need which, left unfulfilled, would result in His starvation. Satan suggests that the

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<sup>1</sup>Fritz Rienecker, A Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976), 1:9.

<sup>2</sup>Henry Alford, The Greek Testament, revised by Everett F. Harrison (Chicago: Moody Press, 1958), 1:28.

<sup>3</sup>R. V. G. Tasker, The Gospel According to Matthew (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), p. 52.

<sup>4</sup>Marvin R. Vincent, Word Studies in the New Testament (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1908), 1:27.

problem can be solved by emphasizing to Christ His position as Son of God.

By its position in the sentence Son is emphatic. "If thou standest to God in the relation of Son."<sup>1</sup>

In essence Satan is saying, "You are the Son to which the Father has just spoken. You are God Omnipotent. Use the power that belongs to You as God's Son so that You will hunger no more." The temptation was very real because Jesus did have the power to turn the stones into bread.

Why would it be so wrong to perform such a miracle? He certainly performed miracles during His ministry. He also very likely fed Himself after He miraculously multiplied the bread and fish (Mark 6:41). Why would it be wrong to turn the stones to bread and feed Himself to prevent Himself from starving? The answer is found in Jesus' response.

#### The Response to the Temptation

Upon being tempted by Satan to turn the stones into bread, Jesus responded to Satan using Scripture:

But He answered and said, "It is written 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God' (Matt 4:4).

'It is written' is the perfect passive tense of the verb γράφω which means 'to write' or 'it stands written.'<sup>2</sup> Lenski puts it this way, "And once written, now stands forever."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Vincent, Word Studies in the New Testament, p. 27.

<sup>2</sup>Rienecker, A Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament, p. 9.

<sup>3</sup>Lenski, The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel, p. 144.

In response to Satan's suggestion Jesus quotes from Deuteronomy 8:3. He does not quote the entire verse but enough to get His point across. The entire verse reads:

And He humbled you and let you be hungry, and fed you with manna which you did not know, nor did you fathers know, that He might make you understand that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord (Deut 8:3).

The key to understanding the last part of the verse is found in the first part of the verse. Moses is recounting to the children of Israel how God dealt with them in the wilderness (Deut 8:2). He led them into the wilderness to humble them by putting them to the test. The test they were to pass was that of keeping the Lord's commandments. A specific test which God chose, was that of hunger. Would the children of Israel keep His commandments even if they got hungry? The first time they were humbled with hunger is recorded in Exodus 16:3:

And the sons of Israel said to them, "Would that we had stayed in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the pots of meat, when we ate bread to the full; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger."

They grumbled against the Lord and did not keep His commandments. They failed the test.

The second test is recorded in Numbers 11:4:

And the rabble who were among them had greedy desires; and also the sons of Israel wept again and said, "Who will give us meat to eat?"

The Lord had provided manna for them to eat (Num 11:6) but they did not want that. They grumbled against the Lord again. Psalm 78:20-22 explains the response of God to this

incident as well as the reason that the children of Israel grumbled.

Therefore the Lord heard and was full of wrath, and fire was kindled against Jacob, and the anger also mounted against Israel; because they did not believe in God, and did not trust in His salvation.

The humbling means was hunger. The test was to see whether the children of Israel would keep the commandments of God. More specifically, would they believe in God and trust in His salvation? No, they did not learn that man is to trust in what God says--to believe His Word--for life rather than in mere food alone. When times were hard for the Israelites and they hungered, the only thoughts in their minds were of food. They reasoned, "We need food or we will die for food is the essence of life."

This is exactly the idea that Satan wanted Jesus to accept. Food is what is essential to life. Jesus however, was not deceived. He knew that the commandments of God were life and that if He wished to survive the wilderness experience, He needed to do God's will rather than satisfy His hunger by His own will. William Hendriksen dramatizes it aptly:

Tempter, you are proceeding upon the false assumption that for a man, in order to appease hunger and keep alive, bread is absolutely necessary. Over against this erroneous idea I now declare that not bread but the creative, energizing, and sustaining power of my Father is the only indispensable source of my, and of man's, life and well-being.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary. Exposition of the Gospel According to Mark* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1975), p. 227.

