

The Quotations Bible Study: Series I: The Person of Jesus

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Week 3. Temptations: Jesus in the Wilderness

Prayer: Father, we pray for blessing and discernment as we examine the confrontation between Jesus and evil. Open our eyes further to the wisdom and perfection of Jesus, while increasing our hearts' willingness to follow Him, in Jesus' Name, amen.

The topic for this study, the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness, takes us to a rich field of quotations, as well as introducing Jesus for the first time in this series as the speaker. As Jesus, responding to the temptations of the devil, quotes Deuteronomy three times, we get a glimpse of Jesus' regard for Scripture. And there is another new speaker, the devil, and with him, we get an example of diabolical hermeneutics.

We begin with some background in Deuteronomy.

I. The Law

Focus passages:

Fear the LORD your God, serve him only and take your oaths in his name.—Deut. 6:13

Do not test the LORD your God as you did at Massah.—Deut. 6:16

He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.—Deut. 8:3

Background: Deut. 6; Ex. 17:1-7; Deut. 8:1-6

The quoted passages all come from the second and longest of Moses' great sermons in Deuteronomy, reminding Israel of the LORD's providence and His regulations for Israel's conduct in the Promised Land. Chapter 6 of Deuteronomy bears close scrutiny, as Moses gathers together several themes to focus on the heart of his instructions for Israel.

Let us consider some questions about this passage:

- Q1:** The word "shema" means the imperative "hear attentively," hence the name *Shema* for this famous passage. Whom is Moses addressing? (Deut. 6:3,4)
- Q2:** What is Moses preaching against when he affirms that the "LORD our God, the LORD is one"? (Deut. 6:4,14)
- Q3:** What is the good conduct of Israel to be based on? (Deut. 6:5,6)
- Q4:** How shall the children of Israel propagate belief in "these words"? (Deut. 6:7-9, 20-25)
- Q5:** What is about to happen? (Deut. 6:10-11)
- Q6:** What is Israel's danger? (Deut. 6:12)
- Q7:** What is Israel's primary allegiance? (Deut. 6:13)
- Q8:** Which of God's characteristics are the people particularly to remember? (Deut. 6:15; Ex. 20:5)
- Q9:** What is the condition of possessing the land? (Deut. 6:18,19)

"Be careful," says Moses in Deut. 6:12, lest Israel forget the LORD. The sermon is a teaching, an admonition, and a warning.

A. The allegiance of the people to the LORD

One of the most interesting aspects of God's first enunciation of the Law in Ex. 20 is His emphasis on His exclusive right to receive worship. (Ex. 20:3-6) In contrast to the other commandments, which are delivered with little or no explanation, the LORD's prohibition of the making and worship of idols is accompanied with some important self-revelation. The LORD is jealous. Nothing else in the world is to receive worship as a god. This is vital: His hatred and His mercy are both determined by this issue.

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Moses revisits this matter in Deut. 6:13-16, using some of the same language, *e.g.*, other gods, jealousy, etc. In Deut. 6:13, fear of the LORD and service to the LORD are connected. Reflect on these questions.

Q10: To fear the LORD is given as a command, so it is not an involuntary fear prompted by fright or immediate circumstances. What is fear of the LORD?

Q11: What does it mean to serve the LORD? Is this service exclusive?

This is surely the very heart of Moses' teaching in Deuteronomy.

[Enrichment: Don't test the LORD

In the first lesson of the series, we briefly studied the story of Ahaz, who declined to receive a sign from the LORD, saying, "I will not put the LORD to the test," unquestionably a reference to this passage in Deuteronomy. Of course, this was simply Ahaz' lame excuse for not following the LORD's commands. But the idea of "testing (AV: tempting) the LORD" bears some examination.

What did Moses mean by "test"? The primary instance of "putting the LORD to the test" is to be found in the story of the children of Israel who murmured for water in the desert, in Ex. 17:1-7. Moses referred to this incident in Deut. 6:16 with the remembrance of Massah. In Exodus, the LORD led the children of Israel out into the desert of Sin, and they find that they have no water. Their concern was understandable, in that no one can survive the desert for long without sufficient water.

