1940

Jesus in the Judaean wilderness

Tanquary, Oliver Leo

Boston University

http://hdl.handle.net/2144/8727

Boston University
Approved
by

M.J. Loustilet
First Reader
Professor of New Testament

Edwin P. Booth
Second Reader
Professor of Church History
TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER                                      PAGE

INTRODUCTION                                  10
   The purpose of the temptation study        10
   Various views pertaining to the story      11
   Requirements for gaining the true           12
   interpretation

I. JESUS AND JOHN THE BAPTIST                13
   The general relationship between Jesus     13
   and John
   John's character and power                 14
   Several reasons for his popularity         15
   The theme of his preaching                 16
   The question of Jesus' intention to be      17
   baptized
   The baptism of Jesus                      19
   John's impression upon Jesus               19
   Jesus' great Messianic awakening           20
   A rational interpretation of what          21
   occurred at the baptism
   The effects of the baptism upon the actions 23
   of Jesus

II. THE COMPARATIVE DATA REGARDING THE       26
    TEMPTATION STORY
   Variations and agreements in the story     26
   The term "forty" explained                  28
   The geographical location for the          29
   wilderness experience
   The importance of variation for purposes of 30
   validity
III. THE FORM OF THE STORY .......................... 32
   The reasons which invalidate a literal
   interpretation of the story ......................... 32
   The possible origin of the narrative ............... 35
   A comparison of Jesus' experience with
   that of Ezekiel .................................. 39
   The influence of Jewish Messianic expectations
   upon Jesus ........................................ 40

IV. JESUS AND THE POPULAR CONCEPTION OF THE
    EXPECTED MESSIAH ................................ 42
   A summary of the Jewish expectations ............... 42
   A criticism of the Messianic expectations
   as held by the Jews ................................ 44

V. THE FIRST TEMPTATION ................................ 45
   The close relationship of Jesus with God .......... 45
   The incongruity of magic to the Father's will .... 47
   A possible stimulus for the first temptation ...... 48
   The deeper principle involved in the first
   temptation ........................................ 49

VI. THE SECOND TEMPTATION ............................... 51
   A possible cause for the second temptation ....... 51
   The scene of the temptation ......................... 52
   The principle involved .............................. 53
   The eventual antagonistic response of
   miracle working ................................... 54

VII. THE THIRD TEMPTATION ............................... 57
   The causes for the temptation ........................ 57
   The scene of the temptation ........................ 58
INTRODUCTION

Three questions have concerned the writer in the preparation of this paper. First, what actually occurred when Jesus went out into the Judaean wilderness? Second, how are we to interpret the temptations in relation to the earthly ministry of Jesus? And third, what significance do the temptations hold for us today?

In these fundamental inquiries one finds the motive which has prompted an investigation into the nature of Jesus' wilderness experience. Considerable has been written about the temptations of Jesus, and innumerable interpretations have been offered in explanation of the experience which came to him. But, for the most part, the average comment only leaves the student more bewildered than ever as to what actually happened. One cause of the difficulty is that authors are not always consistent in their treatment of the story, interpreting one part literally and another figuratively, or regarding one phase of the narrative as of more importance than another.

There are those who see the whole episode not as an event which occurred, but as a parable wherein Christ made himself the central figure, and from which he taught his Disciples how temptations assail us all and how we are to resist them.

"Again some look upon it as a historical narrative, but of a natural event; that the devil was a human tempter, or animated a human tempter, and offered
the temptation through him; for example, that the
tempter was one of the delegation which came up
from Jerusalem to attend the preaching of John
the Baptist (John 1:19) and that the temptation
really consisted of propositions which they made
to him to join their party."\(^1\)

Still others see it as a vision, or a dream having its paral-
lel in Ezekiel's vision of the Valley of Bones. Furthermore,
many hold it as a personal and internal experience in which
certain circumstances suggest temptations. In addition to
these, there is to be noted the strictly literal interpretation
where Christ hears a real voice and deals with a tangible Satan
who carries him bodily to such places as the pinnacle and the
high mountain.

After reading the various interpretations of the story,
one must admit that considerable confusion of thought exists.
In this study the writer has attempted to clarify the answers
to the foregoing questions. If the narrative is to hold any
significance for us, there must be an approach to the subject
which will give it meaning, and which will pave the way for a
rational understanding of that which occurred. Unless this is
known we cannot comprehend the motives behind the unique teach-
ings of the Master, nor can we, in any sense, see the tempta-
tions as factors contributing to the perfection of his great
life. Simply to read the Gospel narratives is not sufficient.
Jewish history, language, customs, and ideals must be taken into

\(^1\) Abbott, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew* p. 74
consideration, and the whole Jewish Theocracy studied if we are to see Jesus in the proper light. In this dissertation we shall deal with the whole of Christ's wilderness experience; no one part is complete in itself. Events follow in logical succession, each dependent upon the preceding one, and we cannot expect to understand a part without knowing the whole, and the whole without fully conceiving each part.

That which happened to Jesus in the region of the Jordan represented the foundation for all that he was, and all that he accomplished. Therefore, it is of primary importance that we see this episode as unparalleled in the list of dominating influences which shaped his ministry. Without adequate insight into the nature of the Master's trials and the techniques by which he overcame them, the realism of his life fades, and we behold a myth. Too long have the masses been unable to find Jesus real; people have not practiced the presence of God. On the other hand, the true Christ comes before us in the fullness of reality when we see him under pressure, being forced to make critical choices, and being urged to identify himself with other than the purposes of God. Only when we glimpse the Master struggling upward through temptation and pain to eternal victory are we able to acknowledge the high meaning and value of life. Consequently, a study of this kind is of the greatest importance.
CHAPTER I

JESUS AND JOHN THE BAPTIST

In order to establish a sound basis for understanding Jesus' wilderness experience, it will be first necessary for us to consider the work of John the Baptist, and his relationship with Jesus. He was truly the forerunner, the herald of Jesus; and the fact that Jesus said of John, "Of those born of woman, there is none greater than John the Baptist," indicates that the influence which he exerted upon the Master's life must have been tremendous. Let us consider, therefore, a few facts about this sturdy prophet, the general nature of his work, and the baptism of Jesus.

It is evident from the Scripture according to Matthew that John attracted much attention and drew forth from the people, both far and wide, a great amount of curiosity when he came preaching. His message was one of great force, and, apparently, was born out of a thorough conviction that he was speaking the Truth. Of course, John was not without a certain amount of prestige to begin with, being the son of an old priest named Zacharias. We can say that in one sense it was John's birthright to deal with a prophetic message; but, on the other hand, his message and manner were so different from anything that the

1 Saint Matthew 11.11
people had seen for many a year, that he stood alone as a
great voice - a prophet of the hour, and perhaps the most
dering character of his time.

We are told that John led a very obscure life until he
was about thirty years of age. Similar to Amos, who had
lived eight centuries before him, John grew up in a small
Judaean town, but began and carried on his ministry in the
wilderness. When his call came, we are told, he was at the
very geographic point where Joshua led the Hebrew slaves in-
to the Promised Land fifteen hundred years previously.
This, coupled with the fact that he was the son of a priest
did much to stir the interest of the whole Judaean commu-
nity.

Now, as we consider his activities in and about the
Jordan River, we are moved to ask the question, "How did it
come that he had so much power?" Or, "What was the full im-
plication of his popularity?"

In the first place, judged in the light of the eighth
century prophets, John was indeed a true prophet. Israel
had not seen a real prophet for many centuries, and, natu-
really, they singled John out with much distinction. In view
of the apocalyptic hope to which the Jews had held for so
long, it was assumed by many that John was the promised Mes-
siah. Others thought that he was one of the early prophets
come to life again - perhaps Amos, Hosea, or, most likely,
Elijah; and, even though John did his best to explain to the multitudes that he was not the Promised One, nor a re-incarnated prophet, still many could not be taught to accept anything less.

In the second place, we note that the Jewish nation was ripe for a revival. The moral fibre of the Jews had been weakened; the nation had been plundered and robbed of its sustenance, and the very miseries of the people had revived the Messianic hope. Again too, the Old Testament pointed out the eventual fulfillment of prophecy, and the Jews had waited long for some light in this direction. The ancient prophetic promise had interpreted the Deliverer to be likened unto Moses. So, when John appeared preaching that the Kingdom of Heaven was at hand, the slumbering hope and enthusiasm of the multitudes were immediately aroused.

A third reason for John's popularity was that he dealt with strong themes. His was not an ordinary message. He preached about the big issues of life, the things that really matter. He talked about sin, judgment, repentance, forgiveness, and salvation. It is to be noticed that people have, and always will be interested in subjects of this nature. Because John preached an uncompromising message on these vital subjects, the crowds became curious and listened. It was indeed as if some superhuman power was being expressed through John. Even the Scribes and Pharisees lifted up their
heads in curiosity, and many came out to the Jordan to investigate this most unusual phenomenon.

Perhaps a fourth reason which could be presented regarding John's power is that he made a definite demand on the people. "Repent," he said, "for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand."\(^2\) Every age of people has looked forward to something definite, something conclusive, something concrete. Here was a man who insisted in no uncertain terms that the Kingdom of Heaven was at hand. In saying that the Day of Judgment was near, he insisted that already the "fan" was in His hand, and the "Holy One" would clean the threshing floor as one gathers up the wheat and burns the chaff. Already the "axe was at the root of the tree," and he demanded that all men must repent, or suffer the Judgment. The Pharisees and Sadducees were rebuked as "vipers and robbers," for John knew their inveterate hypocrisy. This was quite an indictment for a rough herdsman to cast upon such learned groups as the rulers of his day. From far and near, the multitudes came intent upon hearing the prophet preach and allowing themselves to be baptized, lest they lose something which would be valuable for their future security.