Unlike the children of Israel, who failed to learn to trust God in time of testing, Jesus succeeded in trusting God in His time of testing. He trusted completely in the guidance of His Father who had brought about the hungering situation.

### The Results of the Temptation

#### For Jesus

Jesus was the absolute victor in this confrontation with Satan. He demonstrated His complete trust and dependence upon His Heavenly Father. He was able to answer the satanic suggestion with the appropriate words of God which exposed Satan's deceitfulness.

This temptation also reveals Christ's willingness to be humbled. The children of Israel rebelled when God humbled them by putting them to the test. But Christ willingly humbled Himself as Philippians 2:2-4 declares. He allowed Himself to hunger so that He might demonstrate His faithfulness and thereby bring glory to God.

Jesus Christ also demonstrated that any man who is totally dependent upon the Holy Spirit for strength can be victorious. Man does not have to succumb to his lower nature by being controlled by his fleshly desires.

#### For Satan

Satan was defeated in his first attempt to ruin Christ. His advice was proven false by Jesus' knowledgable use of Scripture. Satan often comes as an angel of light

making things to look nearly genuine. However, he always leaves God out of the picture. Any believer can defeat Satan by wise and trusting use of God's written Word.

"Throw Yourself Down . . ."

The Nature of the Temptation

Before Satan actually speaks the tempting words of the second temptation he takes Jesus to the pinnacle of the temple. The means by which Satan takes Jesus and the place that he takes Christ will be discussed before dealing with the temptation itself.

The devil took Him

The first temptation had taken place in the wilderness where Christ had been constrained to go by the Holy Spirit. Following the defeat of his first temptation, Satan attempts to escalate the effect of his next attack by transporting Jesus to a different surrounding. Matthew 4:5 says, "Then the devil took Him into the holy city . . ."

There is some question as to how Satan took Christ. Barnes believes that:

This does not mean that he bore Him through the air . . . there is no evidence that Satan had any power to do any of these things, and the word translated 'taketh Him up' does not imply any such thing.<sup>1</sup>

Barnes is convinced that what is meant is that Satan conducted Jesus, or accompanied Him,<sup>2</sup> but that Satan did not

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<sup>1</sup>Albert Barnes, Notes on the New Testament Matthew and Mark (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1970), p. 34.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

carry Him, for this would have been against Jesus' will.

Lenski sees no problem with regard to Jesus' will if He is carried by Satan.

Like Job, Jesus was placed into Satan's power so that the latter might tempt Him to the uttermost. The transfer of Jesus to the temple was a physical transfer. There is no difficulty as to willingness on Jesus' part; He consented to the Father's will to be tempted as the devil might well tempt Him.<sup>1</sup>

Lenski's viewpoint seems to be the more reasonable. Satan's power is certainly great enough to accomplish this feat and there is no reason to believe that this method would be against Jesus' will.

W. Robertson Nicoll, however, argues that the whole occurrence of this second temptation is symbolic. It is a vision.

"The transit through the air from the desert to the winglet, like that of Ezekiel, carried by a lock of his hair from Babylon to Jerusalem must have been 'in the visions of God' (Ezek 8:3)."<sup>2</sup>

It is difficult to know whether Jesus was literally 'carried' or whether He was 'carried in a vision.' The important thing to realize is that it was a very real and tempting experience from Christ's perspective.

#### On the pinnacle of the temple

Whether in vision or in body Satan took Jesus to the

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<sup>1</sup>R. C. H. Lenski, The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1961. The Wartburg Press 1943, Copyright assigned 1961 to Augsburg), p. 148.

