

4:1 *Led* -Jesus was led of the Spirit at His time of testing (Mt. 4:1); and Paul uses just those words of us in our present experience of trial (Rom. 8:14). His victory in the wilderness therefore becomes a living inspiration for us, who are tempted as He was (Heb. 4:15,16). Note how Mark speaks of Jesus being 'driven' at this time. Being driven by circumstances can be a form of leading- it just depends which perspective we have.

4:3 It's perhaps noteworthy that in the wilderness temptation, Jesus was tempted "If you are the Son of *God*..." (Mt. 4:3), and He replies by quoting Dt. 8:3 "*man* shall not live by bread alone"- and the Jonathan Targum has *bar nasha* [son of man] here for "man". If we are correct in understanding those wilderness temptations as the Lord's internal struggles, we see Him tempted to wrongly focus upon His being Son of *God*, forgetting His humanity; and we see Him overcoming this temptation, preferring instead to perceive Himself as Son of *man*. The *if... then* structure here (a 'first class conditional') effectively means 'Because...' (1). In this case, we are clearly being given an insight into the internal thinking of the Lord Jesus. 'Because You are Son of God, why not...'. A truly human Jesus would inevitably have had such thoughts, and the record here makes that clear. Seeing that Mary appears to have become somewhat influenced by the surrounding view of Jesus as her illegitimate son, it's likely the Lord too had moments when He wondered whether this could all be true- whether He really was God's Son.

The tempter- Every other use of the word in Matthew is about the temptation / testing of Jesus by the Jewish leadership (Mt. 16:1; 19:3; 22:18,35); and that very group are presented as the 'satan' or adversary to the Lord Jesus and His work. There is nothing sinful of itself about putting someone to the test. The same word is used about Jesus putting the disciples to the test (Jn. 6:6); Paul tested / put to the test [s.w., A.V. "assayed"] the idea of preaching in Bithynia (Acts 16:7); we are to put ourselves to the test (2 Cor. 13:5); God put Abraham to the test (Heb. 11:17), false apostles were to be put to the test by the faithful (Rev. 2:2). It ought to be clear that there is nothing sinister nor sinful about the idea of being 'put to the test' nor of putting another to the test.

Stones be made bread- This would not in itself have been a sin if He had agreed to it. But it would have been choosing a lower level, by breaking His fast. But the next temptations were to actually sin. If He had agreed to the first suggestion, obedience to the next ones would have been harder. It could even be argued that to put the Lord to the test was permissible on a lower level- for passages like Ps. 34:8 and Mal. 3:10 almost encourage it for those with a weak faith. Gideon likewise put the Lord to the test and was answered. But the Lord chose the higher level: and He knew Scripture which could support it. But the fact He chose the highest level first of all, meant that He was better able to take the higher level again, and to finally overcome the third temptation, which was definitely a clear choice between right and wrong. More than this, anything other than a desire to make the highest maximum commitment can lead to failure. "The heart of the wise inclines to the right, but the heart of the fool to the left" (Ecc. 10:2 NIV) has been understood as referring not so much to right and wrong, good and evil, as to the highest good and lesser good (cp. how the left hand can stand for simply lesser blessing rather than outright evil, e.g. Gen. 48:13-20). The fool inclines to lower commitment. The wise will always incline to the maximum, wholehearted level.

4:5 *Takes him up*- The Greek is often used in a non-literal sense, with the idea of receiving someone into an office or situation. The same word is used in :8 about the Lord being taken up a high mountain. The idea may well be that He was imagining being received into rulership of the Messianic Kingdom, and was wondering whether that would be possible through accepting 'the devil', be it His own flesh or the Jewish system, who humanly speaking seemed able to offer a path to this. Likewise '*set him*' later on in :5 carries the idea of being appointed, established in authority.

4:6 *Bear you up*- Presumably this was to be taken literally- the Angels physically with Him would have literally held Him under the arms if He jumped from the temple. So we see the literal physical presence of the Angels in our lives. The eyes of God, an evident reference to the Angels, are associated with the temple (1 Kings 8:29; Ps. 11:4; Ps. 5:6-8). The implication surely is that the Angel[s] specifically functioned in the temple / sanctuary. It seems that great stress is placed in Scripture on the Angels physically moving through space, both on the earth and between Heaven and earth, in order to fulfill their tasks, rather than being static in Heaven or earth and bringing things about by just willing them to happen.

The 'devil' of the Lord's own thoughts tempted Him to apply Ps. 91:11 in a wrong context, and jump off the pinnacle of the temple. But if the Lord had gone on, as surely He did, He would have found the words: "Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder: the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under feet" (Ps. 91:13). This promise would have been of wonderful comfort, as throughout the wilderness temptations the Lord "was with the wild beasts" (Mk. 1:13).

Christ overcame all His temptations by quoting from Deuteronomy, showing that His mind was seeking strength from the words of the Angel leading Israel through the wilderness. There are clear similarities between the Angel's leading of Israel through the wilderness and Christ's experience in the wilderness:

Deuteronomy 8

v. 2 "The Lord thy God [an Angel] led thee. . in the wilderness"

Forty years in the wilderness

v. 3 "He (the Angel who led them in v. 2) suffered thee to hunger".

The Angel "fed thee with manna" (Ps. 78:25)

"Man doth not live by bread alone"

Matthew 4

v. 1 Jesus led by the spirit (an Angel?) into the wilderness.

Forty days in the wilderness

The Angel made Jesus hunger.

