

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *Bibliotheca Sacra* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bib-sacra_01.php

ARTICLE V.

THE TEMPTATION.

BY REV. LEMUEL S. POTWIN, NORTH GREENWICH, CONN.

"THOU hast had much to say of Paradise lost," said Thomas Ellwood to Milton, "but what hast thou to say of Paradise found?" The poet soon found something to say. The title of his poem was "Paradise Regained," but his real theme was the Temptation of Christ.

"I, who erewhile the happy garden sung
By one man's disobedience lost, now sing
Recovered paradise to all mankind,
By one man's firm obedience, fully tried
Through all temptation, and the tempter foiled
In all his wiles, defeated and repulsed,
And Eden raised in the waste wilderness." — Bk. I.

According to this poem the primary design of Satan was to ascertain whether Jesus was in a pre-eminent sense the Son of God:

"Then hear, O Son of David, virgin-born, —
For Son of God to me is yet in doubt:
Of the Messiah I had heard, foretold
By all the prophets; of thy birth, at length
Announced by Gabriel, with the first I knew,
And of the angelic song, in Bethlehem field,
On thy birth-night, that sung thee Saviour born.
From that time seldom have I ceased to eye
Thy infancy, thy childhood, and thy youth,
Thy manhood last, though yet in private bred;
Till, at the ford of Jordan, whither all
Flock to the Baptist, I, among the rest
(Though not to be baptized), by voice from heaven,
Heard thee pronounced the Son of God beloved.
Thenceforth I thought thee worth my nearer view
And narrower scrutiny, that I might learn
In what degree or meaning thou art called
The Son of God, which bears no single sense:

The Son of God I also am, or was ;
 And if I was, I am — relation stands :
 All men are sons of God ; yet thee I thought
 In some respect far higher so declared ;
 Therefore I watched thy footsteps from that hour,
 And followed thee still on to this waste wild." — Bk. IV.

To accomplish his object Satan subjects Jesus to a two-fold series of tests, the one designed to try his human virtue, the other to try his absolute divinity. In the first temptation, unable to learn his divinity (the miracle of turning stones to bread being declined), the tempter assails the *appetite* of Jesus with "pompous delicacies":

"Alas, how simple, to these cates compared,
 Was that crude apple that diverted Eve!"

He then tempts him with the offer of riches :

"Get riches first, get wealth, and treasure heap ;
 Not difficult, if thou hearken to me."

Then he tries to awaken a love of glory :

"Think not so slight of glory ; therein least
 Resembling thy great Father."

Thus, in the view of the poet, the first temptation exhausted the power of Satan to lead Jesus into *self-indulgence*.

The second temptation (following the order of Luke) has regard to the future kingdom. Satan urges Jesus to commence to reign immediately :

"Think'st thou to regain
 Thy right by sitting still, or thus retiring?"

Then, showing him all the kingdoms of the world, he advises him to attempt a martial kingdom, like the Parthians, commencing with an alliance with them:

"It shall be my task
 To render thee the Parthian at dispose."

Then he recommends a kingdom of outward magnificence and luxury, and promises to secure to him the Roman throne.

Finally he recommends a life of study and and contemplation and special devotion to heathen lore, as fitting him for the highest kingdom :

“ These rules will render thee a king complete
Within thyself, much more with empire joined.”

The price at which Satan holds his assistance in establishing the kingdom is, that Jesus shall render him homage. The indignant rejection of his offer leaves him still in doubt as to Jesus's higher nature ; but he has found him, by this and the previous trial,

To the utmost of *mere man* both wise and good,—
Not more.”

The third trial was to settle the question of his divinity:

“ Therefore to know what more thou art than man
Worth naming Son of God by voice from heaven,
Another method I must now begin.”

This method was to place Jesus on the highest pinnacle of the temple where he could not stand without a miracle :

“ Now show thy progeny ; if not to stand,
Cast thyself down ; safely, if Son of God.”

