

SCRIPTURE TRUMPS TEMPTATION

You are tempted in three primary ways, 1) through your "flesh" physical desires and passions, 2) through the "world" and its anti-God system of thought and values, and 3) through the "devil" the spiritual enemy of God and His people. In Luke 4, all three attack Jesus Christ.

1- The third temptation: All three avenues of temptation are apparent in all three temptations of Christ in the gospels. The first was to turn stone into bread, the second was to worship the devil to gain authority. Each time the devil tries to twist God's own Word to legitimize the temptation, just as he did from the beginning in the garden of Eden in Genesis 3.

In Luke 4:9, *"he took Jesus to Jerusalem and set Him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to Him, 'if You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down from here'."* Many Iowa wind turbines reach 440 feet. The cliff of the temple was 450 feet, of which the historian Josephus said, "if any looked down, his eyes would grow dizzy, not being able to reach so vast a depth." The devil substantiates his challenge, *"for it is written, 'He will command His angels concerning You, to guard You, and on their hands they will bear You up, lest You strike Your foot against a stone.'"*

The devil says, okay Jesus, quote the Bible. How about Psalm 91:11-12, God's promise of protection? "Step out in faith" and show me how much you believe. The devil twists Scripture, replacing trust with a test. The blatant misuse of Scripture is a warning to us. No one can make God do anything, no matter what Scripture passage is used. Even with good intentions.

2- Presumption is not faith: RK Hughes notes, "the message is clear: do not attempt to force God. Even the very highest and best ends do not justify operating contrary to God's will" which is recorded in Scripture. Jesus Christ had no command from God to test Him, which would be contrary to what God had written. Beyond that, the audacity of the devil is striking.

The very next verse in Psalm 91, God's promise to His faithful one, says *"You will tread on the lion and the adder, the serpent You will trample underfoot."* Amazing! Because back in Genesis 3:15 God made the promise to Adam and Eve for an offspring that would be the deliverer.

God says to the serpent who tempted them, *"I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring, and you shall bruise his heel but He shall crush your head."* Is Satan making a calculated risk here? That if he can get Jesus Christ to disobey God by taking a step of faith at his challenge, then maybe the devil can forestall the surety of his own doom, his head crushed by Christ? That's the audacity of sin, presuming upon God.

3- How does Jesus respond? He answered in verse 12, it is said, *"you shall not put the Lord your God to the test."* Matthew 4:10 adds, *"then Jesus said to him, 'be gone, Satan'."* Because as noted in Luke 11:20-23 and Matthew 12:29, Christ has overcome the strong man, Satan. And Jesus says *"for it is written"* quoting Deuteronomy 6:16. The Israelites tested God at the waters of Meribah, grumbling, *"is God among us or not?"* and the angry Moses struck the Rock which gave them water, which was Christ Himself (1 Corinthians 10:4). You shall not test God.

The way of escape is to trust and obey God's written Word by the power of the Holy Spirit. Not by giving in to sin but by holding out, by the Spirit's power. He ministers the truth of God's Word, *"which is able to discern between the thoughts and intents of the heart"* (Hebrews 4:12). The Bible always exposes sin, because temptation always asks *"did God really say?"* Jesus Christ answers, *"it is written"* because there is no substitute for knowing and heeding God's Word.

4- God's Word of truth and strength: Jesus *"was in every respect tempted just as we are, but without sin"* (Hebrews 4:15). He not only saves us from the penalty and power of sin, but also, in the midst of any kind of temptation we can turn to Him for strength from His written-down Word, by the Holy Spirit. And *"with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need"* (Hebrew 4:16).

Luke continues, *"And when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from Him until an opportune time."* Matthew adds, *"and behold, angels came and were ministering to Him"* just as God had promised in Psalm 91. Next time, answers to some nagging questions! ☐