But the Israelites' response to this was to grumble and murmur against the fate that led them to this place. They accused Moses of having led them to their deaths. Moses sought the LORD, and the LORD had an answer immediately. Moses was to take his rod and, in the presence of the LORD and the people, to strike a certain rock, out of which would flow water to refresh the people. Moses called that place Massah, a word that means "a testing," "temptation," or "trial" (according to Strong).

While there is nothing in the LORD's response directly to suggest that He was tested or tried, and the response itself shows how readily the LORD attended to His people's needs, Moses was certainly aware that the people were testing the bounds of the LORD's patience with their lack of faith in His provision. And of course, it was exactly this same unbelief that cost the children of Israel forty years of wandering in the desert. (Num. 14:26-35) Moses reminded them of this in his sermon. (Deut. 8:2)

In a more general sense, we understand from Moses' teaching that the LORD is not a physical force, or a force of nature, to be tested or measured. The fact of His sovereignty means that we are the ones to be tested. And thus, testing the LORD, to make sure He is there or to see what His powers are, is not only fruitless, it is forbidden.]

B. The allegory of *manna*

In Deut. 7, Moses describes how the blessing of the LORD's people will be experienced and the successes of their campaigns. He returns at the end to a consideration of other gods and how the LORD expects Israel to treat them.

In Deut. 8, Moses returns to the foundations and reminds Israel of the LORD's provision and intent. Moses describes the survival of Israel for forty years in the desert as, frankly, miraculous, relying in numerous respects on God's direct and immediate assistance.

Let's examine a few points in this passage.

Q12: How are the commandments and the possession of the land connected? (Deut. 8:1)

Q13: What were three purposes of the 40 years' wandering in the desert? (Deut. 8:2)

Q14: What happened to Israel during the 40 years? (Deut. 8:3)

Q15: Where did the manna come from? (Ex. 16:15)

Q16: What was the lesson in the manna? (Deut. 8:3)

Q17: What other miraculous signs accompanied Israel in the desert? (Deut. 8:4)

Q18: What is the overarching purpose in the 40 years' wandering? (Deut. 8:5,6)

The allegorical meaning of the manna, described in Deut. 8:3, is very instructive and vivid. It is an amazing revelation from God through Moses, reverberating through the ages. Peek ahead at 1 Cor. 10:1-

4, and you will understand. The manna was more than an allegory. It foreshadowed another food, as the water from the rock foreshadowed another drink.

II. The temptation of Jesus

Focus passages: Matt. 4:3-10; Luke 4:3-12 (see below)

Background: Ps. 91; Matt. 4:1-11; Luke 4:1-14

The temptation of Jesus in the wilderness is told in two of the Gospels in slightly different versions. Whatever the order, the temptations presented to Jesus were three: (1) to turn stones into bread to satisfy His hunger, (2) to cast Himself off the top of the Temple in confidence that He would be saved by angels, and (3) to worship the devil in exchange for all earthly power. In the second of these temptations, the devil also quotes Scripture.

The setting for the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness is immediately following His baptism by John. Luke says that He was full of the Holy Ghost. Matthew and Luke both say He was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, and while Luke says that He was tempted there, Matthew says that the temptation was the purpose of His retreat. Both accounts report forty days of fasting (which is an absolutely prodigious feat—a miracle, in fact).

Q19: Is there a symbolic parallel between the Christ's forty days of temptation in the desert and the forty years' wandering of the children of Israel in the desert?

Q20: Are there other parallels?

The temptations followed. Or they took place during the forty days, or at the end of the forty days. It is certainly possible that, during the forty days, Jesus endured continual assaults by the devil, culminating in these three supreme confrontations at the end, based on the sense of Luke 4:2. Matthew does not mention the coming of the tempter until the forty days were over, if we take Matthew to be reporting the timeline. So, it is unclear how these matters were arranged in time, but clearly, the three temptations at the end were the most important or profound.

Since no one else was present at the time, Jesus must have told the story later to the disciples Himself, possibly at Caesarea Philippi, where He began to instruct the disciples in depth. Mark mentions the temptation in the wilderness (Mark 1:12,13) but gives almost no details. Possibly, he felt that the story was well-enough known not to recount.

Let us now consider the three temptations in detail.

A. Stones to bread

The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"—Matt. 4:3,4

The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread." Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone.'"—Luke 4:3,4

The devil approached Jesus with a temptation to turn the stones around Him into bread to eat. Jesus' response was to quote (with the words, "It is written...") Deut. 8:3, embracing the teaching of Moses about God's provision for Israel and summoning the allegory of the manna.