Jesus stood safely, and Satan, convinced of his divinity, abandons the temptation.

Had Jesus turned the stones into bread at the outset, it would seem that the temptation must then have ended ; for the miracle which the poet imagines on the pinnacle of the temple was not more decisive. But it was the design of God that Jesus' absolute deity should not be at once revealed to the tempter, that he might be emboldened to try his utmost power, and thus experience a heavier defeat. Satan must be vanquished, not by a mere miracle, but first by moral forces — by the power of a perfect human character. Thus Jesus, in his entire nature, becomes the “ Queller of Satan.”

“ Hail, Son of the Most High ! heir of both worlds !
Queller of Satan ! on thy glorious work
Now enter, and begin to save mankind.

The theory of the temptation given by the great poet of theology, though we cannot justify its wanderings from the evangelic narrative, is worthy of high regard, from the sublime prominence which it gives, in the system of redemption, to the great trial of the Second Adam.

Let us present briefly a few other opinions, before we examine the narrative itself. In the enumeration of the temptations, the order of Matthew is observed, except in the quotation from Ellicott, who, with Milton, follows the order of Luke, and places the temptation of the "pinnacle" last.

Neander (in "Life of Christ") says on the first temptation and our Lord's answer: "The principle involved in the reply [Man shall not live by bread alone, etc.] was, that he had no wish to free himself from the sense of human weakness and dependence; that he would work no miracle for that purpose."

On the second he says: "These words [Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God] involve the principle that a miracle may not be wrought except for wise ends and with adequate motives; never with no other aim than to display the power of working wonders."

On the third: "Herein was the temptation, that the Messiah should not develop his kingdom gradually and in its pure spirituality from within, but should establish it at once as an outward dominion; and that, although this will not be accomplished without the use of an evil agency, the end would justify the means."

Of the temptation as a whole he says: "The whole temptation taken together presents us one idea; a contrast, namely, between the founding of God's kingdom as pure, spiritual, and tried by many forms of self-denial, in the slow development ordained for it by its head; and the sudden establishment of that kingdom before men as visible and earthly."

Olshausen characterizes each temptation thus: "The point of the first temptation is very justly regarded to lie in the thought of employing the higher powers bestowed upon him for satisfying his own wants."

"The point of the second temptation lies in the thought of *parading* the gift of working miracles."

"In this last temptation proud lust of dominion appears to be the point."

Ellicott finds in the three temptations "three spiritual assaults, directed against the three portions of our composite nature. To the *body* is presented the temptation of satisfying its wants by a display of power, which would have tacitly abjured its dependence on the Father and its perfect submission to his heavenly will. To the *soul*, the longing appetitive soul, was addressed the temptation of Messianic dominion over all the kingdoms of the world, and of accomplishing in a moment of time all for which the incense of the one sacrifice on Calvary is still rising up on the altar of God. To the *spirit*, the temptation of using that power which belonged to him as God to vindicate his own eternal nature, and to display by one dazzling miracle the true relation in which Jesus of Nazareth stood to men and to angels and to God."

If we add to the foregoing the remark of Alford on the second temptation, that it was "one not of ambition, but of *presumption*," we shall have before us the principal opinions as to the nature of our Lord's temptation.

It will be seen that the first opinion makes especially prominent the desire of Satan

"To understand [his] adversary, who
And what he is."

The second emphasizes the relation of the temptation to the future kingdom.

The others emphasize the effort to corrupt Jesus, by leading him to adopt wrong principles of action.

In other words, the prominent thought in Milton is the conflict itself with Satan; with Neander, it is the right development of God's kingdom; with the others, the rectitude of the Redeemer. With the poet it is a question of championship; with the church historian, a question of the principles of redemption; with the others, more a question of *personal* principles.

Without attempting to compare at length the above opinions with each other, or with the sacred narrative, let us now briefly investigate the significance of each of the three temptations.