Jesus was tempted to ask the Angel to provide bread as He did to Israel in their testing.

v. 4 "Man doth not live by bread alone"

Thus Jesus surveyed His own experience in the wilderness, and saw that He could take to Himself personally the lessons given to Israel. The Angel led Israel through the wilderness

"to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep His commandments or no" (Dt. 8:2). God Himself knows anyway, so this must be regarding the Angel, seeking to know the spiritual strength of Israel, as Job's Satan Angel sought to know Job's strength. Similarly, Christ's Angel led Him into the wilderness, suffering Him to hunger, to humble and prove Him, to reveal His real attitude to the word of God. His quoting of the word to answer the temptations surely proved this to the Angel, especially since Christ showed Himself so capable of thinking Himself into Scripture, and therefore taking the lessons most powerfully to Himself. Christ was made to realize the importance of His memory of the word, as He would have later reflected that this was the only way He had overcome- that man spiritually lives by "every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God". As a result of their wilderness temptations, both Israel and Christ were led to "consider in (their) heart, that, as a man chasteneth his son, so the Lord thy God (the Angel) chasteneth thee". The chastenings of Christ spiritually in the wilderness were therefore arranged by the Angels. There did not have to be Angels actually tempting Christ in the wilderness temptations- because they can act directly on a man's heart, they can lead us into temptation. The fact we pray for Him not to implies that He does- through the Angels, as He Himself tempts no man (James 1:13), although the Angels tempted Abraham, Israel and Christ among others. In the same way as our spiritual strength is due to our personal effort in studying the word along with the Angel acting upon us, so our temptations come from our own internal lusts, but to some degree the Spirit-Angel is also active here. Thus the Angels may arrange an external stimulus, e. g. the fruit of the tree of knowledge, knowing it must produce certain internal desires within us which tempt us. Note how the temptation to throw Himself off the top of the temple was a temptation to misuse Angelic care. He answered it by a quotation which has an Angelic context: "You (Jesus) shall not tempt the Lord your God, as ye tempted Him in Massah" (Dt. 6:16). At Massah the Israelites put the Angel to the test by questioning whether He could provide water (Ex. 17:2-7).

4:7 *Written again*- The Greek effectively means 'On the other hand, it is also written...'. The Lord Jesus did not try to reconcile the two verses, He accepted them as part of a dialectic whereby this verse says that but this verse says this- which is typical Hebrew reasoning. Geek reasoning would seek to explain that this verse says this, but that is qualified by this other verse, so the truth is a mixture between the two verses. The Hebrew style of reasoning leaves apparent contradictions to the Western, Greek reasoning mind. But they are not this at all, just dialectical style.

4:8 *Exceeding high*- The Greek could be translated 'the very highest', clearly a reference to the time of the Kingdom of God on earth. It can hardly be that a fiendish being took the Lord Jesus literally up the highest mountain (Everest) from where He could see all the world. Nor would being up a tall mountain enable the Lord to see "the glory of them". Surely a non-literal event is implied here- within the Lord's mind.

4:10 *Get hence*- The record of the Lord's wilderness temptations is almost certainly a reflection of *His* self-perception; He spoke to the 'devil' / personification of sin which was within Him, He saw Himself as two people, and His spiritual man triumphed gloriously

against the man of the flesh. Lk. 4:8 records how “Jesus answered and said unto him, Get thee behind me, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve”. He understood that we can only serve two masters: God or the flesh (“mammon” is another personification of the flesh, similar to ‘satan’). He saw His own flesh, His own internal thoughts, as a master begging to be served which He must totally reject. His words are a quotation from Dt. 6:13, which warns Israel to serve Yahweh alone and not idols. He perceived His own natural mind and desire as an idol calling to be served. When the Lord explained what had happened in the wilderness to the disciples and thereby to the Gospel writers, He opened His heart to them. He gave us all a window on how He perceived Himself, as He sought to explain to men the internal struggles of the Son of God. Bringing it all back home, I must ask firstly how much we even *struggle* with temptation? And as and when we do, would we not be helped by the Lord’s example of talking to ourselves, and personalising Scripture as He did? ‘You don’t want to do *that!* Give up your place in the Kingdom, for that...drug, that girl, that job? Of course not! Come on. There *is* a way of escape; Paul told me God won’t try me beyond my strength, He will make me a way of escape’.

4:11 *Angels... ministered unto Him*- The same words are used of how they minister to *us* (Heb. 1:14). And the theme of Hebrews 1 and 2 is that the Lord was indeed of our nature, and in essence had the same relationship with us as they had with Jesus.

Digression 2 The Temptation of Jesus

Comments

1. Jesus “was in all points tempted, like as we are” (Heb. 4:15), and: “every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed” (James 1:14). We are tempted by the “Devil” of our own lusts or evil desires, and so was Jesus. We are not tempted by an evil being suddenly standing next to us and prompting us to sin – sin and temptation come “from within, out of the heart of man” (Mk. 7:21). They “proceed” out of the heart, as if to stress that the heart really is their source. Jesus was tempted just as we are (Heb. 4:15,16), and in this sense He becomes for us a legitimate example. Paul borrows the language of “the tempter” coming to Jesus and applies it to “the tempter” coming to Christians (1 Thess. 3:5). And we can note that Matthew alone records how Jesus fasted during the temptation period – and it is Matthew alone who records instruction to *us* about fasting (Mt. 16:16–8 cp. 9:14,15). Seeing we’re not physically encountered by a literal personal Satan in our times of testing, it surely follows that neither was Jesus our example.

2. The temptations are hard to take literally:

– Matthew 4:8 implies that Jesus was led up into a high mountain to see all the kingdoms of the world in their future glory, “In a moment of time”. There is no mountain high enough to see all the world. And why would the height of the mountain enable Jesus to see what the world would be like in the future? The earth being a sphere, there is no point on its surface from which one can see all the parts of the world at one time.