Among others to be baptized of John were Andrew, Simon, Philip and John, but most important was, of course, Jesus.

\(^2\) Saint Matthew 3.2
Like all of the rest, he, too, had heard of John's work and message. Just exactly how he felt about it, we do not know. The passage in the Gospel of the Hebrews reads thusly: "Behold, the mother of the Lord and his brethren spake to him, saying, 'John the Baptist is baptizing for the forgiveness of sins; we will go and be baptized of him.' But he said to them, 'What sins have I committed that I should go and be baptized of him? Anything that I have said must have been said in ignorance.'" In comment upon this, Holtzman points out that according to the Christian community it would not have been conduct altogether worthy of the Savior if he should have decided to go to John, not of his own free will, but only at the request of others. On the other hand, the very fact that Jesus weighed the question of his sin was even more objectionable. The Canonical Gospels seem to support the Hebrews by the intimation that Jesus was a little reluctant in going to John the Baptist. There are some interpreters, Holtzman among others, who point out that Christ's parable about the two sons seems to express his attitude toward John the Baptist and the matter of baptism. After all, Jesus' actions proved more sincere and logical than those of his kinsfolk. While they were filled with en-

3 Gospel of the Hebrews, quoted by Holtzman Page 130
4 Holtzman, Life of Jesus Page 128
thusiasm and said, "Yes," to John's promise, Jesus was some­
what reluctant and said, "No." However, afterwards he not
only went to John, but placed his whole life at the service
and work of John, while the others forgot all about their
vows.

Perhaps a word should be said here regarding the agree­
ment of Jesus' baptism by the three Synoptists. All three
writers agree Jesus was baptized by John in the Jordan, that
the Spirit of God descended upon him, and that a voice came
out of Heaven. They do not state the place of the baptism.
It is principally from John that we learn of the region east
of the Jordan, where John did most of his work. In the Gos­
pels according to Mark and Luke, the heavenly voice spoke to
Jesus, while in Matthew the voice is supposed to have spoken
of him. When we turn to the Book of John, we note that John
does not speak of the baptism, but does record the descent
of the Spirit upon him.

Jesus came before John for baptism. From all historical
data and comment, it is safe to say that almost all who came
to John did so with fear and trembling, asking that their sins
be forgiven, and thankful for the chance to get into the King­
dom. Apparently, John did not baptize immediately, but rather
took the time to question each candidate as to the sincerity
of his intentions. When Jesus came, therefore, before John,
he must have acted quite differently from the ordinary in­
dividual. He had nothing to be afraid of; there was no sin for which he should ask forgiveness, and his purity and character must have attracted John greatly. If Jesus amazed the rabbis in the temple when he was twelve years of age, how much more he probably amazed John when he was thirty. Without question, John felt his own unworthiness when Jesus had finished talking with him. John said, "I have need to be baptized of Thee, and comest Thou to me?" The meeting of Jesus with John was unique in that John probably realized immediately that the one about whom he spoke was at hand.

While it is true that Jesus made an indelible impression upon John, it is likewise true that John made a lasting impression on Jesus. Two particular reasons substantiate this. First, we note that when Jesus began his ministry, he started in a manner most characteristic of John. He preached that the "Kingdom of Heaven was at hand," and urged all men everywhere to repent. Also, the very words of Jesus, uttered later while he was engaged in his active ministry, gives testimony to what Jesus actually thought of John. "There is none born of woman who is greater than John the Baptist."6

Jesus was baptized by John. "Suffer it to be so now, for so it becometh us to fulfil all justice. Then he suffered

---

5 Saint Matthew 3.14
6 Ibid 11.11
him." Immediately after the baptism, Jesus stood praying on the river bank. "Behold, the Heavens were opened, and the Spirit of God as a dove descended upon him, and behold, a voice out of the Heavens said, 'Thou art my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.'" Smith points out that the nature of this experience was a distinct attestation of Jesus' Messiahship, since the "Son of God" was a Jewish title for the Messiah. All scholars agree that at the time of the baptism unusual phenomena occurred, and Jesus became a different man. What happened?

On no point do scholars and students agree so well as upon the fact that Jesus had a great awakening immediately after his baptism. It was indeed the time when he came into a thorough realization of his Messiahship.

Holtzman points out that the real greatness of this moment lay in the fact that Jesus "recognizes that the Holy Spirit, who indeed had spoken already by the mouth of all the prophets, has waited for him (Jesus) in order that it might rest upon him. Consequently, he, Jesus, is the first-born Son of the Spirit of God, who shall reign eternally." Jesus then realized for the first time his unique position. He saw himself as the way by which other men are to participate in the Spirit of God.

---

7 Saint Matthew 3.15
8 Ibid 3.16
9 Smith, Days in His Flesh Page 28
10 Holtzman, Life of Jesus Page 135
Headlam agrees with Holtzman and others in saying that the baptism of Jesus was a great spiritual crisis; it was the time when Jesus became conscious of his divine power and mission. It was the hour in which he awakened to the full realization that he was the "Son of God."

Now we turn and ask the questions, what was the significance of the baptism? How can the physical symbols be interpreted? What is to be thought of the spiritual phenomenon?

First of all, we must recognize the kind of baptism Jesus had. Because there is no evidence of any consciousness of sin on his part, we cannot call his a "Sin Baptism." He did not appear and request baptism as did others; in his case there was nothing for which to repent. Dr. Lowstuter calls his baptism a "Kingdom Baptism." He points out that it had no ecclesiastical significance whatsoever, but was purely symbolic and religious. While he believes that John and Jesus had probably many interviews before the time of this meeting, still he holds that John's awakening to Jesus' Messiahship came at the same time Jesus became conscious of it. Building his case upon this assumption, he states that Jesus was baptized because he wanted to be identified, or allied with the Kingdom about which John was preaching. In this, Jesus saw the Father's will, and did it.

Again, we note that the revelation which came to Jesus
referred more to the Kingdom, than to his own person. "Behold the Kingdom" was the statement upon which great emphasis was laid, rather than, "Behold the Messiah," although this latter thought was implied in the first.

Regarding the actuality of the Heavens opening, and the "voice" being heard, it must be said that these were symbolic of what happened. They are not to be taken literally. The Abingdon Bible Commentary makes this statement regarding the symbolism used:

"This vision, the account of which is expressed in highly symbolic language, was a profound personal spiritual experience. The symbolism used is such as was natural to the time. Jesus saw the heavens rent. The Jews believe in a plurality of the heavens, in the remotest of which dwelt the Most High. By this symbolic language, the idea it conveyed that Jesus at his baptism was given a unique vision of God and came into living and vital fellowship with Him. In Rabbinic literature the dove is sometimes a symbol for the Spirit of God; often it is compared to the hovering of a bird over the young in its nest. The dove is also a symbol of moral purity, gentleness, and peace. Mark thinks of the voice as audible. The words originally conveyed the idea of a profound subjective experience by which Jesus was assured of his Heavenly Father's love and of his call to undertake a great Divine Mission. One important translation gives as the words heard at the baptism: 'This is my beloved son; today have I begotten thee.'"

We are able to assume without too much speculation that Jesus regarded his baptism as an act of consecration, and that in telling about it, he used the language and words which, although symbolic, were natural to his day. "The act

11 The Abingdon Bible Commentary, Davies, J. Newton Page 959
of baptism was unique in his case only insofar as he was unique."\textsuperscript{12}

Gilbert draws four interesting conclusions as to why he believes the voice and the dove were not "physical."\textsuperscript{13} In the first place, the Holy Spirit is represented as abiding permanently. This could not have been the case if the dove had been real in the physical sense, and actually rested upon him. Then, too, he points out that if the voice was physical, there naturally would follow a conflict between the accounts of Matthew and Mark. I quote his other two comments.

"It is difficult to believe that the Holy Spirit would actually assume an animal form, or that Jewish-Christian writers with their conception of the incomparable exaltation of Jehovah would have thought of His Spirit as assuming such form. Also, in the case of John, and certainly in that of Jesus, we cannot assume that there was a need of visible and audible phenomena in order to have a reception of communication from God."\textsuperscript{14}

Jesus' experience was, in all probability, subjective, rather than objective. However, this does not add, nor does it detract from the value of it. Holtzman points out that there is nothing unhealthy in the story, nor can anyone say that the experience was unnatural to Jesus in view

\textsuperscript{12} Gilbert, \textit{Student's Life of Jesus} Page 130
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid Page 132
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid Page 134
of his religious inclinations.

It would appear quite evident from what knowledge we have of Jesus' early life that he had never been subject to any unusual mental quirks or hallucinations of the mind. So far as we know he had always been known as a clear-thinking man and worthy of great respect by everyone. Moreover, history tends to substantiate the fact that most great religious scholars and teachers have experienced an awakening of responsibility and devotion to God just as Jesus did. In this sense Jesus' experience was hardly different from those of other men. The important point which should be stressed here is that the vision alone is never to be thought of as being of any significance in itself. It can only be judged from the beneficial effects which have come from it.

Now when we turn to the spiritual phenomena, we find that Jesus became deeply conscious that he was a man born of God. One very obvious and important result manifested itself. Jesus did not go back to the quiet life in Nazareth. He apparently was convinced that his days in the carpenter shop were over, and that the hour had struck when he was to launch out into the world's greatest adventure.