It is generally admitted, we presume, that the temptation extended through the forty days of fasting; or at least that it was not confined to the close of that period. The language of Mark is: "He was there in the wilderness forty days, tempted of Satan;" and of Luke: "Being forty days tempted of the devil."¹ Why then were the three temptations recorded, since they were not all? Are they not to be regarded as *specimens* of a series of severe trials, to which our Lord was subjected at the hands of Satan? Taking, then, the first temptation, we ask: What was the class of temptations of which this stands as the representative? The answer may be found in the opening words of the devil: "*If thou be the Son of God.*" These words break the silence of those forty days, and show us that during that awful period Satan has been endeavoring, with all his arts and might, to *undermine Jesus' faith in his own divinity and sonship*. In how many ways Satan drove those torturing words into Jesus' soul we know not. We can easily imagine that all the features of his human nature, all his dependence on earthly things, and his subjection to his earthly parents, were brought in to daunt the young Messiah, and crush his aspirations as a Saviour. "If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread." The argument of the tempter seems to be this: 'Thou canst not rise above thy human dependence. Weak, faint, hungry One, see if thou canst supply thy pressing wants by a miracle. If thou dost not, thou art not the Son of God.' The point we have in mind may be expressed thus: Did Satan really desire that the proposed miracle should be

¹ Καὶ ἦν ἐκεῖ ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ ἡμέρας τεσσαράκοντα, πειραζόμενος ὑπὸ τοῦ Σατανᾶ, Mark i. 13.

Καὶ ἦγετο ἐν τῷ πνεύματι εἰς τὴν ἐρήμον, ἡμέρας τεσσαράκοντα πειραζόμενος ὑπὸ τοῦ διαβόλου, Luke iv. 1, 2.

performed, or, presuming that it would not be performed, did he desire that its non-performance should recoil upon the mind of Jesus, and produce doubt and despondency? We suppose the latter. The artfulness of the temptation lies, we think, in proposing a *false test* of Jesus' divinity (as was afterwards done when a "sign from heaven" was demanded), and yet a test plausible in itself. The language employed certainly admits of this idea.¹ Compare the words used to our Saviour on the cross: "If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross."² Was it the desire or expectation of those who uttered this taunt that he should come down?

That the main design of the tempter was to call in question our Lord's sonship and divinity, and thus his capability of being a Saviour, by insisting on a miracle which he did not expect to have performed, seems probable from several considerations:

1. Such a temptation would have been exceedingly *natural* and *timely*. Jesus was about to commence his public work. He would naturally feel his responsibility as he had never felt it before. Now, therefore, was the time for Satan to interpose, and, if possible, break down his purpose, by convincing him of his inability to fulfil his great mission. If the temptation be understood as merely an attempt to

¹ *Εἰ κῆρις εἶ τοῦ Θεοῦ, εἰπέ ἵνα οἱ λίθοι οὗτοι ἔρπονται γέφυραι* (Matt. iv. 3). Alford, following Meyer, says: "The *εἰ* implies no doubt of the Lord's Messiahship," But neither does it imply any acknowledgment of his Messiahship. The indicative in a condition has, we suppose, no power of determining the relation of the supposition to reality, or to the doubt or certainty of the speaker. Such a relation is determined either by the form of the *conclusion* (as when a past tense with *ἔσται* is used) or by the connection of thought. When joined with the imperative, the indicative with *εἰ* expresses *supposition for argument's sake*; but the design of the argument may be either to actualize the conclusion or to disprove the condition. Euthymius, as quoted by Alford (with Meyer), says that Satan designed to taunt our Lord with not being the Son of God, if he does not perform the miracle; but the taunt is regarded, if we understand the quotation, merely as an incentive to the miracle, and not as conveying the chief force of the temptation. The language is: *ἔφη οὗτοι παρακινῶνται τῷ λόγῳ, καθάπερ ἀπειθεῖς ἐπὶ τῷ μὴ εἶναι κῆρις Θεοῦ.*

² *Εἰ σὺς εἶ τοῦ Θεοῦ, καθάβηθι ἀπὸ τοῦ σταυροῦ,* Matt. xxvii. 40.

lead Jesus to use his high powers to satisfy his own wants, we should rather look for it at Nazareth, in his earlier days, than now, at the great crisis in his earthly life.