- A comparison of Matthew 4 and Luke 4 shows that the temptations are described in different orders. Mark 11:13 says that Jesus was “in the wilderness forty days, tempted of Satan”, whilst Matthew 4:2,3 says that “when he had fasted forty days... The tempter (Satan) came to Him”. We can conclude that these same temptations kept repeating themselves. The temptation to turn stones into bread is an obvious example. Being of our nature, the lack of food would have affected him mentally as well as physically, and thus His mind would have easily begun to imagine things. Just going a few days without food can lead to delirium for some (cp. 1 Sam. 30:12). The similarity between rolls of bread and stones is mentioned by Jesus in Mt. 7:9, and doubtless those images often merged in His tortured mind – although always to be brought into swift control by His recollection of the Word.
- Jesus probably told the Gospel writers the record of His temptations, and to bring home in words the intensity of what He underwent, He could have used the figurative approach seen in Matthew 4 and Luke 4.
- It seems unlikely that several times the Devil led Jesus through the wilderness and streets of Jerusalem and then scaled a pinnacle of the temple together, all in view of the inquisitive Jews. Josephus makes no record of anything like this happening – presumably it would have caused a major stir. Similarly, if these temptations occurred several times within the forty days as well as at the end of that period (which they did at least twice, seeing that Matthew and Luke have them in different order), how would Jesus have had time to walk to the nearest high mountain (which could have been Hermon in the far north of Israel), climb to the top and back down again, return to the Judean wilderness and then repeat the exercise? His temptations all occurred in the wilderness – He was there for forty days, tempted all the time by the Devil (he only departed at the end – Mt. 4:11). If Jesus was tempted by the Devil each day, and the temptations occurred only in the wilderness, then it follows that Jesus could not have left the wilderness to go to Jerusalem or travel to a high mountain. These things therefore could not have literally happened.
- If the Devil is a physical person who has no respect for God’s Word and is interested in making people sin, then why would Jesus quote Scripture to overcome him? According to the popular view, this would not send the Devil away. Notice that Jesus quoted a Bible passage each time. If the Devil was the desires within Jesus’ heart, then it is understandable that by His having the Word in His heart and reminding Himself of it, He could overcome those desires. Psalm 119:11 is so relevant that perhaps it is specifically prophesying Christ’s experience in the wilderness: “Your word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against You”.
- That the temptations were internal to the mind of Jesus is suggested by the way that in Matthew’s record, there is a progression from the desert, to the temple pinnacle, to a high mountain – as if in some sort of ascent toward Heaven. It’s even possible that Paul has this in mind when he comments that Jesus did not consider rising up to equality with God a thing to be grasped at, He dismissed that temptation, and instead He progressively *lowered* Himself, even to the death of the cross (Phil. 2:6–8).

We can of course understand the ‘Satan’ figure to be a literal person who as it were ministered the suggestions / temptations / tests to the Lord Jesus. This would be in keeping with how in Old Testament times God had raised up various adversaries through whom to

test His children. But those individuals were very much under God’s control and as it were on His side. John Thomas, who shared our view of Satan completely, put it like this: “If Deity became Satan to Israel, and to Job, it is not to be denied that an angel may have assumed the same attitude in the case of Jesus Christ” ⁽¹⁾.

3. The Devil left him “for a season” to return later. The temptations from ‘the Devil’ returned when the Jewish people, the Pharisees and Herod demanded of Jesus that He pull off a miracle (Lk.23:6–9; Mk. 6:1–6; 8:11–13; 15:31; Mt. 12:38–42). This was just the temptation He had faced and overcome in Mt. 4:5–7. Yet there is no record of a creature literally approaching the Lord later in His ministry. And yet the essence of the three temptations did indeed return to Him later, and the three of them found their quintessence in the experiences of the cross. Thus “cast thyself down” was matched by the Jews [again associating things Jewish with the Devil] tempting Jesus to come down from the cross. There is a strong association between the ‘Satan’ and the Jewish system. The whole structure of the record would have sounded to first century ears like a debate between the Jewish rabbis and their disciple: “Matthew’s and Luke’s stories are in the form of a three–part conversation not unlike the debates of the scribes which utilize proof–texts from Scripture” ⁽²⁾. The triple temptations are to be compared with the Lord’s triple temptation in Gethsemane, and His three trials for His life (before the Sanhedrin, Herod and Pilate). In this sense the Satan ‘returned’ to Him. This is especially clear in Mark’s Gospel. The Jews – the Jewish Satan as it were, the adversary to the Lord’s cause – are recorded as putting Him to the test, just as He was tested in the desert (Mk. 8:11–13; 10:2; 12:13–17).

We note that the Gospels go on to call Peter “Satan” and Judas “a Devil” – perhaps because both of them offered the Lord Jesus the same temptations to immediate glory without the cross which “Satan” did in the wilderness. They would therefore have been occasions of where Satan ‘returned’ to the Lord as predicted at the close of the account of the wilderness temptations. A good case can be made for Judas’ betrayal of the Lord being rooted in his desire for an immediate Messianic Kingdom, and his bitter disappointment and anger when he finally understood that the Lord’s Kingdom was not to come about in that way. It’s been suggested that ‘Iscariot’ is related to the Latin *sicarius*, an assassin, which would suggest that Judas [like Peter] was a zealot willing to use force and violence to bring about the Kingdom of Jesus ⁽³⁾.

<i>John</i>	<i>The wilderness temptations</i>
The Jewish crowd wanted to make him king (Jn. 6:15)	Satan offers him the kingship of the [Jewish?] world
The Jews ask for miraculous bread (Jn. 6:31)	Satan invites him to make miraculous bread
The [Jewish] disciples want Jesus to go to	Satan takes Jesus to Jerusalem and tempts Him to show His

Jerusalem to show His power.
power (Jn. 7:3)

John's Gospel omits many of the incidents and teaching accounts of the synoptics, but repeats their essence in a different way ⁽⁴⁾. It seems John's equivalent of the temptation narratives is his account in Jn. 6:1–14 of the Jews tempting Jesus to do a miraculous sign to prove Himself Messiah, and to provide manna in the wilderness. In this case, John is casting the Jews and their thinking in the role of the "Satan" of the wilderness temptations. The following parallels between the wilderness temptations and the Lord's experience as recorded in Jn. 6 indicate how the 'Devil' of temptation returned to the Lord Jesus – and note in passing how the equivalent of 'Satan' is the Jews:

The Synoptics speak of how Satan 'comes to' and tempts and challenges the Lord Jesus to claim earthly political power, which 'Satan' can give him (Mt. 4:8,9). But John describes this in terms of "the people" coming to Him and trying to make Him King – which temptation He refused (Jn. 6:15). Likewise it was 'the Devil' in the wilderness who tempted Jesus to make the stones into bread. But in Jn. 6:30,31, it is the Jewish people who offer Him the same temptation. In the wilderness, the Lord responded that man lives by the bread which comes from the mouth of God. In Jn. 6:32, He responds likewise by speaking about "the true bread from heaven". The temptation from 'the Devil' to publically display His Divine powers in front of Israel in the Jerusalem temple (Mt. 4:5,6; Lk. 4:9–12) is repeated by John in terms of the Lord's brothers tempting Him to go up to the same temple and openly validate Himself "to the world" (Jn. 7:1–5).

