

Testing the Son of God

¹ Filled with the holy Spirit, Jesus returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the desert ² for forty days, to be tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and when they were over he was hungry. ³ The devil said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread.” ⁴ Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘One does not live by bread alone.’” ⁵ Then he took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a single instant. ⁶ The devil said to him, “I shall give to you all this power and their glory; for it has been handed over to me, and I may give it to whomever I wish. ⁷ All this will be yours, if you worship me.” ⁸ Jesus said to him in reply, “It is written: ‘You shall worship the Lord, your God, and him alone shall you serve.’” ⁹ Then he led him to Jerusalem, made him stand on the parapet of the temple, and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, ¹⁰ for it is written: ‘He will command his angels concerning you, to guard you,’ ¹¹ and: ‘With their hands they will support you, lest you dash your foot against a stone.’” ¹² Jesus said to him in reply, “It also says, ‘You shall not put the Lord, your God, to the test.’” ¹³ When the devil had finished every temptation, he departed from him for a time. (Luke 4:1-13)

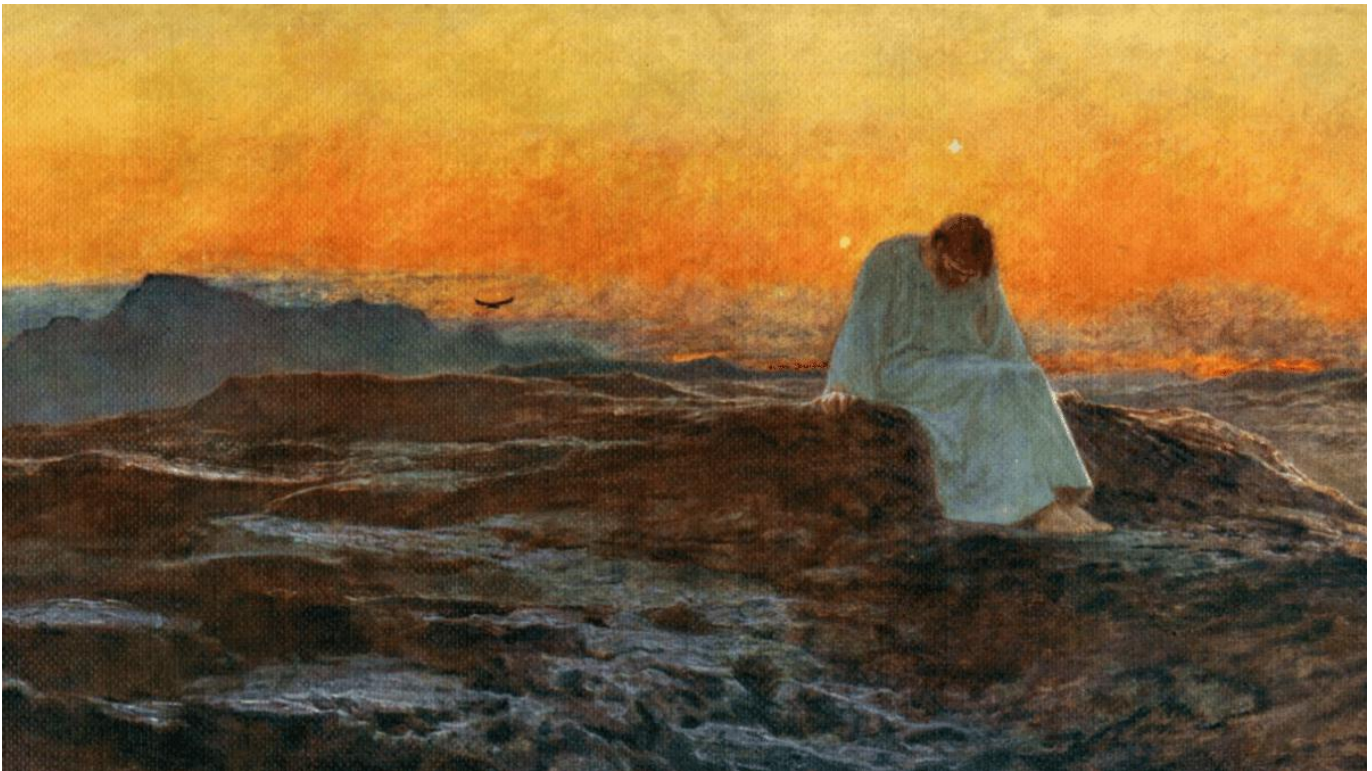


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Context

As we move from Ordinary Time into the Lenten Season, we experience a shift in trajectory of the Sunday gospel readings as the order changes to align with the liturgical season – and rightly so. Following the Sunday celebration of the “Baptism of the Lord” the ordinary time gospels moved ahead to the public ministry, e.g. preaching in Nazareth, calling disciples, the Sermon on the Plain and more. On this first Sunday of Lent, the gospel readings “reset” to pick up the account immediately following Jesus’ baptism in the Jordan River. Fresh from his baptism we find Jesus “filled with the Spirit.” Let us consider where this account falls in Luke’s narrative apart from its use in the Lenten season. In the Gospel according to

Luke the account of Jesus being tempted in the desert falls in the following “*orderly sequence*” (Luke 1:3).