"In the thought of Jesus, baptism was a symbolic way of dedicating oneself to the ideals and demands of a new life of righteousness. He availed himself of this significant moment in the history of his nation to identify himself with its aspirations for a better and holier life, and to dedicate himself
publicly to his great life-task. In doing this, he felt that he was fulfilling a divine demand and obligation."15
CHAPTER II

COMPARATIVE DATA REGARDING THE TEMPTATION STORY

There is considerable variation in the Gospel accounts as to the relative importance of the temptation story. We find nothing mentioned whatever in the Gospel of John about Christ's temptation experience. Mark confines his remarks to two brief passages, which, although being quite important, are nevertheless of little value in helping us to understand exactly what took place, or to comprehend the significance which the temptations had in shaping Jesus' future ministry. Mark's account states that the "Spirit" drove Jesus into the wilderness. From what was earlier mentioned concerning the "Spirit" which descended upon him at the time he became conscious of his Messiahship, we have good reason to believe that this was the same "Spirit." Even though the details of Mark's story are abbreviated, two important facts stand out: first, Jesus was tempted of Satan; and, secondly, he was with the beasts, and the angels ministered unto him. It has been suggested by some that this picturesque ending was the work of the early Christian evangelists who felt the need of heightening the desolation of the region which Jesus occupied in order to give adequate support to the inference of what happened there. Mark's account assumes that Jesus was victorious in his trials, although there is nothing to indi-
cate positively that Jesus subdued the power of Satan.

In his relation to the other Synoptists, Matthew and Luke, Mark's priority is generally accepted; however, there is some question as to whether Mark had access to Q as a source. Most modern scholarship is inclined to believe that he did. Be that as it may, both Mark and Q, as generally reconstructed, give the temptation story as an experience which occurred to the "Messiah" and not to any ordinary person. This is of considerable significance in helping us to understand the temptations of Jesus.

Now when we examine the records of Matthew and Luke, we not only find one at variance with the other in detail, but also in point of fact. Whereas Matthew places the temptation at the close of the forty days, Luke represents the entire period of the forty days as one temptation. Matthew uses eleven verses to present his story, while Luke employs thirteen. Both evangelists agree with Mark in placing the "temptation to turn stones into bread" at the close of the forty days. All would have us understand that this particular temptation arose out of the natural instinct of hunger, Jesus having eaten nothing during the entire period. Whereas Luke makes no comment about the "angels," Matthew tends to emphasize their appearance at the close of the forty days. It is to be noted that the phrase "was led" is given in both Matthew and Luke, and is indicative of the fact that Jesus
probably wrestled with his trials at a geographical point deeper into the wilderness than he had gone previous to that time. Matthew and Luke reverse the order of the last two temptations, Luke presenting the "pinnacle" scene third, while Matthew arranges it second in the list of three. Matthew's account of Jesus being led into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil may be mere editorial rambling, for the general consensus of opinion is that Jesus had no stain of sin upon him at the moment he was baptized by John, an act which, in itself, would give him additional immunity from error. Now to believe that Jesus knowingly was led into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan is hardly possible. Certainly if he had known that he was entering the wilderness for that purpose, he would have rebelled at the offset, to say nothing of withstanding the onslaughts of three particular temptations. We must, therefore, discredit the authenticity of this part of Matthew's account.

The number "forty" used by the Synoptists to describe the length of the fast period may now be accepted as figurative rather than literal. Scholars point out that the recorded experiences of Moses and Elijah show a definite parallelism in the use of the term "forty," so that we should regard it as meaning a considerable length of time, but not necessarily an actual number of days.

Geographically speaking, one may say that Jesus' wil-
derness experience transpired in the region south of the Jordan River, and west of the Dead Sea, although scholars cannot agree as to the exact location. It is more than likely that if John baptized and did his preaching in and about the Jordan, Jesus must have "been driven" further south in the Judaean wilderness which would place him in a position somewhat northwest of the Dead Sea. If one was to consider the possibility that Mount Quarantania was the high mountain peak from which Jesus "was shown all the kingdoms of the earth," the above mentioned location would be perfect, for this peak, the highest in the area, is about ten miles south of Jericho from the northwest corner of the Dead Sea. As we shall mention later, it is altogether possible that from such an outstanding regional hill Jesus might have received his inspiration for the third temptation which occurred to him.

The early part of Mark's account reveals the fact that Jesus had access to wild locusts and honey which were available in the desert region; however, both Matthew and Luke imply that Jesus did not partake of any foods during his sojourn there, and hence was famished at the end of the forty-day period. Much consideration has been given to this implication, for it challenges the normalcy of the Master's mode of living. No reasons are advanced as to why Jesus fasted, if we assume that he did. All that we know of him
would enable us to believe that he did not sanction long fasting; at least, what we know of his earlier life would stand as proof of this. The only possible way by which scholars have endeavored to reconcile this story with earlier and later attitudes of Jesus is to say that he either could not find sufficient natural food to supply his needs, or that he became so engrossed in thinking through the meaning of his "Messiahship" which had just been conferred upon him, that the physical aspects of his nature were simply forgotten, and not forcibly suppressed.

While we must needs recognize the many variations, as well as the numerous arguments in the Synoptic accounts, we must, nevertheless, bear in mind the fact of the temptation experience which has remained constant. The form in which the temptation story is transmitted is mystical, allegorical, and symbolic, rather than literal. As a whole, most scholars agree that the temptation story originated with Jesus himself. It is natural, therefore, to expect a certain number of additions and omissions to occur in the story as it was related from person to person throughout the early Christian community. The very fact that there are these variations gives us substantial ground to accept the central fact of the temptation experience. It is hardly possible that any two persons would tell a given story exactly alike, either from the standpoint of method or of content. But two people could tell the same story, and this is the important
thing. Should there not be found within the three versions
definite points of variation, we would have more justifica-
tion for disbelief than belief.
CHAPTER III

THE FORM OF THE STORY

The form of the temptation story is one which baffles the average reader. Accepting the narrative literally would make us believe that Satan appeared in visible form, engaged Jesus in vocal conversation, deliberately placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, and finally showed him all the kingdoms of the world from some terrestrial mountain. Such an interpretation seems quite incredible by one who has thought the matter through; and especially by one who understands the language and customs of the people living at the time of Jesus. Actually the literal interpretation of this episode in the life of the Master would not be in keeping with his moral character. We have been led to believe that up to the time of the wilderness experience, Jesus was without sin. This being the case, would he not have recognized Satan after the first temptation, and turned away? How did it happen that he parleyed so long with the Devil if he was conscious of such a presence? Matthew's account definitely indicates that Jesus was aware of the one with whom he spoke, for he said, "Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, 'Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve.'"1 However, there is nothing here which demands a literal inter-

---

1 Matthew 4.10
pretation. Several factors enter in to assist us in gaining a more rational conception of the form in which the story is written. For only as we understand the form of the story, can we adequately comprehend the nature of the temptations, and determine their significance both to Jesus and for ourselves.

It is to be noted that both Matthew and Luke present a statement which gives us some clue as to the form of the story: "Then was Jesus led up of the spirit into the wilderness..." From the three accounts it is understood that Jesus had just left the banks of the Jordan River when he was "led into the wilderness." Obviously, Jesus was in the wilderness at the time of his baptism. The question, then, is, how are we to explain the phrase, "led into the wilderness?" Nowhere does one find information which intimates that Jesus left the desert region, returned to civilization, and then was called back into the wilderness again. In fact, there is definite evidence to the contrary. Mark uses the word "straightway" to affirm that Jesus was led immediately into the wild area. Just how, then, are we to interpret a story which tends to contradict itself?

Some students have pointed out that "led up" signifies being taken to some higher part of the land adjoining the Jordan. While it is agreed that the banks of the Jordan, like those of most rivers, fluctuate in altitude from place
to place, nothing can be positively said about the particular place where Jesus was baptized in relation to where he went afterward. Luke complicates matters by saying that Jesus "returned from the Jordan" and was "led up" into the wilderness. Consequently, it is difficult to conceive of Jesus being necessarily taken higher up into the wilderness from where he was.

Others think that the statement denotes being led further into the wilderness, probably into a more dense and desolate section than where he was originally. However, from what scholars have pointed out on the basis of research, the Jordan district, wherein Jesus received his baptism, is located in the very heart of the wilderness. Naturally, it cannot be said with any degree of propriety that Jesus was led further into the region.

Only one conclusion may be drawn from such deductions. Basing what evidence we have upon the Gospel narratives, which imply that Jesus was actually in the wilderness at the time he is said to have been led back again into it, we must reason that Jesus was not literally and corporeally led into a physical desolation. We are forced to accept a totally different interpretation. Says David Smith,

"There was no visible apparition of the tempter; else there would have been no temptation. For it is because they are presented as counsels of prudence and policy that his allurements are entertained. Were they recognized as his personal
overtures they would be instantly rejected.\textsuperscript{2}

The only rational explanation, then, seems to be to treat it as an inward spiritual phenomenon.

Jesus had been miraculously endowed with the Spirit of God. The fact of his divine Messiahship was revealed at the time of his baptism, after which he found himself possessed with unusual gifts and powers. The shock of such an experience must have been tremendous. Under such a psychological misgiving, it is quite probable that Jesus felt himself in a barren country. Certainly, if he suddenly became conscious that the hope of all the ages was to center in his actions and his example, it is most likely that he felt mentally and emotionally perturbed. His great need was to be alone, to meditate, and to adjust himself to the knowledge and the power which had been given him. He was indeed lost "in the wilderness." In reality, it was the call of God, rather than the challenge of the tempter that led him into this state, and which made this unusual experience one of great choice and decision, rather than one of temptation as we usually think of the term.

If we are to be consistent in our treatment of this story as a spiritual experience which came to Jesus, then we must assume that he told the narrative himself to the Apostles and friends in symbolic terms, as was his manner.