In any case, the temptation to produce manna in the wilderness was a temptation to play the role of Messiah as the Jews would have expected it to be played – and this was exactly the temptation that Jesus overcame. Likewise, the temptation to appear on the pinnacle of the temple and jump down to Israel from there was a temptation to again be the Messiah Israel wanted, rather than the One God wanted; for according to the rabbinic *Pesiqta Rabbati* 36, "When the King, the Messiah, reveals himself, he will come and stand on the roof of the temple". These temptations repeated themselves, as "the Devil departed for a season" to return later – e.g. In the form of the relatives of Jesus tempting Him to go up to Jerusalem and to some dramatic works to prove His identity. It was the Jews who repeatedly demanded from Jesus a dramatic "sign from Heaven" (Mt. 16:1; 22:18,35; Mk. 8:11; 10:2; 12:15; Lk. 11:16) – "tempting him" to give one. They are the ones continuing the tempting of Jesus which we first encounter in the record of His wilderness temptations. Hence we can connect the wilderness "Satan" with the Jews / Jewish thinking and the temptation to be as *they* wanted rather than as God intended.

4. In Lk. 11:21,22, the Lord Jesus speaks of how He has already overcome 'Satan' and is now sharing Satan's goods with His disciples. Now this may be prophetic of the Lord's faith in victory over 'Satan' in the cross. But it could also be a reference back to His successful struggle with 'Satan' in the wilderness. If this is the case, then He is reflecting how He

understood ‘Satan’ not as a literal strong man who guards his house, for Jesus didn’t fight with such a person in the wilderness, but rather to the symbolic power of sin with which He had fought and overcome ⁽⁵⁾.

5. There is an evident similarity between the temptations / testing of Jesus and the temptations / testing of Israel, also in the wilderness. That’s why each time, the Lord replies to the temptation with a quotation from Deuteronomy relevant to the wilderness temptations of Israel. The point is that it was *God* who tested Israel. The Greek words *peirazo* and *peirasmos* which are translated “tempt” in the wilderness temptation record are used in the Greek Old Testament in connection with *God* testing His people (Gen. 22:1; Ex. 15:25; 17:7; Num. 14:22; Dt. 4:34; 8:2; 9:22; 33:8; Ps. 95:8). Quite simply, whoever or whatever “the Devil” was in the Lord’s temptations, it was under the control of God. We’ve earlier pointed out how *God* tested Israel in 2 Sam. 24:1, but the parallel 1 Chron. 21:1 says that “Satan” did this.

6. The Lord Jesus overcame the temptations by quoting Scripture. This is an understandable way to overcome temptation that goes on within the human mind; but there is no logical nor Biblical reason why an evil being such as a personal Satan would be somehow scared off by quoting Scripture. If tempted or threatened by an evil person, let alone a personal “Satan”, it would be quite useless to merely quote Bible verses to the person so that they leave us. But once the real ‘Satan’ is understood to be the adversary of our own internal temptations and thoughts, all becomes clearer.

7. The idea of the Lord being led by the spirit and then seeing things like Him standing on a high mountain, or perched on a temple pinnacle, all have some similarities with the experience of Ezekiel. He was likewise ‘led of the spirit’ of God to the captives by the river Chebar; he was ‘in spirit’ transported there, but I don’t think that means he literally went there (Ez. 1:4–28; 3:11–15; 11:1,24,25). It seems the same happened with the Lord Jesus, the “son of man” whom Ezekiel typified in so many ways.

8. The account of the temptations begins and ends with reference to “the spirit”. The Lord Jesus was led by God’s spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan, and then “Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee” (Lk. 4:1,14). The nature of the record hardly suggests that ‘Satan’ was in radical, independent opposition to the spirit of God; even if we take ‘Satan’ as a personal being in the narrative, clearly there was a co–operation between him and God in order to test God’s Son (cp. Paul’s delivering of people unto Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme, 1 Cor. 5:5). And that runs counter to the classical view of Satan as a rebellious being locked in combat with God, ever seeking to oppose Him.

Suggested Explanations

1. When Jesus was baptized in Jordan by John, He received the power of the Holy Spirit (Mt. 3:16). As soon as He came out of the water, He was driven into the wilderness to be tempted. Knowing that He had the power of the spirit to turn stones into bread, jump off buildings

unharméd etc., these temptations must have raged within His mind. If a person was suggesting these things to Jesus and Jesus knew that person to be sinful, then the temptations were a lot less subtle than if they came from within Jesus' own mind.

2. The temptation to take the kingdoms to Himself would have been far more powerful if it came from within Christ. Jesus' mind would have been full of Scripture, and in His afflicted state of mind, caused by His fasting, it would be tempting to misinterpret passages to enable Him to use them to justify taking the easy way out of the situation He was in.