Luke 1:5 – 2:52 The Infancy Narrative

Luke 3:1 – 4:13 Preparations for the Ministry of Jesus

3:1–6 The Setting of John’s Ministry

3:7–18 John’s Preaching

3:19–20 The Imprisonment of John

3:21–22 The Baptism of Jesus

3:23–38 The Genealogy of Jesus

4:1–13 The Temptation of Jesus (*Gospel for 1st Sunday in Lent*)

Luke 4:14 – 9:50 The Ministry in Galilee

4:14-30 Preaching in Nazareth (*Gospel for 3rd and 4th Sundays in Year C*)

5:1-11 Calling Disciples (*Gospel for 5th Sunday in Year C*)

6:17, 20-26 Sermon on the Plain (*Gospel for 6th and 7th Sunday in Year C - depends on when Lent starts*)

The narrative thrust introduces us to John the Baptist as a prelude to meeting the adult Jesus about to take on his very public ministry. Remember that in the gospel narrative just preceding the account of the temptation, Jesus had been at the Jordan River. “²¹ *After all the people had been baptized and Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, heaven was opened* ²² *and the holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.”* (Luke 3:21-22). Immediately following this account Jesus will begin his public ministry: “*Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit*” (4:14). It is no surprise that Luke continues to remind us of the animating and invigorating power of God’s spirit: “*Filled with the holy Spirit, Jesus...was led by the Spirit into the desert for forty days to be tempted by the devil.*” By using the divine passive (“was led”) and the preposition “in” before the Spirit, Luke is emphasizing the fact that it is God who is leading Jesus by means of the Spirit – into the desert/wilderness. The wilderness is no less part of the divine presence in the life of Jesus than is the serene scene at the Jordan River.

The Palestinian wilderness is not the sandy waste of the Sahara. The parts around the Dead Sea are utterly barren, but most of the Palestinian desert is semi-arid, with some vegetation, particularly in the winter. It was a dangerous place, uncharted, inhabited by wild animals and bandits. The wilderness was believed to be the haunt of demons (Isa 13:21; 34:14); it is no surprise that Jesus met the devil there. No surprise that Jesus encounters struggle, temptation and testing. The wilderness is where holiness is put on trial.

It was the place of struggle, temptation and testing for Israel during its 40-year sojourn in the Sinai. The specific mention of Jesus’ forty days in the desert is meant to trigger an association with Israel’s forty years of wandering in the wilderness. In Luke’s *Acts of the Apostles*, Stephen describes those years of wandering as years of testing and failure for the people of God (Acts 7:39–43).

In slowly drawing parallels between Jesus and Moses-led Israel, this episode highlights that Jesus is also tested in the desert but remains faithful. Perhaps one can look to the OT to find a divine purpose for Jesus’ temptation: “*testing you to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commandments*” (Deut 8:2). At the Jordan Jesus was declared to be the Son of God – thus the divine sonship of Jesus is not in question (Luke has even included a genealogy to that fact). Rather it seems as though the wilderness is the place where Jesus must come to accept and embrace what it means to be the Son of God. And so, the devil begins the temptations with “*If you are the Son of God*” (also validly translated as “*Since you are the Son of God*). It is no less a question for us – “since you are the Son of God” – we have expectations, hopes, and more. As Culpepper [97] notes: “On one level the story

describes Jesus' response to calls for misuse of his power and sonship. On another level, the story educates, disabusing the reader of any expectation that Jesus would manifest his sonship by a series of theatrical demonstrations. The work of the Spirit requires faithfulness; neither compromise with Satan nor concessions to popular demands could be allowed."

The Lucan Gospel unfolds in such a way that it creates misunderstanding, disappointment, confusion, and shattered expectations. One would not expect someone who is the Son of God to face opposition and hostility, as Jesus will. And the greatest of all paradoxes, the Son of God will be rejected by his own people as well as the Romans and will be condemned and executed on a cross. It is in this larger context, that we must understand the thrust of these three temptations in the wilderness.