\textsuperscript{2} Smith, \textit{Our Lord's Earthly Life}
of conveying messages of truth. Obviously, if he was the one who had the experience, he must have been the one to tell it. His own words, then, stand as positive evidence that he talked in mystical, allegorical, and symbolic language when he endeavored to relate to men his wilderness experience. "I beheld Satan fallen as lightning from heaven;"\(^3\) or, "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan asked to have you, that he might sift you as wheat;"\(^4\) or, "I came to cast fire upon the earth; and what do I desire, if it is already kindled?"\(^5\) These are all typical examples of the symbolism used not only by Jesus, but by all who had occasion to talk on such things. For example, John the Baptist spoke the same way when he said of Christ, "God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him."\(^6\)

Not only does the "Spirit" denote a special gift of God or a special power; it also expresses prophetic illumination by which new truths are revealed, or by which divine foreknowledge is imparted.

"And behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon; and this man was righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel; and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed unto him by the Holy Spirit, that

\(^3\) Luke 10.18  
\(^4\) Ibid 22.31  
\(^5\) Ibid 12.49  
\(^6\) John 3.34
he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ."\(^7\)

If we are, therefore, to accept this meaning of the term, we may say that being led into the wilderness by the "Spirit," implies being brought there under prophetic illumination or in vision. The implication is that Jesus was mentally, rather than personally present.

In taking this view the assumption that Jesus was carried into the wilderness in a corporeal manner is no longer of great concern. The fact is that if we think of the whole experience as being spiritual, we need not attempt to establish a relationship between the place where Christ actually was, and the various scenes as represented in the temptation story.

When we think of Jesus as being endowed with supernatural powers and keenly aware of the responsibility of his Messiahship, we may easily conceive of the struggle which took place in his own mind. After all, how was he to use this great power? What kind of a Messiah was he going to be? What was the nature of the Kingdom which he was to establish? Seeking an answer to such questions led him into mental opposition with the established customs and the apocalyptic hopes of his day. It was this predicament which constituted the trials or the temptations which he faced.

\(^7\) Luke 2.25-26
All of them came forth out of the consciousness he had for the work he was divinely appointed to do. Certainly, to think through them, and to arrive at certain solutions for them, would not require any special moving about. The whole matter of choice and conflict was mental.

It is quite possible that Jesus' experience was no different in principle from the one which came to the prophet, Ezekiel, while he was with his fellow exiles in Mesopotamia. Says he, "The heavens were opened and I saw visions of God. The word of the Lord came unto me; and the hand of the Lord was there upon me."8 He then goes on to relate how he received revelations in the form of visions from God. In the sequel of the account, Ezekiel was carried into Jerusalem and allowed to see the desecrations and the idolatries which were being committed by the Jews in and about the Holy Temple. We see, then, that the whole experience was spiritual, coming to him in vision form, for Ezekiel remained personally in captivity. Following this, a second, and even more vivid account is given.

"And the Spirit lifted me up, and brought me in the vision by the Spirit of God into Chaldee, to them of the captivity. So the vision that I had seen went up from me. Then I spake unto them of the captivity all the things that Jehovah had showed me."9

8 Ezekiel 1.1-3
9 Ibid 3.14-15
May we not conclude, therefore, that if the prophet Ezekiel was transported in vision to various familiar localities for purposes known only to God and himself, how much more could we expect that Jesus, the Son of God, might be carried to the high mountain and to a pinnacle by just such God-inspired visions.

The attempt to interpret the story of Jesus' temptations literally is not only a waste of time, but a total misapprehension of what actually took place in the wilderness. Under no circumstances would it have been possible for him to see all the kingdoms of the world from one mountain top, to say nothing of the relatively small hills of Judaea; and to have been placed on the pinnacle of the temple in person under the temptation to jump off, is no less incredible. "The narrative is not a historical description of outward situations and spoken words, but a poetic representation of inward and spiritual experiences."10

One additional point appears to substantiate this interpretation. It is to be noticed that the answers which Jesus gave to the three temptations were quotations from the Book of Deuteronomy, which constituted a great practical summary of the prophetic teaching of Israel's golden age. "Man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that

10 Gilbert, Student's Life of Jesus
proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live."\(^{11}\)

"Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God, and serve him, and shalt swear by his name."\(^{12}\) "Ye shall not tempt the Lord your God."\(^{13}\) These quotations impressively indicate that Jesus weighed his problems in the light of Israel's spiritual heritage. He sought Scriptural justification for the solutions which, under divine guidance, he accepted. The fact that the answers came so readily, shows that he had an exceptionally close acquaintance with both the religious teachings, and the Messianic expectations of his countrymen. In other words, Jesus knew his Bible. It is logical, therefore, to conclude that the choices which he faced resulted from his own conception of the Messiahship as over against that which the Jews had always held, and that his conflicts were purely of a spiritual nature.

Should Jesus have held an apocalyptic conception of what he was to do, he, undoubtedly, would have quoted Daniel rather than Deuteronomy, for the Book of Daniel was the leading Old Testament apocalypse. There is a question, however, as to whether he leaned in the direction of the early Christian apostles and evangelists who were dominated by the apocalyptic spirit. One thing we can be certain about,

11 Deuteronomy 8.3
12 Ibid 6.13
13 Ibid 6.16
nevertheless, is that Jesus knew his people and the beliefs which they held. Consequently, he was not to be influenced by any pre-conceived notions or attitudes which they held, if he was to fulfill his obligation to reconcile them to God. The process of thinking through the ministry which he was about to enter involved the fording of torrential streams long before he came to them. Devising the manner by which they might be crossed caused him no small amount of mental anguish; nevertheless, it was just this which constituted the wilderness temptations. And when he finally unveiled his trials to the Disciples, he did so in language which was familiarly symbolic as was the custom of his day.
CHAPTER IV

JESUS AND THE POPULAR CONCEPTION OF THE EXPECTED MESSIAH

In order to comprehend fully the true significance of the three temptations, we must understand the Jewish Messianic ideals, for all three of the Master's trials resulted from, and grew out of, the Hebrew conception of a Messiah who was to redeem Israel. In the first place, it was generally thought that the Messiah would be a king, mighty in battle, one who would lead the armies of Israel in victorious combat against all of her enemies. The Jews had always been a repressed and persecuted people; little had they known the liberty and freedom which other neighboring nations had enjoyed. Fondly did they look forward to the fulfilment of their greatest potential joy, the realization that all nations would be subjected to her divine rule. Jerusalem was to be the Capital of the earth, and the long awaited Messiah was to be one of power and majesty, capable of smiting the enemies and redeeming the Holy City to its promised fullness.

Again, too, the masses expected the coming Messiah to be a wonder worker. Somehow, magic had always enticed and enthralled the Jews. Josephus tells how a certain Hebrew, Theudas by name, who in the reign of Claudius, assembled a massive crowd together at Peraeo, and promised that if they would follow him, he would divide the Jordan by the magic of...
his hand, and lead a triumphal march against Jerusalem. Moreover, he relates how, in the days of procurator Felix, an Egyptian Jew promised the multitudes that if they accompanied him to Mount Olivet, they would see the walls of Jerusalem fall at his command like the walls of Jericho before Joshua's trumpeters. As a miracle man and a wonder worker, the Messiah was to usher in a new and perfect era of prosperity, for long had the people dreamed of the day when they might return to the prosperity of David and Solomon. The rabbis had painted verbal pictures for the people of the anticipated golden age, showing how the trees were to bear fruit throughout the entire year, the grapes were to be singly large enough to fill a wagon, and how the land would be redeemed from hunger, disease, and death. The working of wonders was to be a sign that the Messiah had come.

Furthermore, the Jewish leaders had never conceived of a Messiah who would oppose the social order of things, or the established laws and customs of the day. He was expected to be one who would bless the status quo, yet somehow magically unify the state in its national and international endeavors. His method of coming was also keenly anticipated. Daily the chief priests and the leaders gathered in the temple yard, and there watched the heavens with the hopes that the expected one would descend upon a cloud into their midst. It was truly the sensational which stirred
their imaginations, and which challenged their interests.

Analyzing the expectations of the Jews in relation to the fulfilment of their Messianic hopes, one notes that they were purely nationalistic and selfish. Israel was willing to be religious, and to be the handmaid of Jehovah, provided she could wallow in prosperity, overcome her enemies, and attain her liberty from disease, poverty, and death. The things which she coveted most were physical; they had to do with pleasures and comforts. Consequently, the people of Israel longed for a Messiah who would fulfil the external desires of their natures.

When we understand the Messianic ideal as the Jews had conceived it, we have a firm basis for ascertaining the nature and the significance of the Master's temptations. For in his efforts to build his own concept of the Messiahship, he was forced by necessity to recognize and to deal with the accepted beliefs and established ideas of his time. These influential factors precipitated the conflict which resulted in three specific temptations, all of which Jesus answered in the light of Old Testament wisdom, and of the spiritual heritage of his people.
CHAPTER V

THE FIRST TEMPTATION

After Jesus had been made conscious of his Messianic powers through the baptismal experience, he sought solitude as a natural way of adjusting to the new awakening. Particularly was this necessary in relationship to the future work which he was to do. Having been stricken with unusual power and insight, it was most pertinent that he should meditate and reflect upon the kind of a Messiah he was to be. After all, the revelation was from God. Had not, therefore, God to have something to say regarding the decisions he was to make? To take the divine will into consultation seemed to be the primary object of his seclusions, for while he knew well the Messianic conceptions popular with his people, it was quite another thing to follow the divine purpose. We see Jesus, then, withdrawing into the wilderness in order to ponder the question and to determine the path he is to follow, the path along which the presence of God may constantly abide.

Over and against the nationalistic hopes of material prosperity and political power which the Jews had hoped would be the miraculous manifestations of the true Messiah, came to the mind of Christ a question as to the nature and character of the people who were to enjoy such rich rewards.
Was not God more interested in the attitudes, the desires, and the inner sanctity of each individual, than He was in external conditions, and in the bestowal of earthly prizes? Jesus was faced with the problem of reconciling the expectations of his people with their true needs, as seen in the light of the divine will. His wilderness experience involved a close association with God, rather than an isolated testing by the Devil.