<sup>2</sup>W. Robertson Nicoll, The Expositors Greek Testament Vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1951), p. 90.

holy city of Jerusalem<sup>1</sup> where he stood Him on the pinnacle of the temple (Matt 4:5). The exact location of the pinnacle of the temple is questionable. *πτερυγιον* is a diminutive of *πτερου* meaning 'wing' and 'indicates the tip or extremity of anything,' the pinnacle or summit of the temple.<sup>2</sup>

The two locations that are most probable are Solomon's porch or the Royal porch. Solomon's porch was situated on the eastern side of the temple platform and had the view of the gorge.<sup>3</sup> This particular platform was sixty-seven feet broad and 150 feet high. The total distance from the top to the bottom of the gorge was over seven hundred feet and Josephus said that one could scarcely look down without becoming dizzy.<sup>4</sup>

The other possible location was Herod's royal porch. It overlooked the Kedron Valley and had a four hundred foot drop. This is the spot where it is believed that James, the brother of the Lord, was thrown down.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Floyd V. Filson, A Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew (London: Adam and Clarks Black, 1960), p. 70.

<sup>2</sup>Rienecker, A Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament, 1:9.

<sup>3</sup>F. Godet, A Commentary on the Gospel of St. Luke (New York: I. K. Funk and Co., 1881), p. 140.

<sup>4</sup>Barnes, Notes on the New Testament Matthew and Mark, p. 34.

<sup>5</sup>William Hendriksen, New Testament Commentary. Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1973), p. 228.

Both places were extremely high and would have the same dizzying effect on a person looking down, although it is impossible to know for certain which one Satan used.

#### The devil tempted Jesus

Satan has brought Christ from the wilderness to the pinnacle of the temple in Jerusalem. From this dizzying height the deceiver hurls his second attack at Jesus:

If you are the Son of God throw Yourself down; for it is written, "He will give His Angels charge concerning You; and on their hands they will bear You up, lest You strike Your foot against a stone" (Matt 4:6).

Like Jesus, Satan shows that he can also use Scripture. He uses Psalm 91:11,12 as his proof text to try to deceive Jesus. But in quoting the text the tempter leaves out the words, "To guard you in all your ways" (Ps 91:11).

There are those who regard this omission as being important. They believe that when Satan leaves out "In all your ways" he is, in essence, making the application of this text more general.<sup>1</sup> Henceforth, Satan is implying that God's promises can be used by any person in any situation, rather than by one who is walking according to the will of God. In the context, however, this phrase is referring to those who are righteous and that God will guard them in all of His righteous ways.

Other scholars do not make much of this omission of Scripture. Christ, Himself, did not rebuke Satan for misquoting Scripture. It is best to conclude that the omission

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<sup>1</sup>Godet, A Commentary on the Gospel of St. Luke, p. 140.

may have had some importance in that it further added to the craftiness of the temptation but this omission was not in itself the major part of the temptation.

Another less important yet very real area of attack was in Satan's use of psychology in taking Jesus to such a dizzying height. It is natural for a person to feel a very real physical weakness when exposed to such a drastic height.<sup>1</sup> This tactic is somewhat obvious but the next is not.

Some scholars believe that the temptation is related to how Christ would set up His Kingdom.<sup>2</sup> This idea is that once Christ was at the top of the pinnacle He should jump so that He would be miraculously saved and that those who witnessed the event would believe that He was the Messiah.

In effect the devil was suggesting how Jesus should establish His Kingdom. Perform the spectacular! Dazzle the people! Fling Yourself out into space, and float down as though upheld by an unseen hand! Then the people will accept You as the Messiah.<sup>3</sup>

Satan is suggesting that the people want a sign. Once they observed this they would 'obviously' believe in Him and He would not need to go through any suffering. Barnes explains it this way:

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<sup>1</sup>Hershel H. Hobbs, An Exposition of the Gospel of Matthew (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1965), p. 51.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 52.

Therefore, in this case was, that by thus establishing His claim He would avoid all the obloquy, persecution, and suffering which He must otherwise endure if He attempted to prove He was the Son of God by a life of toil and privation.<sup>1</sup>

This view of the temptation has some flaws. Nowhere is it recorded that any other people saw this incident.<sup>2</sup> In fact, most scholars agree that Christ is the only source of information regarding the temptation incident. No person ever came to Jesus asking about the incident. It seems that it was just between Christ and Satan. Even if there had been observers, Christ was also very aware of the fact that the people would not believe even after viewing such a spectacular miracle (Luke 16:31).