Commentary

As often noted, Luke writes with a narrative intent. This is true also for the account of the temptations. Luke 4:1–13 presents a number of key elements linking it to surrounding material, helping to ensure its interpretation as a bridge scene moving Jesus from his reception of the Spirit at his baptism to his public ministry. The most obvious such bridges include references to the other worldly (3:21–22; 4:5), the setting of the wilderness in the vicinity of the Jordan (3:2–3, 4, 21; 4:1, 14), the Holy Spirit (3:22; 4:1, 1, 14, 16), Jesus' sonship (3:22, 38; 4:3, 9, 41 – *If you are the Son of God*), the attention to the meaning of Jesus' mission, and Jesus' encounter with hostile forces – human and spiritual (4:2–13, 22–30, 33–36).

Some of the bridges are less obvious. So often we skip over genealogies in Scripture, but our text is connected with the genealogy (3:23–38) that ends with "*Adam, son of God.*" How is Jesus, Son of God, the same and different from Adam? One similarity is that "[t]emptation is a universal human experience. Had Jesus not been tempted, he would not really have been human. ... The wonder is not that Jesus was incapable of sinning but that he was able to avoid sinning although he was tempted. Along with the birth narrative, therefore, the temptations make an important anti-docetic statement: Jesus was fully human and knew what it meant to be tempted." [Culpepper, 100-101; contra docetism heresy]

Testing and Temptations. *Filled with the holy Spirit, Jesus returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the desert² for forty days, to be tempted by the devil.* We are so used to hearing this story described as "Jesus' Temptations in the desert" that we pass over the word *peirozo* (4:2), a Greek word that can mean "temptation" or "testing." This word is not without its scriptural precedence and usage.

The word is often used in the Greek translation of the OT (LXX) for God testing people, for example:

- "*God put Abraham to the test*" by asking him to sacrifice his son (Genesis 22:1).
- "*Then the LORD said to Moses: I am going to rain down bread from heaven for you. Each day the people are to go out and gather their daily portion; thus will I test them, to see whether they follow my instructions or not.*" (Exodus 16:4)

Why does God test people? Scripture itself provides some answers:

- Dt 13:4: "*for the Lord, your God, is testing you, to know whether you indeed love the Lord, your God, with all your heart and soul*"
- Dt 8:16: "*that he might afflict you and test you, but also make you prosperous in the end*"
- Dt 8:2-3 (v.3 is quoted by Jesus in answer to the first "test"): "*Remember how for these forty years the Lord, your God, has directed all your journeying in the wilderness, so as to test you by affliction, to know what was in your heart: to keep his commandments, or not. He therefore let you be afflicted with hunger, and then fed you with manna, a food unknown to you and your ancestors,*

so you might know that it is not by bread alone that people live, but by all that comes forth from the mouth of the Lord.”

Generally when teachers or driving instructors give tests, they are not trying to flunk the students, but to help discover what they know and what they can do. This is often when we Christians balk and ask, “Why would Jesus need to be tested by God his Father?” – as we forget “*And Jesus advanced [in] wisdom and age and favor before God and man.*” (Luke 2:52) Part of the mystery of the Incarnation is to understand how Jesus can be truly God and truly man – to have divine knowledge and yet “*advance in wisdom.*” As Hebrews 4:15 says, “*For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has similarly been tested in every way, yet without sin*”.

As Joel Green [192] notes that there is a basis for this “test.” Jesus is empowered “by the Spirit, Jesus is full of the Spirit, and inspired by the Spirit. His central, active role is therefore fundamentally as God’s agent, and it is this special relationship and its implications that lie at the root of Jesus’ identity in Luke-Acts. Not surprisingly, then, it is this that will be tested in the encounter between Jesus and the devil.” The testing conducted by the devil is specific; it seeks to negate Jesus’ role as Son of God by either having Jesus reject the relationship outright or to mold the obedience to the Father to Jesus’ own human needs.

Luke is not just pointing within his own narrative, but has provided a tableau of reflections upon Israel’s wilderness wanderings. Green [192] suggests that we particularly pay close attention to the following:

- divine leading in the wilderness (Deut 8:2; cf. Luke 4:1);
- “forty” (Exod 16:35; Num 14:34; Deut 8:2, 4; cf. Luke 4:2);
- Israel as God’s son (e.g., Exod 4:22–23; cf. Luke 4:3, 9);
- the testing of Jesus is analogous to that experienced by Israel and the scriptural texts he cites derive from those events in which Israel was tested by God (Deuteronomy 6–8); and
- though Jesus was full of the Spirit and followed the Spirit’s guidance, Israel “rebelled and grieved his holy spirit” (Isa 63:10).

Being Tempted. The tradition that Jesus was tested has wide testimony in early Christianity. John references the testing of Jesus throughout his ministry (John 6:14-15; 7:1-9; 12:27-28). *Hebrews* is clear in its testimony that Jesus was tempted as we are tempted (Heb 2:14-18; 4:15).