If it be true that the aspirations of his countrymen were noble, just, and ideal, then the responsibility must rest with him, the Messiah, to assist them in attaining their wants, their terrestrial rewards. But was the Kingdom of God meat and drink? Had not the great prophetic minds of earlier years insisted that righteousness, peace, and joy were to be sought after unceasingly, in preference to all other things? Would the mere fact of miraculously turning stones into bread answer the vital needs of the people? Would it help in establishing justice, good-will, and a sense of dependence upon God? As Jesus thought the matter through, he came to realize that should the divine power be used in the production of such magical effects, he would not only be resisting the Father’s will, but he would also be contributing to the increased delinquency of the nation.

Now scholars are not all agreed as to the exact stimulus which prompted this first temptation. In the Gospels,
we note that both Matthew and Mark place the temptation to turn stones into bread at the end of the forty days. If we may count upon this, it would be reasonable to surmise that Jesus was quite famished at the end of such a long period, the desert region, perhaps, not being over-supplied with berries and natural foodstuffs. As he became conscious of the need for nourishment, he visualized the possibility of using the appointed power for attaining material and personal satisfaction. Why not relieve his physical impoverishment by turning the stones into bread?

The implication here was quite extended. It involved his whole future ministry. Why should he not do miraculous things especially for the purpose of relieving the physical suffering of the people? Would not this be noble and quite in harmony with their expectations? The first temptation was indeed strong; yet his God consciousness insisted that the solution came from the Father. As Jesus recalled the earlier experiences of the Hebrews, he noted how God had always provided food. During the adventurous trek into the Promised Land, Jehovah had supplied the people with manna, and made it possible for them to continue their journey uninhibited. Would he not do the same for all now, provided they sought to do His will? Jesus found the answer in Deuteronomy 8.3: "Man doth not live by bread only, but by everything that proceedeth out of the mouth of Jehovah doth
man live." This was truly God's voice; it was His will.
Thus Jesus met victoriously the struggle which had occurred
in his own mind regarding the future use of divine power in
alleviating physical distress.

Gilbert points out that the first temptation arose out
of the contrast between Jesus' assurance of Messiahship and
his immediate needs. In other words, the fact that the tempt-
ation begins with the words, "If thou art," tends to break
the assurance that he was the Messiah; especially is this
true if refusal should accompany the demands made. But Jesus
found an appropriate reply in Israel's experience, namely:
that bread should never be exalted above obedience to God,
and that loyalty to Him, rather than to self, should be the
rule, even though great and unusual power had been given.
Clarke, in his Commentary, points out that the phrase, "Com-
mand that these stones," connotes a distrust of the divine
support, and implies an illicit means of supplying neces-
\ties. Undoubtedly, the thought had occurred to Jesus that if
he was to save men, it would be first necessary to save him-
self, and having once felt his ability to do this, the tempt-
ation to use his special powers illicitly proved tremendous-
ly strong.

But Christ reasoned that life was more than bread; it
was obedience to the will of God, and nowhere in the New Tes-
tament accounts do we find Christ exercising miraculous power
for his own benefit.

"They that taunted him on the Cross ('He saved others, himself he cannot save'), bore an unconscious testimony to the unselfishness of his spirit, and the thoroughness with which he took upon himself the life of common humanity."¹

Dr. Lowstuter has consistently held to the belief that even those miracles which were accomplished were not done to attract attention, or to stand for a sign of supernatural ability. They were simply the natural overflow of his character. By becoming a magician Messiah, he could have won much worldly success, but the methods used would not have been in harmony with God's moral character. God's interest is in the glorification of the soul, but, as Berguer says, "When one has made bread for oneself out of the stones of the road, one no longer thinks of anything but that bread. The soul dies."²

Had Jesus turned the stones into bread, he would have changed the Old Testament conception of miracle into the heathen conception of magic, which was absolute power inherent in an individual, without moral purpose. This moral purpose is supplied only when one submits to the will of God. The early Israelites, under the leadership and inspiration of Moses, had indeed felt the pinch of physical desire when their

² Berguer, Some Aspects of the Life of Jesus Page 173
bread ran out, yet because they had persisted in seeking the divine favor, Jehovah supplied their wants. It is obvious that Jesus felt assured of the Father's unfailing grace, and knew that if he submitted to His will, he need not fear to continue in his present circumstances. It was God's Spirit which had driven him into the wilderness; the circumstances were God-appointed, hence God would surely uphold and support him. Manson comments, "Materialism fails because it lacks those moral and spiritual principles upon which a sound and progressive civilization can alone be securely founded. The higher life is not only the true life of man, but it is even a necessity for his economic life."³

³ Manson and Wright, The Mission and Message of Jesus Page 27
CHAPTER VI

THE SECOND TEMPTATION

In the first temptation about which we spoke, it was intimated that a stone, by its very shape and color, easily suggests to the imagination, particularly of one who is famished, the appearance of a loaf of bread. In like manner, we may conceive of a desert stone prompting the second temptation with which Jesus dealt. His foot strikes a stone, and he is prone to make a serious fall. Immediately there flashes into his mind another Scripture verse with which he is most familiar: "He will give His angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways."¹ If it be true that angels are attending him, why not go to the Capital city, ascend one of the highest pinnacles of the Temple, and jump off just for the purpose of displaying supernatural power? True, we cannot say dogmatically what the particular happening or occurrence was which brought the temptation to the Master's mind. The above is only a conjecture. Nevertheless, the fact is that such a trial did come. We have only to treat it in a rational manner, for only as we do this does the temptation become of significance both to Christ's ministry and to our own lives.

¹ Psalms 91.11
We are told in the accounts of Matthew and Luke that the scene takes place on the pinnacle of the Temple in Jerusalem, the metropolis of Judaea, and the great center of political and religious power. Here the rulers of the nation lived and worked, and here the chief priests faithfully carried on the religious rites in the Temple. This was indeed an ideal place to make a show.

Josephus speaks of the pinnacle of the Temple as the King's gallery, and holds it with such high regard as to win for it a place of worthy mention among the most magnificent things under the sun. It was within this elaborate setting and before multitudes of the leading citizens of Israel, that Jesus was tempted to come and cast himself down from the highest point and to depend upon divine protection for a safe landing. Being miraculously saved was to give evidence of his divine mission, and induce the worshippers who were eye-witnesses of it, to acknowledge him immediately as the Messiah. Moreover, according to the Jewish expectations, the Redeemer was to come visibly from Heaven, descending upon a cloud. Certainly to accomplish such a feat and to stir the crowds by an unusual appearance would give him a splendid send-off, and perhaps after once gaining their approval, it would be relatively easy for him to win the people to higher ideals. How justifiable could it have been made to appear for the Messiah to open his commission on earth in such a
manner. If men were not to be born into the Kingdom by their appetites as suggested by the first temptation, then perhaps they could be lured into it by their imaginations, as this miracle temptation implies. For generations, the people had expected a wonder-worker, a pinnacle jumper, one who could bring forth great things by the power given him from on High. Naturally, this temptation came with overwhelming force, and prompted Jesus to seek human support by dazzling men into belief. But Jesus gained power to resist by falling back upon the Book of Deuteronomy for an answer: "Thou shalt not make trial of the Lord thy God."\(^2\) A single miracle, such as safely jumping from a pinnacle would certainly secure allegiance from all. As a master of marvels, Jesus might easily have proven himself the Expected One. However, in spite of the allurements inherent within this trial, Jesus allowed God's word to determine his actions.

It seems that the primary point involved here is one of trust. Whereas the first temptation was overcome on the basis of complete confidence in God for supplying physical necessities, the solution to the second temptation implies a complete trust in God for the purpose of doing His will. Should he thrust himself upon God, and risk a public experiment? Perhaps the chance had come to test out the trust which he vowed to God in successfully meeting the first temptation.

\(^2\) Deuteronomy 6.16
temptation.

Then, too, righteousness, peace, and joy, those virtues most characteristic of the higher life, were to be thoughtfully considered in their relationship to miraculous wonder-working. Would such a magical achievement help to bring the citizenry of the land to such spiritual rewards? It was obvious that the practice of pinnacle jumping, or wonder-working, would lead to certain results, but would it culminate in the achievement of the divine goal?

"Magic and miracle-mongering achieve their successes, but these successes are short-lived. They are Pyrrhic victories secured by the intimidation and humiliation of man's rational and moral nature."  

Should Jesus have used his Messianic office as a miracle-working agency, the results would have been most tragic. The psychology of dazzling men and of offering them signs is that it intensifies their demand for miracles. If Jesus had jumped from the pinnacle merely to satisfy morbid curiosity, he could never have succeeded, but, more likely, such action would have stirred the multitudes to insist upon a continuation of such practices. Yet, deeply instilled into the expectations of the people was the demand for the miraculous. For generations the Hebrew nation had been looking steadfastly for a sign-giver; consequently, Christ's temptation to

---

3 Manson and Wright, The Mission and Message of Jesus Page 29
fulfil such an expectation was tremendously powerful.

The Divine Voice reflected in the words of Deuteronomy 6.16, "Ye shall not tempt the Lord thy God," forbids the use of the supernatural to advance moral values necessary for life in the Kingdom. The mere fact of being a show-boy does not insure moral earnestness, nor does the ability to do stunts help others attain the high art of living. That Jesus held no respect for anyone who would even attempt a miracle for the sake of popular admiration, is shown in the words which he spoke to the religious leaders when they came to him saying, "Show unto us a sign from Heaven."4 To this Jesus replied, "An evil and an adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given unto it."5

In making a class study of this temptation, we see wisdom expressed in the answer which Jesus gave. Ostentatiously leaping into the air would not exemplify trust in God; it would be testing the Father by driving Him into a corner. Moreover, to do the miraculous would not prove that Christ was a man of God, even though it astounded the curious. When one reasons the matter through, there is absolutely no connection between pinnacle jumping and the encouragement of

4 Matthew 16.1
5 Ibid 16.4
moral living, which in essence, constitutes the nature of the Kingdom of God.

The essential lesson which this temptation teaches is that "the Kingdom of God cometh not by observation."⁶ Here was the point of greatest clash between Jesus and the Jewish leaders. Jesus sought to build a kingdom of mind and Spirit; it was to be strictly an internal matter. The Jews on the other hand, measured their prosperity and well-being by outward appearances and successes. Because their standards were so different from those which Jesus knew to be his Father's purpose and plan, bitter dissension and hostility were inevitable. Neither the first temptation, which appealed to the appetites, nor the second, which appealed to the love of admiration, is without its parallels in the modern day; but we shall consider the applications of the Master's trials to our own living when we take up the concluding chapter in this dissertation.