Standing on a high mountain recalls Ezekiel being shown what the Kingdom would be like from a high mountain (Ez. 40:2), and John, seeing "the holy Jerusalem" from "a great and high mountain" (Rev. 21:10). Jesus saw the world's kingdoms as they would be in the future (Lk. 4:5), i.e. In the Kingdom, when "the kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ" (Rev. 11:15). Maybe He would have thought of Moses at the end of 40 years' wilderness wandering (cp. His forty days) looking out at the Promised Land (the Kingdom) from Mount Nebo. It is emphasized in Daniel (Dan. 4:17, 25, 32; 5:21) that "the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will"; Jesus would have known that only God, not anyone else, could give Him the kingdom. Therefore it would not have been much of a temptation if an evil monster claimed to be able to give Jesus the kingdom, when He knew only God had the power. However, Jesus knew that it was His (the Father's) good pleasure to give Jesus the kingdom, and it must have been suggested by the "Devil" within Jesus that He could take that kingdom immediately. After all, He could have reasoned, 'God has delegated all authority to me in prospect (Jn. 5:26,27)', to the extent that He had power to both give His life and take it again (Jn. 10:18), although ultimately all power was given unto Him only after His death and resurrection (Mt. 28:18). Jer. 27:5-8 and Jer. 34:5-8 in the LXX speak of how God has made the earth and will give it (Gk. *doso*) to whomever He wishes; and these are the very words of the 'Satan' in Luke's record: "I will give (*doso*) it to you... I give it to whomever I wish". One could say that this is a way of explaining how the Lord Jesus was tempted to 'play God' and seek equality with God – which temptation He refused (as Paul points out in Phil. 2).

3. With His familiarity with Scripture, Christ would have seen the similarities between Himself and Elijah, whose morale collapsed after 40 days in the wilderness (1 Kings 19:8) and Moses, who forfeited his immediate inheritance of the land at the end of 40 years in the wilderness. Jesus at the end of 40 days, was in a similar position to them – faced with a real possibility of failure. Moses and Elijah failed because of human weakness – not because of a person called "the Devil". It was this same human weakness, the 'Satan', or adversary, that was tempting Jesus.

4. "And the Devil said unto Him, If you are the Son of God..." (Lk. 4:3). It must have been a constant temptation within the mind of Christ to question whether He really was the Son of God, seeing that everyone else thought He was the son of Joseph (Lk. 3:23; Jn. 6:42) or illegitimate (so Jn. 9:29 implies), and that the official temple records described him as the son of Joseph (Mt. 1:1,16; Lk. 3:23, where "supposed" means 'reckoned by law'). He was the

only human being not to have a human father. Philippians 2:8 implies that Jesus came to appreciate that He really was a man like us, inferring it was tempting for Him to disbelieve He was the Son of God, and to misunderstand His own nature.

5. The temptations were controlled by God for Christ's spiritual education. The passages quoted by Jesus to strengthen Himself against His desires ("Devil") are all from the same part of Deuteronomy, regarding Israel's experience in the wilderness. Jesus clearly saw a parallel between His experiences and theirs (see below):

Thus Jesus showed us how to read and study the Word – He thought Himself into the position of Israel in the wilderness, and therefore took the lessons that can be learnt from their experiences to Himself in His wilderness trials. The description of the Lord Jesus as being in the wilderness with beasts and Angels (Mk. 1:13) is another connection with Israel's experience in the wilderness – they were plagued there by "wild beasts" because of their disobedience (Dt. 32:19–24 and context).

Deuteronomy 8:2 “The Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep His commandments (word), or no.”

Deuteronomy 8:3. “And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna... that He might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word...of the Lord...”

Matthew 4 / Luke 4 “Jesus led up of the spirit” “forty days” “in the wilderness”. Jesus was proved by the temptations. Jesus overcame by quoting the Scriptures that were in His heart (Ps. 119:11), thus showing it was the Scriptures that were in His heart.

“He was afterward an hungered”. In John 6 manna is interpreted by Jesus as representing the Word of God, which Jesus lived by in the wilderness. Jesus learnt that spiritually He lived by the Word of God. “He answered...it is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word ...of God”.

Deuteronomy 8:5 “Thou shalt also consider in thine heart, that, as a man chasteneth his son, so the Lord thy God chasteneth thee”

Jesus no doubt reflected on His experiences. God chastened His Son, Jesus – 2 Sam. 7:12; Ps. 89:32.

Notes

(1) John Thomas, *Eureka: An Exposition of the Apocalypse* (West Beach, Australia: Logos Publications, 1985 ed.), Vol. 3 p. 65.

(2) G.H. Twelftree, ‘Temptation of Jesus’, in I.H. Marshall, ed., *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Leicester: IVP, 1992) p. 822. Ernst Lohmeyer likewise noted that the account of the wilderness temptations reads very much as a disputation between two Rabbis – as if Jesus was arguing with a Jewish mind about the interpretation of Scripture. See Ernst Lohmeyer, *The Lord’s Prayer* (London: Collins, 1965) p. 224. Henry Kelly sees the record as “a typical rabbinical “show–debate”. Such debates were a form of midrash (meditation on Scripture) that displayed an authoritative figure responding to a series of challenges by citing the correct passage from Scripture” – *Satan: A Biography* (Cambridge: C.U.P., 2006) p. 87. There’s a passage in the Talmud (*Sanhedrin* 89b) where ‘Satan’ three times tempts Abraham, and is rebuffed by Abraham’s quoting of Scripture. There’s another example in the *Deuteronomy*

Rabbah 11.5 where Moses likewise is portrayed as having a triple dialogue with an Angel about agreeing to his death. The more researchers explore the Jewish literature contemporary with the Gospels, the more it becomes apparent that the style of the Gospel records is similar to that found in the contemporary literature – and such a show trial was very much Jewish rabbinic style. “The Gospel tradition presents much of Jesus’ teaching in literary forms akin to those characteristic of rabbinic literature. Such “forms” include miracle stories, parables, disputations, and “cases”, examples drawn from real life situations” – M. Wilcox, ‘Semitic Influence On The New Testament’, in C.A. Evans and S.E. Porter, eds., *Dictionary of New Testament Background* (Leicester: IVP, 2000) p. 1094.