The account in the Gospel of Mark says only that Jesus was tested, but Matthew and Luke describe three temptations. These are typical of the temptations Jesus faced throughout his life and typical as well of the testing his followers will undergo. What is different in Luke is that he changes the order of the temptations (bread, mountain, Temple) from that we find in Matthew’s account (bread, Temple, mountain). The sequence may have been attractive to Matthew because it concludes on a high mountain, just as Matthew’s Gospel concludes on a mountain in Galilee. The Lucan sequence reverses the last two temptations so that the climactic scene occurs at the Temple, where his Gospel begins and ends.

Culpepper [97] has a very interesting insight about the temptation account as a whole:

“The temptation scene is peculiar for several reasons: The devil appears and speaks to Jesus directly; Jesus responds three times, and each time his response is a quotation from the Scriptures; no one is present to witness or report these events; and the settings as well as the temptations themselves project important symbolic overtones. It has been suggested that the temptation scenes are based on Jesus’ responses to actual requests for a sign during his

ministry (see Luke 11:16, 29). At this point the Gospel of John, which contains no account of the temptations following the baptism of Jesus, may be helpful. More clearly than the other Gospels, John shows how the temptations may have had a basis in the ministry of Jesus as it was understood by the evangelists. Following the feeding of the 5,000, the crowd seeks Jesus out again, hoping that he will make bread for them (John 6:26, 30–31). The coming of the Greeks in John 12:20 brings Jesus as close to temptation as he ever comes in the Fourth Gospel, as he considers whether he should ask to be delivered from his hour (John 12:27). Later, at the death of Jesus, his kingship is declared in Hebrew, the language of religion; in Greek, the language of culture; and in Latin, the language of the state. The brothers of Jesus tempt him to go up to Jerusalem and show the people assembled there the works he could do (John 7:3). John further declares that Jesus' brothers did not believe in him, and Jesus said they belonged to the world (John 7:5–7). John, therefore, shows how Jesus faced the temptations in the course of his ministry, and it may actually be closer to the historical basis for the stylized and symbolic accounts of the temptations in Matthew and Luke."

Thoughts about temptations and the human will. "The devil made me do it." Don't we wish. Stoffregen offers some pastoral thoughts that I will repeat here

"Wherever it comes from, the tempter/tester does not have the power to make someone do something evil. Temptation is not coercion. The serpent in the garden can't make Eve and Adam eat the apple. The devil in our text can't make Jesus turn stones into bread. "To tempt" means to try and convince someone to do something. It means enticing someone to **want** to do something. Tempters can't make someone do something bad, but try to make the temptee **want** to do something bad. They don't take away the will. Rather, they try to change one's will."

"In my own experience, often when I sin, it is not usually a problem of knowledge. Many times I know what is good and bad. It is a problem of the will. I just want to do the bad; or there are times I just don't want to do the good. More often than not, it is not a question of ignorance -- of not knowing the difference between good and bad. It is a question of one's will or conviction -- what do I want to do and what will I do."

"It is the responsibility of the parents and of the church not only to teach its baptized members the difference between right and wrong; but also to help motivate them to **want** to do the right thing. The devil (and much of society) is still around trying to make us want to do the wrong thing."

"The way *Diabolos* seeks to change our wills is by lying, by stretching the truth. Generally, *Diabolos* entices us not with great evils, but with good things for the wrong reasons. It could be argued that none of Jesus' temptations were to do anything grossly evil, but to do some good things, but for the wrong reasons or at the wrong time. What's wrong with turning stones into bread (if one can do it) to feed the hungry? Later, Jesus will turn a couple fish and five loaves of bread into a feast for 5000. God provided Israel with manna in the wilderness. What's wrong with the King of kings and Lord of lords assuming control over the kingdoms of the world? Isn't that what we are expecting at the *parousia*? What's wrong with believing scriptures so strongly that the Son of God trusts the angels to protect him? In the other three gospels, Jesus will walk on water, perhaps slightly less difficult than floating on air. At the end of Luke, Jesus will be carried up into heaven (24:51)."

"The Slanderer entices Jesus with good things -- perhaps even proper things for one who is the

Son of God. Temptations/testings put us in a battle of wills -- perhaps like the battles between parents and children, or between any two people. Children want to do what they want to do when they want to do it -- and sometimes their plans conflict with what parents want them to do. The same can happen between any two or more people.”

The “Ground” of the Temptations. Before immersing ourselves in the details of the three temptations, perhaps an overview of their OT background would help locate our gospel in context.

