

Jesus' Temptations

In Old Testament times, the sacrifices pointed to the fact that a substitute would be acceptable to God in payment for sin.

However, these sacrifices were not in themselves acceptable substitutes.

They were merely a stopgap measure.

As Hebrews 10:4 points out "**---it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins.**"

However, as ineffectual as they were in themselves, they pointed to a sin offering that would be completely acceptable.

They pointed to the "**Lamb of God**" Who would take "**away the sin of the world.**"

But when the time came, it would be a man, not a Lamb, which would be the sacrifice.

You see, sin is man's problem, and any acceptable substitute must come from the human race.

And in the very next verse, that is Hebrews 10:5, that man is identified---

"Therefore, when He (that is Jesus) came into the world, He said: "Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, But a body You have prepared for Me."

And herein is the genius of the incarnation. God became man, a perfect man, and then He laid down His life as our substitute for sin.

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However, as soon as Jesus became a real man, He took on the problems of being human. Oh, no, He never sinned, but like every other human being, He would experience hunger and thirst, and most importantly, the intense desire for self preservation.

And even though self-preservation is a very legitimate need, it would not be compatible with the pathway He was to follow.

If He was to complete His mission, His physical requirements must be brought under the control of His own will.

And this control must be tested before He began His public ministry, which, I believe, is what His temptations in the wilderness were all about.

Turn with me then to Matthew 4:1 **"Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil."**

So He was led by the Spirit and tempted by the devil.

It was God's test, followed by Satan's temptations.

And it would concern His mastery over His bodily needs.

V 2 **"And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterward He was hungry."**

Now some people might think this fast was an unnecessary abuse of the body.

But as we now know, there was a good reason for this fast.

It would test Jesus' complete reliance on His Father's judgment, even in the absence of any knowledge of when this fast would end.

Well, as we look in on V 2, Jesus has nearly reached what is considered the limit of human endurance.

This, of course, was the perfect time for Satan to make his appearance.

V 3 **"Now when the tempter came to Him, he said, "If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread."**

In other words, *Use your divine powers to satisfy your physical needs.*

You're going to die if you don't do something!

Nevertheless, Jesus responded---"**It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.'**"

And so, having failed in his first attempt, Satan introduced two more temptations common to man in the hope that they would resonate with Jesus.

No doubt the first one was based on Satan's suspicion that Jesus would be very anxious to claim His title as Israel's Messiah.

V 5-6 **"Then the devil took Him up into the holy city, set Him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down. For it is written: 'He shall give His angels charge over you,' and, 'In *their* hands**

**they shall bear you up, Lest you dash
your foot against a stone.'**"

Certainly this plan promised instant
success.

It would prove He was the Son of God, and
therefore the Messiah.

And it was based on scripture, so what could
go wrong?

But as Jesus stood there looking down from
"the pinnacle of the temple," He was
fully aware of the fact that making such
a jump would be forcing God's hand.

It was an idea that was completely foreign
to His very nature.

So He simply said---"**It is written again,
'You shall not tempt the LORD your God.'**"

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And, finally, there was the temptation to
have it all now.

V 8-9 **"Again, the devil took Him up on an exceedingly high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to Him, "All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me."**

Actually, Satan was offering Jesus what His Heavenly Father had already promised Him. Yes, some day, in His millennial kingdom, Jesus will have **"all the kingdoms of the world and their glory."**

But Satan was offering Him a shortcut. There would be no need to go down that long road of suffering.

It would be instant gratification without the cross, and, really, that was the point.

Well, that was the last test, and Jesus scored 100%.

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And, you know, those initial tests would set the tone for His entire earthly ministry, and particularly those final agonizing hours on the cross.

And like that 40-day fast, His temptations would come at His lowest point physically.

They would begin after His beatings, and when His crucifixion was in progress.

They would begin when He was slowly dying.

Matthew 27:39-40 **"And those who passed by blasphemed Him, wagging their heads and saying, "You who destroy the temple and build *it* in three days, save Yourself! If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross."**

But there isn't any **"if."**

He *is* **"the Son of God."**

But, just like the temptation to turn the stones into bread, He refused to use His divine powers to end His suffering.

He was the **"Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world,"** and He would see it through to the end.

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And, finally, there was the temptation to prove He was their Messiah.

V 41-42 **"Likewise the chief priests also, mocking with the scribes and elders, said, "He saved others; Himself He cannot save. If He is the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe Him."**

And He could have done it.

He could have proven He was **"the King of Israel."**

He could have called 10,000 angels to assist Him.

Yes, He could have easily had them all on
their knees.

But He died *alone* for you and me.