⁶ Luke 17:20
CHAPTER VII

THE THIRD TEMPTATION

Of the three temptations, the third is by far less subtle and more natural than the other two. It arose in answer to the inevitable conflict between the Jewish conception of the Messiahship and Jesus' interpretation of his Father's will. Specifically, this temptation was the urge to be the kind of a political deliverer that the people expected their Messiah to be.

It must be recalled, at this time, that Roman rule had grown abhorrent to the Jews who were sick of the humiliations and the crushing defeats which had been administered to them by neighboring nations. They were, in fact, desperate, and ready to follow any leader who would promise them deliverance. Some students of Jewish history have pointed out that even the heathen were more or less ready to join the ranks of some mighty king whose leadership would inspire the action necessary to break the yoke of oppression.

Now when we recognize the strong hopes of the Jewish people for a worthy successor to the throne of David, and at the same time realize the long period of anticipation in which they awaited the Promised Messiah, we are better able to understand the force of the third temptation. With the exception of John the Baptist, there had not been a single
prophet for many years; yet Israel had waited patiently for
the time when David's lineage would be made complete, and
when the throne of Israel would be established in more than
its ancient splendor. Moreover, the Pharisees expected a
literal establishment of a universal Jewish Kingdom. The
nationalistic spirit was intensely high, holding as its goal
a supreme Judaism controlling all the world, with Jerusalem
as its Capital. Even Christ's Apostles held this conception,
even to the last, in spite of all the Master told them.

Without doubt, the great question in Jesus' mind at this
time was, who would believe that he was the Messiah if he
did not act in accordance with the popular Messianic hopes?
Being of royal descent aligned him to the Jewish crown. Why
not accept the Kingship as any candidate would, take up the
sword, subdue the enemies, and then make his appeal for peace,
joy, and righteousness? But Jesus reasoned that to do so
would be gaining the allegiance of men by methods which were
not of God. Physical force would be mandatory, and this
could never be reconciled with God's methods of attaining
moral results.

The scene of this temptation is quite different from
that of the preceding two. A high mountain is suggested from
where it would be possible for Christ to see all of the king-
doms of the earth. Here, as we have discovered with the
others, a literal interpretation breaks down completely. For
there is to be found no especially high mountain in the region of the Jordan, Mount Quarantania being perhaps the nearest possibility. The fact is, however, that even though an "Everest" peak be found, not more than one hemisphere could be seen from its summit, to say nothing of all the kingdoms of the earth. Even though a high peak were to be found, the extent of one's vision would not exceed the mountains of Arabia, the country of Gilead, the territory of the Amalekites, the plains of Moab, the lowlands of Jericho, the river Jordan, and the whole of the Dead Sea.

The phrase "all the glory of them" indicates a picture seen in imagination, rather than a literal view from any height. Moreover, one finds the words, "All these things will I give thee" extremely difficult to accept literally. Abbott points out that if we suppose the proposition was made by a fiend in bodily form and involved a demand of divine homage paid to him, there would be absolutely no temptation with which to contend. For from the remarks which Jesus later made, he knew Satan was a liar from the very beginning. We must, therefore, discredit all efforts to present a literal interpretation of this temptation.

The only solution is to regard it as a subjective appeal

1 Abbott, Gospel According to Matthew
2 Matthew 4.9
which challenges Christ to display physical force in achieving the nationalistic ideals of his people. In his own mind, he visualizes being carried to a high peak and there being shown all the kingdoms which he might rule, provided he acted in the spirit of the Prince of this world. To follow the popular demand was sure to bring rich earthly rewards, for what could not the Son of God do with his tremendous power released upon the earth? However, after full consideration for the great offer: "All things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me," Jesus rejected the whole promise on the grounds that a kingdom which is built upon violence is not the Kingdom of Heaven. The implication is that he would be forced to worship men and not God. So, again, as before, Jesus found his answer in the Book of Deuteronomy; "Ye shall not tempt the Lord your God." Gibson has attempted to paraphrase the answer which Jesus most likely conceived:

"In establishing My Kingdom, I must show Myself to be a servant and worshipper of God and of Him only. Accordingly, no worldly methods must be used, however promising they may seem to be; the battle must be fought with spiritual weapons alone, and on truth and love alone must I depend. I choose the path of the Cross. 'Get thee hence, Satan, for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God and Him only shalt thou serve.'"

---

3 Matthew 4.9
4 Deuteronomy 6.16
5 Gibson, Gospel of St. Matthew
This temptation was of special significance through the whole life of the Master, for it was repeated several times, especially in the efforts of the people to make him King, "When Jesus therefore perceived that they would come and take him by force, to make him a king, he departed again into a mountain himself alone," and in the attempts of his Disciples to prohibit him from sacrificing himself.

"Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, 'Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee.' But he turned, and said unto Peter, 'Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.'" Also, it is significant to note that should he have fallen in line with the demands of this temptation, he could have escaped the suffering and the tragic death which, by reason of voluntary choice, was his fate. The Jewish leaders would have gone the limit to help him establish a powerful military state, if he had so declared his intentions to fulfil the popular ideal. But the message of the Old Testament resounded too clearly in his mind to allow a passive acquiescence.

Gilbert points out how, in the third temptation, the fact that Jesus is the Messiah is not doubted, as it appears to be in the wording of the other two Satanic demands which came to him. For in the phrase, "If thou art the Son of

---

6 John 6.15
7 Matthew 16.22-23
God," there is definitely suggested the possibility that Jesus was supersensitive of his appointed power, especially as he reflected upon the types of opposition against which he knew he would come. However, by the time he faced the third temptation, his faith in both God and himself was firmly grounded, so that the demand simply read: "All things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me." 8

8 Matthew 4.9
CHAPTER VIII

JESUS' SUBSEQUENT TEMPTATIONS

"And when the devil had completed every temptation, he departed from him for a season."\(^1\) There are several Scriptural references which indicate that Jesus faced the problem of temptation on other occasions than that of the Judaean wilderness. Anyone reading the life of Christ from a critical perspective could not help but see trials and temptations manifested through his entire career. The author of the Book of Hebrews in a direct reference to the Master, says:

"For we have not a high priest that cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but one that hath been in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin."\(^2\)

In addition to those passages which refer to Christ's struggles in the Garden of Gethsemane and upon the Cross, we find still other evidences which support the belief that he endured doubts and adversities of mind just as any normal person would. The passage, "But I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straightened till it be accomplished,"\(^3\) suggests definite soul controversy which must have been over-

---

\(^1\) Luke 4.13
\(^2\) Hebrews 4.15
\(^3\) Luke 12.50
come sometime or another. Again, too, the Master's state-
ment, as expressed through John, "Now is my soul troubled," is obviously an indication of conflict. In the endeavor
Jesus made to inform his Disciples of his impending doom, he beheld Satan through the voice of Peter, who would not be-
lieve the tragic story, and who was anxious to prohibit any harm which might come to Jesus. The fact that Christ said,
"Get thee behind me, Satan," is evidence that he again felt the power of temptation. Then, at the Last Supper Jesus
made another enlightening statement: "Ye are they which have continued with me in my temptations." Moreover, two verses in the Book of Hebrews also support the belief that Jesus en-
dured innumerable subsequent temptations: "For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons into glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings," and, "Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suf-
fered."

May we not conclude, therefore, that the wilderness epi-
sode was only the beginning of a series of temptations which

4 John 12.27
5 Luke 4.8
6 Ibid 22.28
7 Hebrews 2.10
8 Ibid 5.8
lasted the duration of the Master's life?

What Biblical references we have to the Master's subsequent temptations, although not an exceptionally large number, are quite sufficient to convince us of the "humanity" of our Lord. This is of special significance to us from the standpoint of hopes and ideals. The fact that Jesus faced temptation, even as we do, yet was without sin, gives us the assurance that overcoming our burdens and trials is not an impossibility. The light of the world emanates from this hope. Conflicts are indeed the common experiences of mankind. They cannot be denied, nor can they be forgotten, but they can be overcome. That is the special significance of the Master's temptations, so far as we are concerned.

The mystery of how we may best account for the humanity and the divinity of Christ is still as great as it ever was. But this need not hinder our conviction that there was such a thing as a human element in the Son of God. In assuming this and believing that out of such an element, temptations arose which were similar to our own, we find our strong basis for receiving Christ as the one sent from God to show us the way, and to redeem us to the full and complete life.
CONCLUSION

Three questions claim our interest as the result of the inquiry we have made into the nature and purpose of Christ's wilderness experience. First, how may we view or interpret the temptations which he faced? Secondly, of what significance, if any, were the temptations to Jesus? Thirdly, do the temptations of our Lord hold any significance for us today? We shall consider the three questions in order.