- The First Temptation (4:3-4): *If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread.* The response is from Deuteronomy 8:3: “*It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone.'*” The context in Deuteronomy is that Moses reminds the people of Israel that God tested them in the wilderness by hunger, but he fed them with manna in order to make them understand that one does not live by bread alone.
- The Second Temptation (4:5-8): *I shall give to you all this power and their glory; for it has been handed over to me, and I may give it to whomever I wish. ⁷ All this will be yours, if you worship me.*” The response is from Deuteronomy 6:13: “*It is written: 'You shall worship the Lord, your God, and him alone shall you serve.'*” The context in Deuteronomy is that Moses addresses the people of Israel prior to entering the land of promise. He calls upon the people to fear and love the Lord always. He provides a creed for them, the Shema, “*Hear, O Israel....* (6:4), tells them not to forget who gave the land, and admonishes them to worship and serve the Lord.
- The Third Temptation (4:9-12): “*If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, ¹⁰ for it is written: 'He will command his angels concerning you, to guard you,' ¹¹ and: 'With their hands they will support you, lest you dash your foot against a stone.'*” Here the devil quotes Psalm 91:11-12. The response is from Deuteronomy 6:16: “*You shall not put the Lord, your God, to the test.*” The context in Deuteronomy is the same as the previous episode (Deut 6:13). Moses exhorts the people not to test the Lord as they did at Massah, a place of quarreling, where the people of Israel demanded water from Moses, which he finally obtained by striking a rock (Exodus 17:1-7).

We have already suggested that the testing ground is Jesus’ relationship with the Father in heaven. The background is Israel’s wilderness experience, but what is the narrative ground that Luke seeks to plow within this Gospel? The following insights are largely taken from Culpepper [98] with minor textual edits.

- (1) *The temptations clarify the nature of Jesus’ work as the Son of God.* Following the infancy narratives, the finding of Jesus in the Temple at age 12, his baptism and declaration that he was the Son of God, and genealogy (that concludes with “Son of God”), the temptations serve to interpret the implications of his identity for his coming ministry. Jesus will fulfill the heritage of Israel, combat the rule of Satan, and fulfill his work as Savior by his faithfulness.
- (2) *The temptations identify Jesus with the heritage of Israel.* Like Israel, Jesus was led by the Spirit in the wilderness. Israel was there for 40 years; Jesus for 40 days. The temptation to make bread evokes memories of the manna God supplied Israel. Even more clearly, the three quotations from Deuteronomy link the temptation scene with Israel’s experience. Consequently, the three temptations themselves may be seen as corresponding to the temptations of Israel, which involved bread (Exod 16:15), testing the Lord (Exod 17:1–7), and idolatry (Exodus 32).
- (3) *The temptations mirror the conflict of God’s reign with the reign of Satan.* The interpretation of the parable of the sower explains that some do not receive the Word because, like the birds who peck the seeds, the devil comes and snatches the Word from them (8:12). The success of the mission of

the seventy signaled the fall of Satan from heaven (10:18). Later, Jesus explains that he did not cast out demons by the power of Beelzebul, but that the coming of the kingdom is a sign of Satan's defeat (11:14–23). Similarly, the crippled woman is identified as “a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen long years” (13:16). Not surprising is Luke's emphasis that the failures of Jesus' disciples during the events of Jesus' passion are due to Satan's temptations (22:3, 31). Jesus' conflict with Satan at the beginning of his ministry, therefore, serves as an interpretive frame that enables the reader to understand the whole of Jesus' ministry as an attack on the enslaving and destructive effects of Satan's work.

- (4) *The temptations emphasize that Jesus' ministry should be understood as the fulfillment of the Scriptures.* As we have noted, one of the striking features of these verses is that in Jesus' three responses to the devil he quotes scriptures. There is no other dialogue or interpretation; these are the only words Jesus speaks. The effect is to focus attention on both the power and the fulfillment of Scripture. Throughout Luke, the Scriptures form the context for understanding the meaning of the Gospel narrative. The annunciations echo biblical hopes and expectations. John's work is a fulfillment of the prophets (see 3:4–6). Jesus' inaugural address in Nazareth announces the fulfillment of Isaiah 61 (see 4:18–19), and his response to John's queries again points to the fulfillment of the prophets (see 7:18–23). The end of the Gospel makes the same point: Jesus fulfilled what was written in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms (24:44), and those who would understand Jesus must have their minds open to the Scriptures (24:45).
- (5) *The temptations offer Jesus' followers a model for resisting temptation.* In various respects, Luke paints a picture of Jesus as a model for his followers. In Luke Jesus is more frequently portrayed as exemplifying characteristically Christian virtues: Jesus is empowered by the Spirit; he prays regularly; he is compassionate toward the outcast and afflicted; he associates with women, sinners, and tax collectors; and he dies a martyr's death, praying for his persecutors. In the temptation scene, therefore, Jesus faithfully resists temptations to do less than or other than he was called to do. He relies on Scripture and refuses to put God to the test. The temptation scene, therefore, can serve as an example story for all who are tempted.