The real thrust of the temptation is for Christ to presume upon the promise of God.<sup>3</sup> He had just sworn His allegiance to His Heavenly Father during the preceding temptation. He said that He would trust the Father for His needs. Satan challenges, "If you say that you have faith then demonstrate it!"

Satan gives two reasons that Christ should jump. The first is His nature. Christ is the Son of God--the all-powerful God. Secondly, God has said in His Word that He

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<sup>1</sup>Barnes, Notes on the New Testament Matthew and Mark, p. 35.

<sup>2</sup>Alford, The Greek Testament, 1:29.

<sup>3</sup>Morris, The Gospel According to St. Luke, p. 103.

will protect His righteous servants. With this double assault the devil hopes to deceive Jesus into jumping.

The Response to the Temptation

Jesus is not to be entrapped by Satan's snare. Once again He relies upon the Word of God as His weapon. Just as before, Christ refers back to the Pentateuch and quotes from Deuteronomy 6:16, "You shall not put the Lord Your God to the test."

Jesus quotes only the first part of the verse as the rest does not directly apply to the temptation. The remainder of the verse does, however, tell when the children of Israel put God to the test. It was when they were at Massah.

In Exodus 17:1-7 Moses recounts the incident in which the children of Israel put God to the test. They did not trust in His goodness but demanded proof of His protection. They had just been miraculously delivered out of the hands of the Egyptians. God had guided all two million Jews safely into the wilderness. But when they came to Rephidim trouble occurred. There was no water for them to drink. Again they began to grumble. Moses responded, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the Lord?"

Psalm 78:18-19 explains,

And in their hearts they put God to the test by asking food according to their desire. Then they spoke against God; they said, "Can God prepare a table in the wilderness?"

Not only did the people have selfish desires but they also doubted God's care and protection.

When Jesus responded He was, in essence, saying that He knew that God the Father would take care of Him and that He did not need to do anything to force God to show Himself. Christ's trust was based upon God's Word, not on a sign from above.

### The Results of the Temptation

#### For Jesus

Christ once again victoriously depends upon the Word of God for His defense. He never doubted the Father's love and protection. As a result He did not act out of fear. He did not need to perform a miracle to quench His own doubt (Luke 11:42).

Again Christ demonstrated that the Israelites failed unnecessarily in the wilderness. He depended totally upon God for strength. They could have, but they didn't. He trusted patiently while they impatiently grumbled.

#### For Satan

Satan shows how powerful he is by carrying Jesus to the pinnacle of the temple. He has the ability to do super-human things.

Satan shows his ability to use Scripture. He is extremely intelligent and he probably knows the Word as well as any saint. He misuses Scripture in order to deceive

people. Although Satan has great power and intelligence he is no match for one who knows the Word of God and allows the Holy Spirit to help him apply it to his life.

"If You Fall Down and Worship Me . . ."

The Nature of the Temptation

Satan has been defeated a second time but he does not yet concede his battle against Christ.

Again, the devil took Him to a very high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world, and their glory; and he said to Him, "All these things will I give You, if You fall down and worship me" (Matt 4:8-9).

The location

The third and final temptation took place upon a mountain. Some suggest that the mountain was located near Jerusalem<sup>1</sup> while others are even more specific and suggest that it was Quarantania.<sup>2</sup> From that spot they would have been able to see the international highway which connected many of the leading nations. The suggestions, however, are purely speculative. The exact mountain to which Satan took Jesus is unknown.

Satan showed Him

From this high mountain Satan showed Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. There is some question as to how Satan did this. Barnes feels that the

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<sup>1</sup>Barnes, Notes on the New Testament Matthew and Mark, p. 35.

