

Recapitulating Israel's exodus, Jesus as God's Son was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to fast and be tempted by the devil. By trusting the Scriptures Jesus prevailed in every way where Israel had failed. In following God's True Son, you inherit his hard-won victory and can now worship God in Spirit and truth.

Introduction – In this series that asks “What Is a Christian?” we’ve explored some well-known and not-so-familiar biblical imagery that describes what it means to be a believer in Jesus. But there is another identity shared by all Christians that may be the one we are presently most aware of as we endure— isolated but still together—this season of pandemic lock-down while unable to gather as a holy assembly to worship on the Lord’s Day.

I. God Tests for True Worship

A. “Sons of God” who are covenant heads are uniquely tested (vv. 1-2, 11)

Adam (Luke 3:38), Israel (Exodus 4:22-23), Christ (Matthew 3:17). As God’s Son, Jesus follows in the footsteps of Israel, just as Israel as God’s son followed in the footsteps of Adam (Genesis 3; Matthew 2:15; Romans 5:12-19). God *tests* Jesus to strengthen and confirm his moral character as the righteous Son of God; the devil *tempts* Jesus intending to destroy his moral character and thereby ruin his messianic mission. Temptation is always at root a test of loyalty. Both Adam and Israel failed their probationary tests by yielding to temptation, and thus were disqualified from their God-appointed missions. By passing his test in the wilderness, Jesus becomes fully qualified for his mission of being the atoning sacrifice on behalf of our sins that reverses the consequences of Adam’s and Israel’s falls into sin.

B. “Children of God” who are covenant subjects are generally tested

The main point of this Bible story is about Jesus’ triumph as a true worshiper of God. But looking to Christ our covenant head, we can glean lots of practical application for the Christian because the temptations Jesus endured are the general types every person experiences. Those arising from your physical desires, appeals to pride, and desires to possess (James 1:2-4; 1 Peter 1:3-7; 1 Jn 2:16). The real question when God ordains such trials that test you is, “Who will gain your allegiance?” Because whatever you give your heart of hearts to, whatever gains your allegiance, that is what you worship!

II. Satan Tempts for False Worship

A. Physical needs: will God provide? (v. 3)

The first of the devil’s temptations appeals to Jesus’ intense hunger after he fasted 40 days. Temptation often comes at the moment of greatest weakness. Here Satan tempts Jesus to miraculously turn stones into bread, and to do it because as the Son of God he can feed himself supernaturally. Doesn’t this remind you of the manna from heaven the Israelites ate for 40 years (Exodus 16; cf. Matthew 14:13-21; 15:32-39; John 6:41)? Notice Satan turns the words of God (“this is my beloved Son”; Matthew 3:17) into a taunt, directly challenging God’s word (cf. Genesis 3:1-4)! Truly the devil is the father of lies, the master tempter of Adam, Israel, Jesus, and all of us (2 Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 7:26; 1 Peter 2:22; 1 John 3:5, 8; Revelation 2:9-10).

B. Emotional needs: will God protect? (vv. 5-6)

For the second temptation, the devil took Jesus to Jerusalem (cf. Isaiah 48:2; Nehemiah 11:1), and stood him on the highest point of the temple. Jesus had resisted the first temptation by trusting in God alone by quoting the Bible. Now the devil attacks that trust (2 Peter 1:19-21). This time the devil quotes Scripture back at Jesus (Ps 91:11-12), but as is his habit, he takes it out of context and applies

it in exactly the wrong way. Notice how the devil twists Scripture. Psalm 91 enjoins believers to trust in God, while the devil twists the psalm to replace trust with a test that casts doubt on God's faithfulness and demands a visible sign in place of faith in God's unseen protection, effectively gambling with his life. The devil suggests there's no risk if only Jesus has faith in God to protect him. We can almost hear the devil's whisper: "It says you won't even stub your toe! Do you trust God or not?"

C. Psychological needs: will God rule? (vv. 8-9)

For the third and final temptation, the devil took Jesus to another place. This time to appeal to his kingly status. The location of this temptation is a very high mountain, likely in a vision, to parade before the Son of God all the great civilizations of the world. As the messianic King of kings, Jesus surely knew all these rightfully belong to him (Psalm 2:8). Now the devil strikes with by far the worst of his temptations. He offers that if Jesus will bow down and worship him just this once, then he will hand over all these kingdoms to the Son of God right now. Here the devil offers a path to kingship that avoids the cross. He's offering the whole world in exchange for one little bow.

III. Jesus Submits for Refined Worship

A. According to Scripture's disciplines, not bodily urges (v. 4)

Jesus refuses to pull rank in order to accomplish his God-given task, instead accepting temporary privation as the Father's will for him. And Jesus does not need to work a miracle now to feed himself because he trusts God will sustain him during his hunger fast by "every word that proceeds from the mouth of God." Jesus resists the tempter by quoting a verse from the book of Deuteronomy (Dt 8:3). In fact, all the Scriptures Jesus quotes to resist the devil's temptations are from God's message to Israel during her wilderness period (Deuteronomy 6-8). By limiting himself to Deuteronomy, Jesus links his experience to Israel's wandering in the desert.

B. According to Scripture's promises, not prideful insecurities (v. 7)

Jesus refused to test God. He would not force the divine hand to satisfy some emotional need. Instead, Jesus replied to Satan's irreverent Bible quoting ways by citing a more relevant Scripture verse (Deuteronomy 6:16), making clear that one must never test God's care by manipulation. Jesus also knows that the right and faithful way to interpret Scripture is to compare it with other Scripture because the Scripture cannot contradict itself (Jn 10:35). Instead of putting God to the test, Jesus chose the path of patient trust, waiting for God's plan to deliver him—not from suffering, but through suffering. He trusted that which is written. Don't test God. Rather focus on God's promises and trust God's perfect plan.

C. According to Scripture's commands, not vainglorious shortcuts (v. 10)

The crown of God lay beyond the cross on the far side of suffering and temptation. In submitting himself to the Father's will, Jesus rejects the shortcut of idolatrous political expediency to gain the kingdom of heaven. Once again, Jesus quotes a relevant Scripture verse to defeat the tempter (Deut 6:4-5, 12-14; 10:20). He stands on the Bible's promise of kingdom blessings if he worships God alone. With his third victory, Jesus sends Satan away. He had conquered the strong man (Matthew 12:29; 16:23), and now sets out on the long road of obedience and worship. By resisting temptation and conquering by faith, Jesus proved he values the kingdom of God over the kingdoms of the world.

Conclusion – Temptation often begins with doubt. If your doubts will lead you to a deeper faith, you must put your doubts in God's hands, and trust him to lead you to doubt your doubts. God only allows you to experience doubt and temptation for a season to test your faith, so that you might worship God for his sake, not for what he can give you. This is God's will for you. This is how he made you to live forever. Because above all, Christian, you are a worshiper.