The First Test. ¹ *Filled with the holy Spirit, Jesus returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the desert* ² *for forty days, to be tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and when they were over he was hungry.* ³ *The devil said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread.”* ⁴ *Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘One does not live by bread alone.’”*

Jesus has been fasting for forty days. He is hungry and vulnerable – and in a weakened physical and mental state. In years when Lent allows us to celebrate the 6th Sunday of Ordinary Time, that gospel proclaims: “*Blessed are you who are hungry.*” Jesus is now one of them. In the midst of his hunger, Jesus is tempted to take care of his own needs. If the sons of Israel were miraculously fed by manna, why shouldn't the Son of God enjoy the same care? Jesus is challenged to repeat the sign of God's provision by providing for his own needs rather than depending on God's provision for his needs.

But the question also points past Jesus' immediate need. How will Jesus respond to the physical needs of others? Will he meet their expectations and provide abundant food, having people follow him because he satisfies their temporal needs. As essential as eating is, it is not essential to the kingdom of God (*cf.* Luke 9:58, 10:4, 12:29-31). To respond to the people's pressing needs in ever-miraculous ways does not lead others to a true experience of the kingdom of God. The temptation that Jesus faces is the compassionate response to people and their needs and all the while also calling them to a life of discipleship that calls for

wholehearted seeking after the kingdom of God rather than food and drink.

There is no question that Luke presents Jesus as one who is genuinely concerned for the poor, the outcasts, the needy, and the hungry. In the beatitudes in 6:20-23 Jesus pronounces a blessing on the poor, the hungry, the weeping. How will Jesus conduct his ministry of compassion to the poor and needy? One easy way would be to use his miraculous powers to turn stones to bread. But his answer to that suggestion was that one does not live by bread alone. The kingdom of God is more than bread.

A theme that Stoffregen presents with other passages is that Jesus is not primarily motivated by needs, neither his own or those of others, but by the Word of God (which frequently leads Jesus to care for human needs). Our mission, should we choose to accept it, is not to seek needs that we might fulfill, but to seek to live by the Word of God. Meeting human needs is certainly a very good thing to do; but can it not also be a temptation from the Slanderer to lead us away from God's Word?

I think that we frequently see temptations as doing bad things, as enticements to break the latter commandments of the Law: to steal, to lie, to commit adultery, etc. These tests are attacks on the first commandments, especially the first commandment. Can "doing good things for the needy" become another god whom we worship? Whom do we allow to run our lives? Does it lead to codependency, where the other person, the needy one controls our lives, rather than God?

The Second Temptation. ⁵ *Then he took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a single instant.* ⁶ *The devil said to him, "I shall give to you all this power and their glory; for it has been handed over to me, and I may give it to whomever I wish.* ⁷ *All this will be yours, if you worship me."* ⁸ *Jesus said to him in reply, "It is written: 'You shall worship the Lord, your God, and him alone shall you serve.'"*

From the mundane of concerns about daily bread, we are taken to loft heights. In the second temptation the devil "leads" Jesus up. The same verb "lead" was used earlier in v. 1 to speak of the Spirit's leading of Jesus in the wilderness. The devil showed Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and promised to give him all their power and glory if he would only worship him. There is the claim that the authority and the glory of the kingdoms of the world have been given to the devil, so he can give it to whomever he wishes. Interestingly, Jesus does not dispute (answer) the claim of the devil that the kingdoms of the world belong to him. Green (*The Gospel of Luke*, 194) states: "... we have been led to believe that 'all the world' was under the charge of the Roman emperor (2:1; 3:1). Now, however, in a way clearly parallel to the scenario painted in Revelation 13, we discover that the world of humanity is actually ruled by the devil."

Or is this just one of the devil's lies? If so, it isn't worth Jesus' effort to argue with this liar. The devil will say anything to try and sway Jesus over to his side. The devil will make promises that he is powerless to keep. He is called the "father of lies" (Jn 8:44). Is the devil in possession of the kingdoms of the world? The devil can't make people act evilly, but is very good at enticing them to such deeds -- often with false promises. The history of civilization is laced with narratives of the corrupting influence of power and glory in the world. Is the devil tempting Jesus to enter the world of secular/political power? Wouldn't this be a way to see the kingdom of God take hold in the world? Why not do it the way it's done by nations, kings and governors.