<sup>2</sup>Hobbs, An Exposition of the Gospel of Matthew, p. 53.

kingdoms Jesus saw were those of Palestine.<sup>1</sup> He reasons that Judea was divided into three parts which were called kingdoms. The sons of Herod presided over these kingdoms and were even called kings. He goes on to say that the term 'world' is often used in a limited sense which would denote a part of the world, particularly the land of Canaan (Rom 4:3).<sup>2</sup> This being the case, when Satan took Jesus to the high mountain they merely looked out across the countryside and saw the glory of the kingdoms of Palestine.

It is a more common view among scholars that the 'kingdoms of the world' were more than those of Palestine alone. The Greek noun for 'world' in Matthew 4:8 is not οἰκουμένη which means 'the inhabited earth' but rather κόσμος which indicates the 'sum total of everything here and now, the (orderly) universe,' or 'the planet upon which we live.'<sup>3</sup> Thus, the idea of the entire world is suggested.

Luke mentions that all the kingdoms of the world were shown in a moment of time (Luke 4:5). This was a truly remarkable occurrence. It is most likely that in order for this to happen it must have been in the form of a vision.

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<sup>1</sup>Barnes, Notes on the New Testament Matthew and Mark, p. 35.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>William F. Arndt and Wilbur F. Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 447.

There are two other incidents of men being taken to mountains where they saw visions (Ezek 40:2 and Rev 21:10). The fact that these were visions does not diminish the reality of the experience nor does it lessen the effect of the temptation.<sup>1</sup>

### Satan's authority

After showing Jesus the glory of the kingdoms from this mountain top, Satan makes a tempting offer, "All these things will I give to You" (Matt 4:9). Did Satan have the authority to give Jesus the kingdoms of the world? He certainly did claim it as if they were his own, and he is called the ruler of this world (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11).<sup>2</sup>

F. Godet believes that Satan made a legitimate offer as prince of the world.

God certainly leaves to Satan a certain use of His sovereignty and powers; he reigns over the whole extradivine sphere of human life, and has power to raise to the pinnacle of glory the man who he favors.<sup>3</sup>

Others do not agree with this point of view.

G. Campbell Morgan asserts that while it is true that Satan is the prince of this world he cannot legitimately give it away. He could only lease it out because he does not have eternal possession of it.<sup>4</sup> Satan does influence the entire

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<sup>1</sup>Hendriksen, New Testament Commentary. Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew, p. 232.

<sup>2</sup>Morris, The Gospel According to St. Luke, p. 103.

<sup>3</sup>Godet, A Commentary on the Gospel of St. Luke, p. 138.

<sup>4</sup>G. Campbell Morgan, The Gospel According to Luke (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1931), p. 60.

world but he does not have the final say in disposing of it as he wishes.<sup>1</sup>

Therefore, the tempter's claim is only partially true as he is the ruler of the world but only in a limited sense. He did not have the authority to do with it as he pleased. God is still sovereign.

### Worship me

There is very little debate as to what Satan was attempting to do in this final temptation. The deceiver wanted Jesus to be more in love with the things of the world rather than with God. Satan also wanted the worship of the Lord Jesus. Satan's greatest desire was to be worshiped like the Most High (Isa 14:14) and he was trying to trick the Creator into worshiping the creature. His offer was tempting for it would mean that Christ would not have to endure the sufferings of the cross. There was only one condition to which Christ must comply before He would gain the whole world. He must bow down to Satan. This act of bowing down refers to the "oriental prostration before great human lords but especially also with reference to prostration before God in the deepest religious reverence and adoration."<sup>2</sup>

### The Response to the Temptation

For the third time Christ relies upon Scripture

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<sup>1</sup>Geldenhuys, Commentary on the Gospel of Luke, p. 161.

<sup>2</sup>Lenski, The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel, p. 155.

quoting, "You shall worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only" (Deut 6:13). Understanding the context of this verse will give enlightenment to Jesus' response.

Moses is giving instruction to the children of Israel. He is warning them regarding their experiences upon arriving in the promised land. Once they get there, food, cities, houses, and many other material goods will become theirs. When this happens they must guard themselves very carefully for it will be quite easy for them to forget God. If this were to happen they would, in effect, become idol worshipers by worshiping the gifts of God rather than God, Himself. Christ realizes that this same thing would be true of Him were He to yield to this temptation.