2. Such a temptation would be a *severe* one, and would touch a vital point in the work of redemption. Notwithstanding the ingenious efforts of commentators, it is hard to see why our Saviour should be driven into the wilderness, to enter into a mighty conflict with the devil, on the point whether he should ever work a miracle to satisfy his personal wants. But if Satan designed to dispute and deny his *power* to work a miracle, and to fling this reproach in his face, till he should either believe it, or be maddened to attempt a miracle to pander to the devil's curiosity, then we can see that, to one who had *not yet performed his first miracle*, the taunt was bitter, and the temptation severe.

3. It was unlikely that Jesus would perform *any* miracle at the devil's bidding. Satan could not have expected it; but the grounds for demanding one were plausible enough to form a basis for discrediting Jesus' powers, and insisting that he was no Saviour.

4. The view we advocate harmonizes with the notion that this temptation is a *specimen*. The attempt to discredit Jesus' power as a divine Saviour, on the ground of his human nature and lowly condition, admits of a great variety of modes, and when pursued with the malice and ingenuity of an arch-fiend, would not fail to move the Saviour's soul in intense conflict.

If it be objected to this view, that Satan could not have undertaken so hopeless a task as is here supposed, it may be sufficient answer, to say that his votaries undertook the very same task during our Lord's public life. They tried to put down Jesus' claim, by demanding miracles which they never expected him to perform, and did not believe he *could* perform. In this they were of their father the devil.

This view of the temptation throws light upon the significance of our Saviour's reply: "Man shall not live by bread

alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." He might have declined the miracle without giving a reason. If he afterwards peremptorily refused a sign to an "evil and adulterous generation" which sought it from improper motives, much more might he have refused one to the evil one himself. Yet he condescended to show that the miracle was needless, and that such a test as Satan proposed was therefore unreasonable: "I will not perform the miracle, because, being unnecessary and no part of my duty, I will not stake the evidence of my Sonship on it. 'The meat that perisheth' is little worth. I will not doubt that I am the Son of God at such a test as thine. I decline the devil's miracle, and shall only work the works of him that sent me."

Satan undoubtedly was not satisfied with the reason. Changing the words afterwards uttered at the cross, but not their spirit, we can hear him say: "Ah! thou that wast just called the Son of God, thou that aspirest to be the world's Redeemer, save thyself from hunger, and I will be thy first follower."

The first temptation leaves Jesus undaunted, and therefore victorious; and Satan foiled, but not disheartened.

Much that we have said on the first temptation is applicable also to the second, which, like the first, is directed to undermining Jesus' faith in himself. The method pursued, however, is different. Our Saviour had quoted the scriptures. He had also expressed great faith in the care of God. These two circumstances are artfully chosen as the basis of a new trial. Satan, too, knows something of the scriptures, and with their help, he will now challenge our Lord's divinity on the score of his want of *faith* in God. "If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down; for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee, and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone." In other words, "Show me now your trust in the Father. Show me your reliance on a promise like one which you yourself just now

quoted. Leap from this temple-roof; fear not the dizzy height, and trust the promise I have quoted. If thou dost not, thou art not the Son of God. Thou must go back to thy Nazareth, and think no more of being the world's Redeemer."

Thus it appears that, while the first temptation was a blow at Jesus' *power*, this was a blow at his *faith*, his union with the Father. The first said: Thou art not a miracle-worker; this: Thou art not a man of God even, much less the Son of God. Taking this, then, as a *specimen temptation*, we must conceive of every possible device that Satan could invent, by means of false tests, to break down Jesus' confidence in his own filial piety. Here was the struggle with the horrors of despondency.