Q21: The devil prefaced his temptation with the premise, "If you are the Son of God..." Jesus' Sonship had been declared by the Father and confirmed by the Holy Spirit at Jesus' Baptism immediately before His retreat into the desert. What was the devil trying to do? (Matt. 4:3; Luke 4:3)

Q22: Jesus had the authority to turn the stones into bread. Why was this a temptation? (Matt. 4:1,2; Luke 4:1,2)

Q23: How did Jesus' quotation of Deut. 8:3 answer the devil? (Matt. 4:4; Luke 4:4)

Jesus was hungry, but the Spirit had a purpose for His hunger, sustaining Him in other ways through the forty days' fast. So Jesus, seeing that purpose, refuted the wrong inference offered by Satan, namely,

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that Sonship meant that Jesus could use His authority to satisfy His hunger rather than relying on God's purpose and provision, as Israel had been taught.

For, Jesus was, in His forty days' fast, living by God's word, living out Deut. 8:3.

B. Throwing Himself from the top of the Temple

Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down. For it is written: 'He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'" Jesus answered him, "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"—Matt. 4:5-7

The devil led him to Jerusalem and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down from here. For it is written: 'He will command his angels concerning you to guard you carefully; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'" Jesus answered, "It says: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"—Luke 4:9-12

The devil took Jesus to the pinnacle of the Temple in Jerusalem, said to have been the highest point in the region, and tempted Him to cast Himself off, relying on God to save Him. Here, the devil tried to twist reliance on God in a different way, quoting Scripture, Psalm 91:11,12, "For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone."

[Enrichment: Sidelight on Psalm 91

Psalm 91 is a powerful and moving testimony to the Lord's provision for His people, beginning with the famous declaration, "He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty." The protection that God's people are under is extraordinary: "A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you." (Ps. 91:7) The people are protected from pestilence, terror, war, and numerous other dangers. The psalm is not explicitly Messianic, but the application to the Messiah is hard to resist, particularly in the quoted passage. Another Messianic image is in Ps. 91:13, "you will trample ... the serpent."

The devil's quotation was fairly exact. Matthew's account leaves out the clause, "to guard you in all your ways," while Luke's account omits only "in all your ways." While it might be that not mentioning the keeping of Him in His (righteous) ways had some substance in the devil's perverse application of the Scripture, it seems more likely that the omissions are incidental. (If the omission was not incidental, it may give a clue to one particular way that the devil misuses Scripture, that is, by abridging it.) The devil's true intent was as before, to convince Jesus that His authority could be used independently of God's purpose.]

Jesus' response was to quote Deut. 6:16.

Q24: Again the devil prefaced his temptation with the premise, "If you are the Son of God..." What was the devil's purpose? (Matt. 4:5; Luke 4:9)

Q25: What authority did the devil claim? (Matt. 4:6; Luke 4:10)

Q26: Why would not God rescue Jesus if He jumped off the Temple?

Q27: How did Jesus' quotation of Deut. 6:16 answer the devil's temptation? (Matt. 4:7; Luke 4:12)

C. H. Toy remarked as follows, "By this quotation [Deut. 6:16] Jesus means to say, in reply to the above citation of Satan, that he had no right to throw himself into uncommanded danger, and then expect God to deliver him; Herein Satan has misrepresented the Psalmist, who had in mind only dangers arising in the path of duty." He goes on to say, "lack of trust of God, with a trial of his patience, is shown in a fool-hardy demand for his protection..."

[Enrichment: Types

In a study of the quotations from the Old Testament in the New Testament, it is guaranteed that we will encounter more and deeper examples of the parallels between Israel and Jesus. These parallels are

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what theologians call “types.” A “type” is a person, an event, a group, or a ceremony in the Old Testament that, in its behavior or unfolding, foreshadows Jesus the Christ, the Gospel, the church, or some other aspect of the redemptive story. The latter are called the “antitype.” There are many theories about “types” in the Old Testament, and some of them are controversial. The types we will examine are those that are firmly upheld by Scripture itself.