(3) See Oscar Cullmann, *The State in the New Testament* (New York: Scribners’, 1956) p. 15.

(4)

The Synoptic Gospels	John’s Gospel
Mt. 16:19 the keys of the Gospel of the Kingdom	Jn. 20:21,23
the more literal accounts of the birth of Jesus	Jn. 1:1–14
The great preaching commission	Jn. 14:12; 17:18; 20:21; Jn. 15:8,16; Jn. 17:23 RV
The Synoptics all include the Lord’s Mount Olivet prophecy as a lead–in to the record of the breaking of bread and crucifixion	In John, the record of this prophecy is omitted and replaced by the account of the Lord’s discourse in the upper room. “The day of the son of man” in John becomes “the hour [of the cross]... that the son of man should be glorified” (Jn. 12:23). “Coming”, “that day”, “convict / judge the world” are all phrases picked up by John and applied to our experience of the Lord right now. In our context of judgment now, we have to appreciate that the reality of the future judgment of course holds true; but the essence of it is going on now.
The three synoptic gospels all include Peter’s ‘confession’, shortly before Jesus’ transfiguration on the mountain.	In John’s gospel the account of the transfiguration is lacking. Are we to assume that Thomas’ confession in chapter 20 is supposed to take its place?
The need for water baptism	Jn. 3:3–5
The account of the breaking of bread	John’s version is in John 6:48–58. He stresses that one must absorb Christ into themselves in order to really have the eternal life which the bread and

blood symbolize. It seems John puts it this way in order to counter the tendency to think that merely by partaking in the ritual of breaking bread, believers are thereby guaranteed eternal life.

John expresses this in more abstract language: “The word was made flesh” (Jn. 1:14).

The many quotations from the Old Testament, shown to be fulfilled in the Lord Jesus.

The synoptics each give some account of the literal origin of Jesus through giving genealogies or some reference to them.

John’s Gospel speaks of Jesus as if He somehow existed in the plan of God from the beginning, but “became flesh” when He was born of Mary.

(5) This is actually the view of Joachim Jeremias, *New Testament Theology* (New York: Scribners, 1971) p. 73.

Jesus in the Wilderness: A Study in the Language and Nature of Temptation

It may well be argued that the language of the wilderness temptations implies there was physical movement going on, e.g. the tempter came to Jesus and led Him. We now consider how such language is relevant to internal desires within the human mind.

“And when the tempter came to Him...”

I want to show that temptation and desire are often described in terms of physical movement, thus enabling us to analyse them in a way which is easier to visualize than to describe them in purely abstract terms.

The Lord “was tempted in every point like as we are” (Heb. 4:15); and “every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lusts (desires) and enticed” (James 1:14). For Jesus to be tempted like us, He had to go through the same process of temptation as we do. So to some extent He also was “drawn away” by the evil desires – the ‘Devil’ – which He had within Him. This would explain why the Devil is described as taking Jesus into Jerusalem and onto a mountain; this “taking” is the same as being “drawn away” in James 1. This association of our natural desires with the idea of physical movement is picked up frequently in the New Testament. “Lead us not into temptation” (Mt. 6:13) is a case in point. We are led by our desires, as Jesus was to a small extent in the wilderness; and yet God is expressed here as ultimately in control of these things. He is greater than those desires, and is able to stop them leading us, to “keep us from falling” (note the connection of temptation and physical

movement again). The world generally makes no resistance to being led by the Devil – thus “silly women” are “led captive... led away with divers lusts... led away with the error of the wicked” (2 Tim. 3:6; 2 Pet. 3:17). Jesus was not led by the Devil – His lusts which He shared with us – to the same extent as these people were. But nevertheless, the same basic idea of sin leading us in order to tempt us was true of Him. The Greek word translated “taketh” in Matthew 4 in relation to Jesus being ‘taken’ by the Devil is used both figuratively and literally in Scripture. The following examples show its figurative use:

“...customs they have *received* to hold” (Mk. 7:4)

“His own *received* Him not” (Jn. 1:11)

“You have *received* Christ” (Col. 2:6)

Similarly, the Devil ‘coming’ to Jesus can also be subjective; the Greek word for ‘coming’ can also be used either figuratively or literally. It is translated ‘consent’ in 1 Timothy 6:3: some “consent not to wholesome words”. Hebrews 12:1 describes “the sin that does so easily beset us” as if sin – the Devil – comes up to us and besets us. The language of Revelation 20 regarding the Devil and Satan being loosed and going out throughout the world now falls into place, once it is appreciated that the diabolism – our evil desires – are likened to coming to people. The Lord Jesus answered each temptation by quoting Scripture, as if the whole experience was a living demonstration of Psalm 119:11: “Your word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against You”. Although Jesus had the word in His heart, He had our lusts / desires, and for a brief moment it was possible that “the lusts of other things *entering in*” (Mk. 4:19) could try (albeit in vain) to choke that word, even in *His* heart. For them to try to ‘enter in’, they must ‘come’ to us; and thus the Devil – those desires – came to Jesus. The parable of the sower equates all the various reasons for failure to produce fruit, seeing they all have the same effect. Satan ‘coming’ to take away the word from the new convert is parallel, therefore, to “the lusts of other things entering in (choking) the word” (Mk. 4:15,19).

There’s another example of our internal lust being described as physically moving in to us ⁽¹⁾. Nathan’s parable about David’s sin with Bathsheba blamed the act on a traveller ‘coming to’ David asking to be satisfied. The traveller of the parable represented David’s lusts which led to adultery and murder (2 Sam.12:4), although both these come “from within, out of the heart of man” (Mk. 7:20–23).

The Diaglott translates James 1:14 “each one is tempted by his own inordinate desire, being drawn out and entrapped”. This is the language of hunting animals – drawing them out and trapping them. 1 Timothy 3:7 talks of the “snare of the Devil” – our inordinate desires. Thus for Jesus to be tempted He had to be drawn out of the tremendous shell of His own spirituality, like a mouse is attracted out of a hole towards cheese set in a trap; and then having the self-control and self-possession to withdraw back again.