The Hebrew meaning of the verb translated "You shall worship Him" is that of 'to work or serve.'<sup>1</sup> It is in contrast to the word (עֲבָדָה) which means 'house of slavery.' Both words come from the same source.<sup>2</sup> God is saying that the children of Israel were slaves in Egypt, but now they are free to serve God. However, they will become slaves again if they forget to love and serve God.

When Jesus quoted this verse to Satan He knew that to bow down to Satan once would mean serving him forever. In contrast to slavery to Satan, Jesus knew that real life

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<sup>1</sup>Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs editors. A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1907), p. 712.

<sup>2</sup>Craigie, The Book of Deuteronomy in the New International Commentary on the Old Testament, p. 173.

and pleasure come from loving and serving God.

### The Results of the Temptation

#### For Jesus

The Lord showed His complete mastery of the situation and of Satan. His unwavering dependence continued to be upon the Holy Spirit and the Word of God. He showed His absolute resolution to gain the world God's way through suffering on the cross.

#### For Satan

Satan shows himself to be the father of lies. He makes a claim that he cannot fulfill. He suggests that real life is in material wealth not in God.

With the temptation completed Satan leaves at the Lord's command. At this time the angels come and strengthen Jesus.

## CHAPTER III

### THE PURPOSE OF THE TEMPTATIONS

#### The Messianic Mission

The statement was made previously that these temptations are a puzzling part of the Lord's life. Why did He have to endure this direct confrontation with Satan? After examining each temptation several conclusions can be drawn.

The purpose of this attack from Satan's perspective was to thwart Christ's Messianic mission. This is evidenced in the fact that this interaction took place immediately following Christ's baptism, where He was anointed as the Messiah.<sup>1</sup> Throughout His life previous to this time, He had encountered the usual testings that any human experiences except that He was without failure. However, at this time when the inauguration of His role as the Messiah had taken place, He was tempted to the fullest of the adversary's capacity.

"All three of the tests are variations of the one great temptation to remove His Messianic vocation from the guidance of His Father and make it simply a political calling."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Geldenhuys, Commentary on the Gospel of Luke, p. 158.

<sup>2</sup>S. Lewis Johnson, Jr., "The Temptation of Christ," Bibliotheca Sacra 123 (492 1966):345.

God the Father, however, purposed that these temptations would show forth the glory of the Messiah. Calvin speaks to this purpose.

"Let us therefore learn that, by guidance of the Spirit, Christ withdrew from the crowd of men, in order that He might come forth as the highest teacher of the church, as the ambassador of God, -rather as sent from heaven, than as taken from some town, and from among the common people.<sup>1</sup>

### Christ's Humanity

The main purpose of these temptations in Jesus' life was directed toward His Messiahship. Yet, they also show that humanity was involved in that Messiahship. Christ humbled Himself to become like man (Phil 2). Part of that humility was allowing Himself to be dependent upon the Holy Spirit. The Spirit compelled Jesus into the wilderness and while there, as throughout His entire human life, He was in dependence upon the Spirit.

This dependence was evidenced in His responses to Satan's attacks. While Satan was desiring Jesus to display His godly powers Christ responded with mere words of trust rather than with miracles. God's Word was His wisdom and with it He conquered as any man may conquer.<sup>2</sup> This display of humanity is an example for all mankind. Anyone can be victorious over temptation if he, like the Lord, depends upon

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<sup>1</sup>John Calvin, Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and Luke (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964), p. 207.

<sup>2</sup>Chafer, Major Bible Themes, p. 82.

the power of the Spirit and the Word of God.

### The Worthiness of the Lamb

The temptations were also intended to demonstrate the worthiness of the Lamb. Following the entrance of sin into the world, God instituted a sacrificial system for the atonement of sin (Lev 4-7). According to the Law priests were appointed to prepare specified animals for sacrifice. Year after year these priests would slaughter animals for the peoples' sins. It was necessary to do this regularly because the blood of these animals was only able to cover the sin rather than to take it away. These sacrifices only pointed to the time when a perfect sacrifice (2 Cor 5:21) would be made. That completely blameless sacrifice would take away sin forever (Heb 9:12).