Example: Israel is a type of Christ, in that Israel came out of Egypt, as did Christ, in fulfillment of the prophecy of Hosea 11:1, as Matthew assures us (Matt. 2:15). Another example: the manna and the water that flowed from the rock are types of the Lord’s Supper, just as Israel is a type of the church, as Paul assures us (1 Cor. 10:1-4).

It is important not to stretch the analogies of types too far, but they are not to be ignored, for they contain a message. The message is (in general, as I see it), God’s plan for the redemption of the world through Jesus Christ was written large upon the life of Israel (and upon many other things besides), so that we might know that God’s sovereignty over the affairs of history is complete and that His plan for redemption is cosmic and covers all of time and space.

Of course, the temptations of Christ, as well as His answers to them, put Jesus’ continuity with Israel in sharp relief. Jesus literally stands in the place of Israel, of which He is the supreme antitype.]

C. Rule the world for worship

Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. “All this I will give you,” he said, “if you will bow down and worship me.” Jesus said to him, “Away from me, Satan! For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.’”—Matt. 4:8-10

The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And he said to him, “I will give you all their authority and splendor, for it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. So if you worship me, it will all be yours.” Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.’”—Luke 4:5-8

The devil approached Jesus with a proposition. Taking Jesus to a place where all the kingdoms of the world could be viewed, whether literally or in some kind of vision, the devil offered to grant Jesus ownership and rule over all of it, if only Jesus worshiped him in return. Jesus’ response was to rebuke Satan and quote Deut. 6:13.

Q28: Was the devil’s claim of sovereignty correct? (Luke 4:6)

Q29: Was the devil’s offer real? (Matt. 4:9; Luke 4:6,7)

Q30: Jesus revealed a flash of anger in his response to Satan. What prompted Him so? (Matt. 4:10; Luke 4:8)

Q31: How did Jesus’ quotation of Deut. 6:13 answer Satan’s temptation? (Matt. 4:10; Luke 4:8)

[Enrichment: Thoughts on the temptations

The temptations of the “stones into bread” and the “casting down from the highest point of the Temple” both addressed unbelief, the lack of confidence in God’s oversight and provision, and Jesus answered them in patience and humility. The other temptation, however, spoke to God’s primary prohibition to Israel—the worship of other gods. God’s exclusive right to the worship of His people is declared throughout the Law and the prophets, and Jesus responded angrily, at last asserting His authority to dismiss the devil, leaving no question as to where He stood.

In connection with the temptation to rule the world, one cannot help thinking of what Jesus taught His disciples in Matt. 16:26, “What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul?” Jesus received exactly that proposition—a shortcut to kingdom, a way around the cross—and He turned it down. He was tempted, and He passed the test, obedient to God’s plan and purpose.]

III. Conclusions

The temptations of Jesus provide us with a drama that illustrates the cosmic nature of the struggle that Jesus had entered into. When the crisis came, He was ready.

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Q32: Are the devil's propositions substantial?

Q33: What is the common feature among Jesus' responses?

Q34: With whom does Jesus most closely identify?

The devil's temptations struck at the heart of Jesus' self-identity. Cleverly, the devil concealed disobedience with "just taking care of oneself" and with "try God out." The same taunt, "If you are the Son of God..." was cast at Jesus while on the cross, (Matt. 27:40) doubtless coming from the same source.

Jesus responded very powerfully and wisely to each of Satan's temptations, always in a way that affirmed the heart and core of God's commandments to Israel. The Deuteronomy quotations ensured that with complete consistency.

Finally, with consideration of the temptations, the parallels between the life of Israel and the life of Jesus become plainly visible.

What came afterwards—

There is a touching note at the end of this episode in Matthew's account, "... and angels came and attended him." (Matt. 4:11) The angels, whom Jesus would not command to save Him or to relieve His suffering, ministered to His needs, restoring His strength for the task ahead. For now He would turn to His ministry, as Luke relates, "Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit..." (Luke 4:14) The writer of Hebrews explains the sequence of events for us, "Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted." (Heb. 2:18)

No wonder the Father said of Jesus, "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased." (Luke 3:22)

Can we pray this **prayer** together?

Father, as we hope to bow before the presence of your Son, our Savior, we acknowledge our faults and sins, and fling ourselves on your mercy, in shame beside the One who resisted the temptations that we have not. Though we have not earned it, receive us into your kingdom, we pray, in Jesus' Name, amen.