But Jesus again refuses to do the devil's bidding: "I reject thy test. I am the Son of God, but I will not do an act of presumption to please thy curiosity, or avert thy shaft of malice. Say, if thou wilt, 'Thou art not the Son of God.' I will not tempt the Lord God in order to save myself the pangs of thy temptations."

Thus calmly and sublimely does our Lord rise above the second temptation, holding firmly his inward faith, while, with the self-control of true greatness, he refuses the vain outward exhibition of that faith.

Satan was already vanquished, but he seems not to have known it. He was vanquished because he had not shaken the soul of Jesus from its confidence in himself and his mission. Yet he may have fancied that because he had plied the Redeemer with outward tests which had not been fulfilled, therefore he had planted in his breast some doubt and distrust. This, then, was the time for his great proposal, his offer of a last resort to dispirited enthusiasm. He brings before Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them. He offers them as the reward of fealty to himself. "Abandon thy purpose. Behold my influence over the world. Thou art not able to destroy my power. Art thou bent on such a mad career? Take the world as

it is. I will give thee a high place in its honors. I only claim the *highest* for myself; for I am the 'prince of this world.' "

Here is found the goal of all the temptations. The tempter has striven to fill the Saviour's soul with doubt and despondency, that he may be won over from the task of rescuing the slaves of Satan, and may become himself the vassal of the wicked one. This is the decisive moment. The history of the ages of eternity hangs on the answer of Jesus "Get thee behind me Satan; for it is written 'Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.'" This is all. Jesus declares his loyalty to the Lord God, and his determination to bring back a lost world to his service. The devil quails before a divine firmness and an unchangeable purpose.

If it be asked wherein this temptation can be regarded as a *specimen*, we answer that it presents the *outward difficulties* in the way of Jesus, as the other two had insisted on his inward unfitness for his work. The offer of those glorious worldly kingdoms which Satan made as a tempting prize, was suggestive of every species of *worldly opposition* if Jesus rejected the offer. It was as if a general should offer to his antagonist the second place in his own army. He need not add: "If you decline the offer, you must *fight* those whom you would otherwise command"; for this would be taken for granted. We, therefore, who know the subsequent history of our Lord, can see in this temptation the shadow of those dark days when the "prince of this world" came again with his array of both spiritual and temporal power, and brought Jesus to the cross. Refusing homage to Satan was welcoming the cross.

The third temptation also belongs in substance to every temptation like the first and second, as the *application* of them all, and of each one. Hence we need not accuse Luke of carelessness in placing this trial immediately after the first. It belongs with the first, with both, with all of their kind. The two were *preparatory*; this, *conclusive*. Jesus

overcame them all; and his victory consisted, not simply in retaining his personal integrity, but in retaining and strengthening his confidence in himself as the Messiah, and in repelling with utter loathing and immutable firmness, in full view of his sufferings and death, the proposal to resign his work and serve the world and the devil.

We remark, in conclusion, that although the temptation lies in the sphere of our Lord's Messiahship, it is by no means beyond the reach of human sympathies. True, we are not tempted to doubt our divinity, but how often have the servants of Christ, overwhelmed with the responsibility of following him and carrying on his work, been tempted to doubt the reality of their sacred mission, and their ability, through grace, to perform it. In these hours of darkness and despondency they have been in the wilderness with their Master, and the devil has been beside them to lead them to despair of the success of redemption, and to submit to the world and its prince. Happy are such when they have come off victorious by the help of him who "was tempted in all points like as we are."

ARTICLE VI.

REMARKS ON RENDERINGS OF THE COMMON VERSION (IN THE EPISTLE TO THE GALATIANS).

BY H. B. HACKETT, PROFESSOR IN NEWTON THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY.

(Concluded from Vol. XIX. p. 225.)

As remarked in the former Article, the object here is not to revise the common translation, in course or minutely; but only to point out some of the more obvious changes, which are regarded by interpreters as due to the sense, or to a clearer representation of the sense, of the original text. It will be noticed that the current version of the passage is