While it may be true that scholars have made some six or seven different interpretations of the phenomena which occurred to Jesus, there seems to be only one rational interpretation which should command our attention. We are to think of the whole episode as an urge to prostitute the divine power with which he had been made conscious after the baptism. To assume that there was such a thing as an objective Satanic being who met Jesus face to face, and tempted him, is utterly grotesque. This literal interpretation does not uphold the moral character of Christ, for had he been conscious that he was speaking to the devil, he would have instantly rejected him.

In reality, Jesus had a mystical experience in which certain circumstances suggested temptations which were overcome only after severe mental struggle. All of these circumstances had their bases in the Messianic ideals of the Is-
raelites, but which were rejected by Jesus on the grounds that they did not harmonize with the Father's will. Rather than ascribe the phenomena to a series of external occurrences, some of them absurd and impossible, we must think of them as internal spiritual experiences in which there were suggested to our Lord the various ways by which he might administer the Messianic office. This kind of an interpretation implies that Jesus was, in imagination, carried to the pinnacle of the Temple, where he might best usher in his ministerial program by showing that he was the wonder-worker whom all had expected the Messiah to be. In the same fashion, he was shown, through the normal processes of the imagination, the various kingdoms of the world over which he might rule, provided it was his good pleasure to be the kind of a Messiah that the home folks expected he would be. Wendt says:

"This was no conflict against images and ideals arising out of a wicked, selfish and ungodly disposition and inclination in Jesus himself, but there were Messianic conceptions and ideals which hitherto approached him from without, that is, from among the prevailing views and traditions of his countrymen, and which he now inwardly possessed, in the sense of their being known to him and being imaged in his mind, without needing any external means of presentation."

It was in the temptation experience that Jesus received a prediction of the trials he was to combat in the

---

1 Wendt, *Teachings of Jesus* Volume I Page 102
execution of his great office. Because the visions presented actual situations, against which he would sooner or later come in contact, they became veritable temptations which could not be rejected without some definite struggle. In each predicament wherein Jesus pictured himself, he saw solutions that were selfish and impious; so that in telling his experience to the Apostles, he related it in the usual symbolic way by regarding it as the work of Satan.

While it is the opinion of the writer that both the tempter and the temptations arose out of the soul of Jesus, there are any number of Bible scholars who would quickly reject this view on the grounds that Jesus was the sinless Son of God, in whose pure heart no suggestions of evil could arise. Might it be said, however, that these temptations are not to be thought of in the same way that we understand our own. Let us agree that Jesus was sinless from his youth up; this does not inhibit the probability of being faced with great decisions. The Master's temptations are to be looked upon as a series of cardinal choices which were prompted by the Messianic conceptions of the people. To decide in favor of the current apocalyptic hopes and to follow the desires of the Jewish leaders, would be to travel the lower road. Adhering to the Father's will meant resisting the Messianic ideals of his countrymen, even though the Cross proved inevitable. Surely, if we think the matter through in this
fashion, it would not be irrational to accept Christ’s experience as purely internal and spiritual.

Jesus’ record of work which followed the baptismal experience substantiates this interpretation of the story. Although these same temptations returned o’er and o’er, the fact remains that Jesus did not once yield after having decided his way while in the wilderness. On the Cross, he was challenged to obey his own will; yet, he resigned himself, as he had once concluded was best, “Not my will but Thine be done.”² Peter’s rebuke came in the form of the old temptation to be a kingly Messiah; yet, he rejected it instantly by saying to Peter, “Get thee behind me, Satan.”³ The very fact that Jesus interpreted Peter’s words as the voice of Satan in action, is an apt illustration of the symbolism by which he expressed himself.

Having once understood the general form in which the narrative is given, we may now consider the essence of each temptation.

We may think of the first as being an attempt to induce Jesus to dedicate his God-given powers purely for the sake of attaining earthly, or material desires. To give himself to this end would not only bring forth high praises from his people, but it would establish him in immediate power.

² Luke 22.42
³ Mark 8.33
Jesus, however, recognizes his task as being the responsibility of making God real to everyone. The hunger pangs of the soul are in more need of satisfaction than the gratification of mere physical appetite. Jesus concludes that his Godly powers are for a religious purpose only, and with this conviction, he rejects all other suggestions with a familiar passage from Deuteronomy, "Men does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."\(^4\)

The second temptation was probably suggested by the Psalmist's promise, "For He will give His angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways."\(^5\) The question asked was, why not do something miraculous, fling himself from the pinnacle of the Temple, and under God's care and protection, float safely to earth? Would not this be the best way to rally men to his cause? But Jesus reasoned that the Kingdom of God was not to come by observation. Besides, God was not to be tested through methods which are in direct violation of His laws. In overcoming this temptation, Jesus resolved not to use spectacular and ostentatious ways of building the Kingdom of God.

The third temptation was the most alluring of all. It arose directly out of strong Messianic hopes, which had dominated Israel for many centuries. Why not accept a rightful

---

\(^4\) Deuteronomy 6.13

\(^5\) Psalms 91.11
heritage as a descendant in the lineage of David, and allow the people to crown him King? If only God-given powers could be used politically to unify the state, and militaristically to subdue her enemies, would not this be to the advantage of all Israel? Perhaps after that he could more easily lead the people to joy, peace, and righteousness. Jesus, however, repudiated the use of force to advance his cause, on the grounds that all strength comes from God, and that only as one conforms to His will can he find the true power in life.

Now let us turn and consider the significance which the temptations held for Jesus. In short, it should be said that his wilderness sojourn gave him the opportunity to decide upon a definite plan of work. There were three aspects to this plan. First, there was not to be a single part of his work accomplished by the prostitution of divine power. Performing miracles for their own sake or for the purpose of attracting fame was tabooed. Men were to judge him by his works alone. Moreover, there was apparently included the desire that little would be said regarding the Messiahship. Only during the closing days of the ministry was anything said, and then, it came in the form of a question, such as, "Who do men say that I am," or, "Who do ye say that I am?"6 Many students actually believe that Jesus performed few miracles in relation

6 Mark 8.27
to the length of his ministry, probably not more than one a
month on an average; and that these came not as the result of
a desire to show supernatural power, but rather out of com-
passion and sympathy which was his unique nature to give.
Throughout three years of ministry, Jesus evaded publicity,
by avoiding crowds as much as possible and by making special
requests that those who were witnesses of his healing work
should tell no one of it.

John's words, "Though ye believe not me, believe the
works that ye may know and believe, that the Father is in me,
and I in him,"7 are quite explicit in indicating that Jesus
wanted to stand upon his own record and be the true Son of
the Father. Jesus so harmonized his life with the Father's
will, that he took the liberty to suggest to men that they
could see the Father through his actions. "If I do not the
works of my Father, believe me not."8 It is true then that
in Christ Jesus we have an advocate with the Father, one who
sought not only to understand the divine will, but also to do
it.

Dr. Knudson, in his class lectures, has pointed out that
in the light of centuries of study upon the life of Christ,
one characteristic of Jesus stands out as most unique, that

7 John 10.38
8 Ibid 10.37
is, his God consciousness. The wilderness episode had every-
thing to do with this, for in the very manner and form of the
trials which he faced, there came a conviction that life was
more than meat and drink and worldly success; life was to do
the Father's will. Hence, the application of supernatural
power through pinnacle jumping escapades, and the like, were
entirely superfluous to God's way of doing things.

The second aspect of his plan was closely connected with
the first. He would not seek any external power by which to
supplement God's creative hand. From the moment he rejected
the third temptation to accept an earthly kingship, to the
very hour of his death upon the Cross, Jesus did not ally
himself with any secular power. One can imagine how easy it
might have been for him to join up with the ruling groups of
the day, win their good will first, and then ask for their
allegiance toward instituting a more spiritual type of king-
dom. Or again, how easy it would have been to identify him-
self with the throne of David, being a proper descendant, but
he steadfastly refused to have anything to do with the poli-
tical side of Israel's existence.

A second unique characteristic of Jesus was his utter
dependence upon God. "Heaven and earth," said Jesus, "shall
pass away, but my words shall not pass away." The reason
for this was that his words were of God. "He spake as one

---

Matthew 24:35
having authority and not as the Scribes."\textsuperscript{10} When we stop to conceive of such a personality, we realize more than ever the significance of the temptations, trials they were, which gave him direction and conviction for the kind of living he was to do, and the quality of work he was to accomplish.

The third aspect of his plan referred to the question of personal danger. From the wilderness experience came the resolve that danger which arose as the inevitable result of doing God's work would never be avoided. His suffering, persecution, and death upon the Cross were, therefore, the final and climatic testing of this conviction. "Others he saved but himself he cannot save,"\textsuperscript{11} was the cry which went forth from the lips of those who witnessed the crucifixion. No truth could have been better spoken; for on the day when Christ turned his eyes toward Jerusalem, he manifested such a spirit of self-abandonment to the Father's will, as has never been equaled since. His own words indicate the realization he held of the tragic fate which was to be his.

"Oh Jerusalem, Jerusalem, that killeth the prophets, and stoneth them that are sent unto her. How often would I have gathered thy children rogether, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not."\textsuperscript{12}

Yet for no possible reason would he turn back.

\textsuperscript{10} Matthew 7.29
\textsuperscript{11} Ibid 15.31
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid 23.27
It must be admitted that his unique God consciousness and his complete dependence upon God gave him support for this aspect of his plan; but when we remember that Jesus was embodied with flesh, and, therefore, subject to pain and suffering just as any other normal human being, the thing which Jesus accomplished takes on a new and greater meaning. His concern was always to do the Father's will, even though that path led to a cross. These three aspects of his plan, then, the decision to avoid prostitution of his power, the resolve not to seek external power, and the determination to abandon himself for the Father's sake, constitute the significance which the temptations held for Jesus himself.