When John the Baptist saw Jesus coming toward him he recognized at once that Christ was that long awaited Saviour. He exclaimed, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).

As the Lamb Christ was tempted to the extreme and yet remained strong and unyielding, He finally commanded Satan to leave. This showed Jesus' victory of the tempter as well as His absolute impeccability. Being completely impeccable there would be no fear of Jesus leaving His appointed path which led to the cross. This Lamb was proven worthy to take man's sin upon Himself.

### The Merciful and Faithful High Priest

Christ's temptation experience was also purposed to enable Him to become a merciful and faithful high priest.

"Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For since He Himself was tempted in that which He suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted" (Heb 2:17-18).

Because of enduring these temptations He is able to understand man and his problems in a way no other can. It was not necessary for Him to actually yield to temptation in order to empathize with mankind. Empathy does not come from participation in a person's sin but rather from participation in the strength of the temptation to sin. Christ felt the fullest possible impact of the temptation because of His sinlessness.<sup>1</sup> Sinful man is never able to experience temptation to the fullest because he will sin before reaching that point. When a Christian is tempted to turn from following God, he can be reassured that Jesus knows what He is experiencing and yet He has succeeded.<sup>2</sup>

### The Three Areas of Temptation

It is interesting to note that the three temptations that Jesus experienced at this time seem to cover the general avenues by which temptations come as described in

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<sup>1</sup>F. F. Bruce, The Epistle to the Hebrews (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964), p. 86.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 53.

1 John 2:16 "For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world."<sup>1</sup>

The first temptation was directed toward the lust of the flesh. After fasting in the wilderness for forty days, Jesus became hungry whereupon Satan, seizing upon Christ's human need, attempts to plant distrust of the Father in Jesus' mind. The deceiver suggests to Jesus that acquiring bread is the only possible means of sustaining life and therefore, is the most important thing in life.

How many times men are tempted to believe this same way! Esau sold his birthright for this very reason of satisfying the desires of the flesh (Heb 12:16).

The second temptation was directed toward the pride of life. Satan prompted Jesus to jump from the pinnacle of the temple in order to pridefully show His trust in God by means of a spectacular sign. No one eludes this temptation to be prideful. Consider King David whom God called, "A man after My heart" (Acts 13:22). His pride in the greatness of his army caused him to disobey God by counting his men.

The third temptation involves the lust of the eye. Satan revealed all of the riches and glory of all the earthly kingdoms to Jesus with the intention that Jesus should

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<sup>1</sup>Ivan H. French, "The Life of Christ," Class Notes, Grace Theological Seminary, Winona Lake, Indiana, Fall 1977, p. 26.

succumb to the lust of his eye.

Jesus was tempted in each of these three categories to the greatest extent possible and yet He remained steadfast and impeccable. His victory did not come through His own power but rather through His quiet trust (faith) in His Father, His dependence upon the Holy Spirit, and the Word of God. In this same way a believer can have victory over sin. For:

No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, that you may be able to endure it (1 Cor 10:13).

Like Christ, a man must first humble himself and realize that it is God's will for all believers to put their trust in Him, not in themselves. Then he must rely upon the Holy Spirit's leading and use the appropriate Scripture as a defense against sin.

## CONCLUSION

Understanding the nature and the purpose of the temptations allows the believer to better appreciate the Christ. The Christian has a Messiah who was willing to suffer for him. He is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. He who is exalted was and is desirous to do whatever it takes to help His chosen. When tempted to think that God does not care for His soul, the believer should take time to meditate on the significance of the temptations.

The temptations also exalt the Christ. Even while suffering through extreme and dark circumstances, the Messiah is shown as an example of perfect endurance. He is not weak and timid but strong, mighty to conquer. The devil's attempt to dishonor Christ only serves to honor Him as the glorious Messiah.

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