Bratcher notes: "The temptation for Jesus was whether he would opt for political power and success or will he choose the path that may lead to suffering, humiliation and death? Will he play the game of power politics, jockeying for position, climbing to the top by hook or crook, or will he take the hard road of the suffering servant? Political ambition and the desire for success could, of course, be easily rationalized as being for a good cause, God's cause." Jesus' response makes it clear that God's will leads to a more costly way, but there can be no compromise. Jesus' response is almost a quote from Dt 6:13: "The LORD

your God you shall fear; him you shall serve, and by his name alone you shall swear.”

It is also good to recall Psalm 2:8 – “*You are my son; today I have begotten you. Ask it of me, and I will give you the nations as your inheritance, and, as your possession, the ends of the earth.*” God’s purpose is to grant Jesus an everlasting kingdom—a promise made in 1:32–33, now recalled by this faint echo of Ps 2:8 and indeed by the devil’s own offer. The devil proposes to displace God as Jesus’ benefactor. The devil will give him what is due, but in the process extract a great price—that is, Jesus’ allegiance. In effect, this is an invitation for Jesus to deny his identity as God’s Son, substituting in its place an analogous relationship to the devil. Resident in the devil’s own words, though, is a recognition that these two possibilities are not really parallel after all, since the devil is not co-equal with God. Whatever rule the devil exercises is that allowed him by God; he can only delegate to Jesus what has already been delegated to him. What Jesus is offered, then, is a shabby substitute for the divine sonship that is his by birth. [from Green, 194-95]

As Culpepper [99] notes: “This is the first reference to authority in the Gospel, but Luke is more concerned with the exercise of authority than any of the other Gospels. Jesus taught with authority (4:32) and commanded the unclean spirits (who were subject to the devil) with such authority that they came out (4:36). He had authority to forgive sins (5:24). A centurion recognized his authority (7:8). Jesus gave the Twelve authority over demons and diseases (9:1). Jesus claimed that he saw Satan fall from heaven and gave his disciples authority to tread on snakes and scorpions (10:19). He instructed them to fear the one who has authority to cast them into hell (12:5). In Luke, therefore, the authority of God, exercised by Jesus, is superior to that of the authority of the devil, exercised through unclean spirits and ‘the kingdoms of the world.’”

The Third Test. ”⁹ *Then he led him to Jerusalem, made him stand on the parapet of the temple, and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, ¹⁰for it is written: ‘He will command his angels concerning you, to guard you,’ ¹¹and: ‘With their hands they will support you, lest you dash your foot against a stone.’” ¹²Jesus said to him in reply, “It also says, ‘You shall not put the Lord, your God, to the test.’” ¹³When the devil had finished every temptation, he departed from him for a time.*

The climactic scene occurs in Jerusalem, where the devil takes Jesus to the “parapet” of the Temple. There are no contemporary references to this feature of the Temple, but it is often supposed that the site intended is the southeast corner of the Temple wall, its highest point above the valley below. In a quite conniving manner, the devil frames the third temptation in a quotation from Scripture. Twice Jesus has fended off temptations with words from Scripture, so this time the devil addresses Jesus by citing a text from the Psalms, in effect saying: “Did the psalmist not promise angels to protect you and to bear you up so that you would not even strike your foot against a stone?” (Ps 91:11–12; the Sunday psalm) “If you are the Son of God,” he challenges Jesus once more, “throw yourself down from here.” What is at stake is God’s promise.

“Specifically, Jesus was tempted to call upon God to deliver him from death in Jerusalem. Ironically, as every Christian reader knows, Jesus would eventually face death in Jerusalem, and when he did he would choose not his own deliverance but faithfulness to his Father’s will (22:42). Jesus would fulfill his divine sonship not by escaping death but by accepting death and defeating it.” (Culpepper, 100) We are called to recognize an even deeper mystery, known already to the believing community of which Luke is a part, that divine rescue may come *through* suffering and death and not only *before* (and *from*) them.

Part of this test deals with the proper use of the Word of God. Stoffregen writes, “The devil was suggesting that on the basis of Scripture Jesus must believe and insist on divine protection. Suffering and

death would be a sign of weak faith. Vulnerability to life-threatening situations would be a sign of divine displeasure. He after all is the Son of God! As Son, the least he should expect is safety and protection from his heavenly Father. He should jump off from this great height with the confidence that God will protect him.”

The devil asks Jesus to prove his faith on the parapet of the temple in Jerusalem. Jesus will not do that now nor will he do it later. The next time Jesus goes to the temple in Jerusalem, he isn't taken to the top of the temple, but to the top of a cross. It isn't the devil who tempts him to jump down, but the people who cry out, 'If you are the Son of God, jump down from the cross. Save yourself and then we will believe in you.' Jesus will not come down. The angels will not save him from stubbing his feet; they will not save him from death on a cross.