Note

(1) This and other observations in this section are confirmed in Wayne E. Oates, *Temptation: A Biblical and Psychological Approach* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1991).

The Wilderness Temptations: a Window into the Mind of Jesus

We have shown that our Lord's experiences were similar to those of Israel in the wilderness. The following are additional comments which give greater insight into His temptations:

– The Lord realized He was in a similar position to Israel in another wilderness, and therefore personalized Scripture in Deuteronomy concerning *their* experience then to apply to Himself.

- The personification of the sinful temptations in the Lord's heart as a person called 'the Devil' shows how clearly His mind was divided between flesh and spirit – without the hazy overlap so characteristic of our semi-spirituality. It was probably with this in mind that He deftly broke the bread representing his body into two at the Last Supper – to show that clear division within Himself (Mt. 26:26). A psychotherapist friend of mine, Dr. Artur Dombrovsky, suggested to me in discussing the wilderness temptations that the more in touch with themselves a person is, the more clearly they will be able to see themselves from outside themselves; the greater the distance they are able to place between them and the 'self' whom they analyse and dialogue with in self-examination. Much of our self-talk is vague; that of the Lord Jesus was specific and focused. He was the man ultimately in touch with Himself.

– The quotation of Dt. 6:13 "You shalt fear the Lord your God (alone)" was probably made with Dt. 6:14 in mind "You shall not go after other gods". Perhaps He interpreted the pagan idols as the evil thoughts of His heart. Earlier Dt. 6:7,8 had warned that not repeating the Law would result in idol worship – and Christ saw that His neglect of the Father's word would result in His serving His evil desires. Thus the purpose of the temptations was to prove whether Christ would really keep and apply the word in His heart (Dt. 8:2), as it was for Israel in their wilderness.

– God alone has the power to give the Kingdom (Dan. 4:32). That Jesus was tempted to take it for Himself (Mt. 4:9) indicates He was tempted to make Himself equal to God. Phil. 2:6 comments on this: that although He had the same perfect mind as God, He did not consider equality with God a thing to be even considered. This shows (again) how conscious Christ was of His sinless mind, and how this tempted Him to proudly assume equality with God. This was probably in the back of His consciousness as He argued in Jn. 10:34–36 that men in the Old Testament had been called God, but He was not then taking that title to Himself as He could have done, but only calling Himself the *Son* of God. His appreciation of the many passages which functionally applied the Name of Yahweh to Him would have tempted Him to use the name in His own right because of His ultimate manifestation of God. Christ reflected that to whomsoever *He* wanted He could give the Kingdom (Lk. 4:6) – and He thought of giving it to Himself. Note how later He promised to give the cities of the Kingdom to us (Mt. 19:28; Lk. 19:17).

– His 'adversary', His own mind, quoted Ps. 91:11,12 to Himself (Mt. 4:6): "He shall give His Angels charge over you". This Psalm has primary reference to Joshua being protected by the Angel during the wilderness wanderings when the apostate Israelites were consumed by

the destroyer Angel. The specific reason for this protection is given in Ps. 91:1; because he had remained in the tabernacle, no doubt from the motive of wanting to hear as much as possible of God's word spoken by the Angel to his master Moses (Ex. 33:11). Our Lord was in a similar position – dedicated to the word of God, the rest of Israel apostate. It would have been tempting to abuse the subsequent Angelic power which His spirituality had made available to Him.

– There is the implication that it took the Lord 40 days to overcome the Devil, at which point the Devil departed. This is more easily understandable in terms of an internal battle, than a literal struggle against a supernatural being. And the fact it took 40 days shows how hard was the struggle for the Lord.

– The Lord standing on a high mountain beholding the coming Kingdom of God ⁽¹⁾ points forward to an identical scene in Rev. 21:10. There are other connections with Revelation – “The kingdoms of the world” = Rev. 11:15; v.9,10= Rev. 22:8,9; v.5= Rev. 21:2. It is almost as if the Lord Jesus in giving Revelation was looking back to His wilderness trials, rejoicing that what He had been tempted to have then *illegitimately*, was now His and ours legitimately. The wilderness temptation was to take the Kingdom and rule it for Himself rather than for God; i.e. not to manifest God, even if externally there would not be any evident difference between whether He was manifesting God in an acceptable spirit or not. For these temptations to be real, it must have been possible that God would have allowed Christ to take the Kingdom; as He would have allowed the Lord to use the Angels to rescue Him from his ordeal in Gethsemane. That God was willing to accept a second best, to allow His plan for salvation to go as far as Christ's freewill effort allowed it to, would have been a tremendous temptation and yet stimulation to Jesus. Hence God's supreme delight in the totality of Christ's effort and victory, as described, e.g., in Is. 49:5–9.

– There can be little doubt that standing on a mountain looking out over God's Kingdom would have reminded Christ of Moses on Nebo, who for one slip was denied it all. And that must have sobered Him (Dt. 34:1). And having quoted Dt. 8:3 to Himself about living on the bread/word of God, His mind would have gone on to Dt. 8:9 with its description of eating bread without scarceness in the Kingdom – i.e. feeding fully on spiritual things, in the allegory.

– The Lord was tempted to believe that He would be miraculously preserved from dashing His foot against a stone. This is an allusion to Prov. 3:23, which promises that the Father will keep the Son in whom He delights from ‘stumbling in the way’. Prov. 3:4 is specifically applied to the Lord Jesus in Lk. 2:52. But ‘stumbling in the way’ in the context of Prov. 3 refers to sinning, and the need to not stumble by the hard effort of applying Divine wisdom in daily life. Do we get another window here into the mind of the Lord? Is not the implication of all this that He was tempted to think that as God's Son, somehow God would preserve Him from sinning, and so He could do as He wished? Thank God, and Him, that He put that thought so far behind Him.

