

BIBLE BACKGROUND

Luke 4:1-13

Verse 1-4

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness where for forty days he was tested by the devil. He did not eat anything during those days and when they were finished, he was hungry. The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God say to this stone, 'Become bread!'" Jesus replied to him, "It has been written, 'Man shall not live on bread alone.'"

I have described the nature of the temptations in other places so will not spend much time on them. The temptations centre on the question of how Jesus will operate in his ministry. They consist of both an outer attack, mounted **by the devil**, and an inner attack, Jesus' own thoughts on the possibilities before him. The first temptation is to win a following by filling people's bellies.

Jesus himself **was hungry**. Some in POW camps have written how bread can become a god because prisoners were consumed by hunger. Jesus felt this temptation to place bread before God. Note also the doubt the devil wishes to put into Jesus' mind by beginning his attack with the word **if**. To seek to prove himself would have constituted a defeat.

The important thing was Jesus' reliance on the Scriptures (Deut 8:30). They were his Father's word and were his foundation. Perhaps it would be better to say that his Father was his bulwark against Satan and therefore he fully depended on the Father and his word. The Creator certainly provides food but not only food. He also grants us knowledge of him, and chance to live in relationship with him under his covenant of salvation. Doing his will can be considered food too (Jn 4:34). Jesus turned his mind to this matter of treating life as a material existence alone (12:15, 23). He advocated being rich toward God, which is to live by faith and not works (even the works of earning an income) and to act in justice and love (12:31).

Such living by faith, such staunch confessionality in the face of persecution and testing is accomplished by being **full of the Holy Spirit**. Luke favours the term **full** πλήρης to describe those who are directed and enabled by the Spirit to work powerfully in the kingdom to proclaim God's word and do good works (Acts 6:3,5,8; 7:55; 9:36; 11:24). Jesus is unique in that his fullness is perfect and complete from his baptism on (3:22).

Verses 5-8

When he led him up [on to a high mountain, the devil] he showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. The devil said to him, "I will give you all their authority and the glory of them because it has been given to me and to whomever I wish to give it to. Therefore, if you bow down before me it will be all yours." Jesus said to him, "It has been written, 'Worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.'"

The temptation here is not only the selfish desire for glory and power but for Jesus to grasp prematurely at the glory and power rightly his and to take a short cut to gaining followers by a display of authority, rule and magnificence. Jesus called the devil the prince of this world (Jn 12:31; 14:30; 16:11) and Satan was correct in saying that God had allowed him to gain control of men's thinking who worship their own ego's, intelligence and seek glory and honour.

Power over others and the taking of territory that does not belong to a person or a nation has been a great temptation through the ages. Jesus' approach was to divest himself of power in order to serve humanity and to wait in trust for his Father to exalt him at the appropriate time, which occurred at his ascension. The majestic powerlessness of Christ is sung about in Phil 2.

Such worship is to be directed to God only. The quote is from Deut 6:13. Without the proper worship and reverencing of Christ (Eph 5:33) humans will exalt themselves and seek to be like God. This temptation, like the first, reminds us of the temptation account in Gen 2. The serpent offered Adam and Eve both food (the first temptation) and the chance to be like God (3:5). Christ humbled himself before his Father to defeat the devil and take man's sin into himself.

Verses 9-13

He led him to Jerusalem and set him on the summit of the temple and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here. For it has been written that he will command his angels concerning you to guard you and to raise you up upon their hands lest you strike your foot on a stone." Jesus having replied to him, said, "You will not put the Lord your God to the test."

And after all these tests the devil departed from him until an opportune time.

The third temptation involves winning a following through the use of spectacular miracles. Our Lord would carry out miraculous healing but it was never for his advantage but a response of compassion towards the afflicted. The devil uses the tactic of quoting Scriptures to engage in a theological combat. Surely all Scripture is authoritative and cannot be denied. Ps 91:11 promises God's aid to those who trust him, the very thing Christ wished to proclaim.

Jesus' replies with Deut 6:16. God does promise his protection but this must be believed in and trusted rather than doubted and tested.

In all these tests, Christ not only remains firm in his faith and in his mission from the Father but he uses testing and persecution as the opportunity to make a good confession before the Father. We can think also of his unwavering love, civility and poise during his trials before Pilate, the Sanhedrin, Annas and Caiaphas and Herod (1Tim 6:13). We are reminded of the martyrs as well as the Reformers who confessed the truth of the gospel under pressure.