Lastly, we are interested in the significance which Christ's temptations hold for us today. In the main, we can say that the temptations seem to exalt the character of Christ and to confirm our faith in his divine mission. When we comprehend all that is involved in the wilderness episode, we see little difference between the trials which Jesus underwent, and those which, by our very nature, we are called upon to bear. We share Jesus' first experience when we allow poverty to tempt us toward violating both the laws of God and man for the sake of a livelihood. Is this not a common temptation among us? We share the Master's second experience when we are prone to neglect our religious duties, when we deliberately run excessive risks or brave needless dangers,
or when we make a public display of our faith in God. We share the third experience when we are tempted by power, wealth, and influence to conform to the world.

When we distrust God's providential care and seek out our own devices for self-maintenance, we yield to the first temptation. By the very act of making an issue out of our faith in, and dependence upon God, we yield to the second temptation. Seeking worldly riches, clamoring after earthly rewards for our services, or using the world's methods to capture material prizes are all illustrations of worldliness, and represent a yielding to the third temptation.

It is doubtful if any man ever escapes life without being subject to some one or all of these temptations. They embody choices which all men in all generations must make; and, because they are so vital in the determination of character, and in the attainment of life, they are profoundly significant to us today.

Again, too, it is possible for us to deduce certain fundamental truths from the three temptations of the Master which are of considerable significance. For one thing, it is to be noticed that even wholesome desires may degenerate into temptations when higher moral principles are sacrificed to them. Moreover, an appetite may become a temptation when it conflicts with complete trust in God. Sin results when a higher moral principle is compromised with a
lower propensity. When a noble objective is given up for an inferior one, there results a feeling of moral lapse. To choose and to follow the highest that we know is to do the will of God. This truth, the trials of the Master exemplified. There need not necessarily be images of evil arising out of one's own disposition, to bring a sense of personal guilt. The mere fact of choosing a lower way, when a higher one could have been taken, constitutes the essence of sin. God's power used for the purpose of turning stones to bread should not be thought of as sin in itself. Only when such a desire conflicts with a complete dependence upon God can there be involved the temptation to sin. Fundamentally, there is to be found nothing wrong in the suggestion which occurred to Jesus to establish an earthly kingship, and then lead the people onward to material and spiritual glory. The mistake would have been to use the methods of men in the effort to attain the gifts of God. This is impossible.

A quotation from Manson and Wright clarifies in our minds the type of Messianic office Jesus established after foregoing the trials of the wilderness.

"The conception of the Messianic office as one which might only appeal directly to man's spiritual, moral, and rational consciousness to secure support and victory, demanded intense moral rectitude, unflinching courage, and an insight as profound as it was self-sacrificing. This conception of the Messianic office did not on the one hand offer economic benefits, nor on the other hand did it depend upon miraculous agencies or political intrigue
and military force. It is quite impossible to explain the mission of Jesus except on the supposition that he possessed this kind of a Messianic consciousness from the beginning of his ministry. This alone explains, so it seems to us, the character of his ministry."13
BOSTON UNIVERSITY
GRADUATE SCHOOL

Abstract of Thesis
JESUS IN THE JUDAEAN WILDERNESS

by
Oliver Leo Tanquary
(A.B., College of the Pacific, 1933)
submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
1940
Three questions have concerned the writer in the preparation of this paper. First, what actually occurred when Jesus went out into the Judaean wilderness? Secondly, how are we to interpret the temptations in relation to the earthly ministry of Jesus? And thirdly, what significance do the temptations hold for us today?

In these fundamental inquiries one finds the motive which has prompted a sincere investigation into the nature of Jesus' wilderness experience. Considerable has been written about the temptations of Jesus, and innumerable interpretations have been offered in explanation of the phenomenal experience which came to him. But, for the most part, the average comment only leaves the student more bewildered than ever as to what actually happened. It is the aim of this paper, therefore, to present a rational interpretation of the wilderness episode, one which would not only be in harmony with the concepts of modern theology, but which could be justified on the basis of the best scientific research.

The word temptation, as commonly used in the Gospel narrative, is of Greek origin, and denotes all of those experiences in life, such as pain, sorrow, and conflict by which men are proved and tested. We, therefore, must not
think of Christ's temptations as being similar to ours in the sense of solicitation to sin. They had to do with the making of certain great decisions regarding the exact methods Christ would use toward realizing his ideals. The entire narrative is clothed in symbolic phraseology. Historical investigation reveals that the early Christians believed in the devil as one who manifested himself directly, if not objectively. While it is quite probable that many of them may have conceived this incident as objectively enacted, we must look upon it simply as a profound subjective experience, and embodying the utmost of reality, even though it comes to us expressed in symbolic language.

To understand Jesus' relationship with John the Baptist is of the utmost importance in enabling us to comprehend the purpose of the temptations. He had been attracted to the Jordan region by John's powerful preaching, and, while he did not ask for a sin baptism, he nevertheless insisted upon being baptized, "for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness."¹ "Us" refers to all the people; and by "righteousness," he means their duty and obligation to God.

Immediately after the baptism, he felt the bestowal of the Holy Spirit upon him. In other words, he awakened to a Messianic consciousness. For the first time the idea that he was the Messiah dawning. The shock of such an awakening was,

¹ Matthew 3.15
without doubt, tremendous. Rest and opportunity to think through the implications of his divine powers were most urgently needed. To spend forty days or so in the wilderness alone thinking through such a jarring revelation would be most natural. Being "led by the Spirit" denotes the influence which his awakening had in prompting him to seek solitude. Psychologically, he was in a wilderness of doubt and indecision, regardless of the nature of the environmental surroundings. Due to this fact we may at least be sure that he was not literally and corporeally forced into the wilderness by some objective Satanic being.

The temptations, or trials, which followed were visions of the many concrete ways by which he might use the newly received power in achieving desired ends. In relating such an experience to others, the use of symbolic phraseology would be only natural, especially when one considers that it was the common practice of his day.

In the first scene, temptation is represented by the natural inclination to relieve oneself of hunger. Why not use the divine power which had been given to turn stones into bread. The implication here is that such great power could be used to fill stomachs everywhere. Consequently, the purpose was indeed worthy, insofar as it went. But Jesus answered the proposal by a quotation from Deuteronomy which said that the life of man may be sustained not by bread only, but by
whatever other means God shall appoint. Jesus reasoned, therefore, that to undertake to supply his own wants and the physical desires of others, would be to show a distrust for God; he would not do it without a special dispensation. The first temptation not only evidenced his resignation to God, but it also carried a conviction which served to regulate his future conduct.

The second scene takes place in the Temple yards at Jerusalem. Here the devil is supposed to have led Jesus, and after placing him on the pinnacle, questions him something like this: "Inasmuch as you are the Son of God, would it not be becoming for you to open your ministry in the most triumphant and conspicuous manner possible? Why not cast yourself off the pinnacle, and trust God for a safe delivery, which is a Scriptural promise? Not only will you startle the Jewish leaders, and instantly win their allegiance, but you will also be fulfilling prophecy by visibly descending from heaven in a manner harmonious to their expectations."

As Jesus pondered such interrogations, he came to realize that the very Scriptures which made this tempting appeal, also admonished men not to make improper trial of God's power. "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God." 2 It was in this manner that Jesus was forewarned of a very subtle temptation with which he would later be called upon to deal.

---

2 Deuteronomy 6.13
God's will meant the rejection of any inclinations he might feel toward using his miraculous powers to dazzle men. The attitudes of faith and dependence upon God could not be instilled into the hearts and minds of people by giving them signs from heaven.

In the last scene, or temptation, Jesus faces frankly the Messianic expectations of his people. Of the many hopes held, the thought of a kingly deliverer, one who could smite the enemy and set up a reigning state, was most dominant. Long had the Jewish people expected the Promised Messiah to come and establish for them a world empire with Jerusalem as its Capital. The symbolic setting for this trial is upon an exceedingly high mountain where the tempter is represented as showing Jesus all the kingdoms of the earth. The offer is that Jesus will be given possession of all of them provided he falls down and worships Mammon (the devil). In other words, should Christ employ his divine powers to establish an earthly kingship, there would be nothing under the sun which he could not achieve. A justifiable implication to this is that after having once attained kingly glory, he might then endeavor to win the people over to joy, peace, and righteousness. However, as Jesus reasoned with the suggestion, he felt that again the Scriptures held the best answer. "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou
Paying allegiance to men is indeed honorable; but all religious homage must be paid to God alone. It was not God's will that Jesus should seek to gain spiritual goals with the methods of men. The Messianic consciousness, out of which these three great choices had come, and in which there was to be found the potential seed of truth and righteousness among men, had been given by God; therefore, Christ's first responsibility was to seek the divine will, regardless of the opposition and sacrifice which he might be called upon to make.

A detailed study of this kind is beneficial only as we come to realize the true significance of the temptations, not only to Jesus but for our own lives. They were of invaluable consequence to Jesus; for in the choices involved, he found the direction of his ministry, and nucleus of a definite plan of work, and some important guiding principles. Never was he to exploit his divine power for the purposes of satisfying material wants only, nor was he to seek external or worldly power for the achievement of heavenly goals, nor was it ever to be his intention to avoid personal danger, when in the act of doing God's will.

For us today, the temptations are of infinite value; first, because they serve to exalt the character of Christ, and to confirm our faith in his divine mission, and secondly, 3 Deuteronomy 6.13
because our trials are similar to what his were. When we distrust God's providential care, or make ostentatious remarks about our faith, or clamor for earthly rewards, we yield to the very temptations which Christ conquered. Because these are the temptations which belong to the common experience of humanity, Christ becomes more than ever our Savior by the example he gave us in overcoming them. By so doing, he proved that moral principles should take precedent over natural inclinations, and that sin is the choosing of a lower way when a higher way is possible.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Abbott's Bible Commentary
The Abingdon Bible Commentary
Clarke's Bible Commentary