Note

(1) Christ seeing “all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time” (Lk. 4:5) surely refers to the future Kingdom of God on earth – all the kingdoms as they would be in the future (cp. Rev. 11:15).

The Wilderness Temptations: Internal Struggle With Self-Doubt

The essence of the wilderness temptations appears to me to be connected with a tendency within Jesus towards self-doubt; to question whether He really was God’s Son. After all, everyone around Him thought He had a human father. Perhaps Mary’s mid-life collapse of faith involved her going quiet over the visit of the Angel and her strange son’s Divine begettal. Perhaps it all seemed as a dream to her, especially if Joseph was dead or not on the scene. Jesus was so human that it must have been unreal for Him to imagine that actually, His mother was the only woman to have become pregnant directly from God. And we all have the essence of this temptation; to wonder whether in fact we really are any different from the world around us, whether we have in any meaningful sense been born again, whether God actually sees us as His children; whether we will receive the salvation of God’s children and eternal entrance into His family which is ours if we are now His children. To have those struggles isn’t sinful; for the Lord endured these temptations without sinning. Here, then, is the evidence that the wilderness temptations hinged around His own questioning of His Divine Sonship:

- The promise to receive ‘the Kingdoms of the world and their glory’ was framed in the language of Ps. 2:7,8 LXX. Here God proclaims His Son to the world, and invites His Son to ‘Ask of me, and I will give to you the nations of the earth for your inheritance, and the ends of the earth for your possession’. The Greek words used are similar to the words of ‘the devil’ to Jesus. Clearly the Lord was being tempted not only to misapply Scripture, but also to just check that He really was in fact God’s Son.

- “*If you are the Son of God...*” was the repeated temptation the Lord faced. Either, as I believe, the ‘devil’ refers to the ‘enemy’ of the Lord’s internal temptations; or, if we are to read the temptation records with reference to a literal person, then that person was unsure as to the identity of Jesus. This latter option is another nail in the coffin for the orthodox understanding of ‘the devil’ as a personal, omnipotent fallen Angel who set out to target Jesus.

- “If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread” (Mt. 4:3) can also be translated: “Give the command to God, so that he will provide bread from these stones”. The idea is that if Jesus is God’s Son, then, God will do what Jesus asks Him. The temptation to jump off the temple was really the same thing- ‘If God’s really your father, then surely He’ll give you unlimited protection?’.

- The temptation to worship the devil, and *then* to receive all the Kingdoms of the world, was also self-doubt- that as God’s Son, the Kingdoms of this world belonged to Him in prospect there and then, and would be later given to Him, according to Psalm 2.

- The Jews expected Messiah to authenticate Himself by creating manna. The *Pesiqta Rabbati* 36/126a stated that “When the King Messiah reveals himself to proclaim salvation he

will come and stand upon the roof of the temple". The Lord Jesus was a Palestinian Jew, who would've been familiar with these ideas. His temptations therefore involved an element of doubt as to whether He, who had just opened His public ministry, was actually the Messiah after all. He was tempted to 'prove it' in terms which the Jews would've understood, rather than God's terms.

- The temptations involved an element of doing visible miracles in order to prove that He was indeed God's Son. Several times, the Lord stresses that experiencing miracles would not of itself prove to anyone that He is the Son of God. He taught this on the basis of having faced acute temptation in that very area.

These temptations to self-doubt recurred. We read that the devil left Jesus for a while, implying he / it returned to Jesus. If the devil refers to a literal person, then Scripture is silent as to this ever occurring. But once the devil is understood as the personal temptations of Jesus, then all becomes clearer. The essence of what He internally struggled with as He sat in the desert returned to Him. In fact whenever the Lord is described as being 'tempted' later in the Gospel records, it's possible to understand those temptations not merely as 'tests', but as moral temptations which repeated the essence of the wilderness temptations:

- The Greek wording of 'command that these stones be made bread' recurs in Mt. 20:21, where a woman likewise asks Jesus to command, to utter a word of power, that would give her sons the best places in His Kingdom. Likewise in Lk. 9:54, where the Lord is asked to issue a 'command' for fire to come down against the Samaritans. Fire will only come from Heaven in the final judgment (Rev. 20:9). Again, the essence of the temptation was to try to prove that He was Son of God by forcing the Kingdom to come in His lifetime, to avoid the cross. Whereas it was His death and resurrection which actually declared Him to be the Son of God (Rom. 1:4)- not simply His miracles. For many men have done miracles, but this didn't prove they were the begotten Son of God. And all this is what He faced in the wilderness.

- Another example of the 'devil' returning is to be found in the way that the Lord Jesus is described as being 'tempted' to provide a 'sign', a miracle to prove He is actually Son of God (Mt. 12:38-40; 16:1-4).

- The temptation to produce a miraculous sign to validate Himself was of course repeated as He hung on the cross (Mk. 15:27-32).

- The temptation of the Lord about the divorce and remarriage question was also a moral issue (Mt. 19:1-9). John the Baptist had lost his head for criticizing Herod's divorce and remarriage; and surely the intention of the question was to lead the Lord into making a statement which Herod would see as critical of his situation. The temptation for the Lord was perhaps to assert Himself as a King in opposition to Herod and thus proclaim His political Kingdom there and then. Likewise the 'temptation' whether to pay tax to Rome or not (Mk. 12:14). Refusing to pay tax to Rome was the classic issue raised by the Jewish revolutionaries- for the tax was seen as funding anti-Jewish and pagan functions and rituals. Again, the essence of the temptation, as in the wilderness, was to proclaim Himself as King of Israel and Son of God there and then, rather than wait for His death and resurrection to be the true declaration of that Sonship (Rom. 1:4).

- Peter tempts the Lord to consider that being Messiah didn't mean that He had to suffer, and that He could start His Kingdom there and then (Mt. 16:21-23). Perhaps the way the Lord called Peter 'satan' at that point was an intentional reference back to the wilderness struggles with 'satan'.