The temptations being completed – and a foreshadowing of the temptations Jesus will face in ministry – the devil “*departed from him for a time.*” Satan will return later in the Gospel story, in the events leading up to Jesus' death (see 22:3, 31, 53).

A final thought. Although the temptation story does not offer ethical instructions that cover every eventuality, it does describe the perennial ethical challenges that Christians face: the temptations to forget one's baptismal identity, to attempt to use one's religion for personal gain, to try to be successful rather than faithful, to be dazzled by the riches of the world, to make compromises where one is called to stand firm, and to avoid the path of sacrifice and suffering. Christian ethics does not come prepackaged. The call is not to adherence to a list of rules and regulations but to faithfulness to the call and purposes of God.

Notes

4:1 Filled with the holy Spirit: as a result of the descent of the Spirit upon him at his baptism (Luke 3:21-22), Jesus is now equipped to overcome the devil. Just as the Spirit is prominent at this early stage of Jesus' ministry (Luke 4:1, 14, 18), so too it will be at the beginning of the period of the church in Acts (Acts 1:4; 2:4, 17). This is also Luke's characteristic way of designating the prophetic figures of his narrative (see 1:15, 41, 67; as well see Acts 4:8, 31; 6:3, 5; 7:55; 11:24; 13:9)

4:2 for forty days: the mention of forty days recalls the forty years of the wilderness wanderings of the Israelites during the Exodus (Deut 8:2). The 40 days in the wilderness without food also calls to mind the prophet Elijah (1 Kgs 19:8) and Moses who fasted for 40 days before writing the words of the covenant (Ex 34:28).

tempted: It is difficult to know how to translate *peirazo* (4:2) and the more intensive *ekpeirazo* (4:13) -- “to test” or “to tempt”. The word is used in the OT (LXX) when speaking of God testing people (e.g. Abraham in Gen 22:1). Of course that only raises the question why God tests people. Some answer from Scripture include: Dt 13:3b: “for the LORD your God is testing you, to know whether you indeed love the LORD your God with all your heart and soul” and Dt 8:16: “to humble you and to test you, and in the end to do you good.” Clearly the purpose is positive – to help people discover what they know and can do. *peirazo* and *ekpeirazo* can also have negative connotations: “to tempt” or “to try and cause someone to make a mistake” or “to try and cause someone to sin.” At the same time that God is “testing” the strength of one's faithfulness, the “Tempter” may be “tempting” someone to sin. Every other time *peirazo/ekpeirazo* are used in Luke, the tempters/testers are human beings: a lawyer (10:25) and part of a crowd (11:16).

devil: Luke uses *diabolos* in this account (versus Mark's use of *satanas*; this same distinction is

maintained in 8:12, Acts 10:38; 13:10 – although Luke also uses *satanas* elsewhere in an equivalent sense – and *beelzeboul* as well). Lest we make too much distinction it should be noted that literally *diabolos* means “the slanderer” or as an adjective: “slanderous”. (This meaning is used in 1 Tim 3:11; 2 Tim 3:3; Tit 2:3.) It is the word used in the LXX to translate the Hebrew *SaTaN*, which literally means “adversary”. One is reminded to the LXX *diabolos* of *The Book of Job* where the *diabolos* is God’s prosecuting attorney.

he ate nothing... he was hungry: Luke does not describe this as “fasting.” The emphasis on the condition of Jesus marks the testing at the end of a period when Jesus is weak from hunger.

4:3 stone to become bread: These words echo John the Baptist’s declaration that God could raise up “children for Abraham from these stones” (3:8).

4:4 One does not live by bread alone: The phrase refers to the full text of Dt 8:3 (which Matthew carries) that concludes: “but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.” This is a passage which stresses the Israelite dependence upon God during their wanderings in the wilderness.

4:5 all the kingdoms of the world: Luke uses *oikoumené* rather than *kosmos* (as in Matthew). The Lucan use of *kosmos* is limited to the created, natural order. His use of *oikoumené* points to the social and political order. This is consistent with “kingdoms” (*basileia*) pointing to empires and city states.

in a single instant. Only Luke makes a notation of the time – perhaps to clarify the visionary nature of the experience?

4:7 worship: *proskyeno* – a standard Lucan term for worship or obeisance

4:9 to Jerusalem: the Lucan order of the temptations concludes on the parapet of the temple in Jerusalem, the city of destiny in Luke-Acts. It is in Jerusalem that Jesus will ultimately face his destiny (Luke 9:51; 13:33).

4:13 for a time: the devil’s opportune time will occur before the passion and death of Jesus (Luke 22:3, 31-32, 53).

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