

63 DID THE DEVIL TEMPT JESUS?

INTRODUCTION: In this paper, we will seek to show that the temptation of Jesus, as it is traditionally literally interpreted, is an impossibility and causes the focus to be on a mythical character instead of the serious considerations Jesus was contemplating. Read Deuteronomy chapters 5 to 10 to understand Jesus' state of mind as it was from these chapters He drew his three conclusions. The contrast of Israel's failure to remain faithful to Yahweh in the wilderness compared to Jesus' resolve to stay completely in the will of the Father should be the primary focus.

A. ANOMALIES REGARDING THE TRANSLATION/USES OF THE WORD "DEVIL"

Similar to the issues around the idea of "satan" in Preterist Paper #60, the Greek word, diabolos, [Strong's #1228], is used in two very different ways in the New Testament. The word diabolos is an adjective and means "slandering, accusing," but in most of the 38 references in the New Testament, it is translated as "devil", a noun. There are three passages where it was impossible to construe "diabolos" to be the devil, the superhuman enemy of God, so translators departed from their "devil" translation and used the true meaning of the word, that is, slanderous.

1. 1 Tim. 3:11 "...women must be dignified, not **slandering [diabolos #1228]**..." (Versus "women must be dignified, not devils...")
2. 2 Tim. 3:1-3 "...people will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful...**slandering [diabolos]**... (versus 'people will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful...devils')"
3. Titus 2:3 "Older women likewise are to exhibit behavior fitting for those who are holy, not **slandering [diabolos #1228]**..." (Versus "Older women are to be 'holy, not devils...'")

When we see these kinds of inconsistencies of translation, we can credibly posit translator bias.

B. PROBLEMS WITH THE TRADITIONAL LITERAL INTERPRETATION OF THE TEMPTATION

1. "The devil, leading Him up on a high mountain, showed Him all the kingdoms of the world..." Lk 4:5

Problem: There is no mountain high enough to see all the kingdoms of the world. Even if one understands "world" to be a reference to the Roman Empire (as in Lk 2:1 "there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed"), there was no mountain in the Roman Empire from which one could see all the provinces of the Roman Empire. For perspective, one can only view about 200 miles from the highest mountain in the world, Mt Everest, and the Roman Empire was well over 2,000 miles in width at the time of Christ. In fact, seeing most any amount of kingdoms from a literal high mountain is unlikely.

2. "The devil... showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time." Lk 4:5

Problem: One has to believe the devil had the ability no other angelic being in the Bible had: to collapse/supersede/manipulate time.

3. "The devil said to Him, 'I will give you all this authority and their glory, for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whomever I want. If you therefore will worship before me, it will all be yours.'" Lk 4:6-7

Problem: With the traditional view, one must believe Jesus could actually be tempted to worship an evil entity who offered him the kingdoms of the world. Since Jesus was tempted as we are, His temptation could not be something He could easily dismiss. Jesus, from the age of twelve, knew God was his Father (Luke 2) and he was uniquely identified in Luke 3 as the beloved Son of Yahweh. To entertain the idea Jesus could seriously be moved to become a satanist to gain worldly power is beyond foolish.

4. "He led him to Jerusalem and set Him on the pinnacle of the temple..." Lk 4:9

Problem: The literal interpretation maintains the devil took Jesus to the pinnacle of the temple and set Him on it as one would place any object on another. How did they get to the top of the temple? Did the devil fly Jesus superman style? Do we have record of any other angelic beings with the ability to move individuals from one place to another? Note: Yahweh moved Ezekiel to Jerusalem while he lived in Babylon. This was most certainly a vision. Ez 8

5. "...and said to Him, 'If you are the Son of God, cast yourself down from here.'" Lk 4:9

Problem: This is not a peculiar demand from an evil entity, but an expectation from Jewish tradition that would identify the Messiah. "When the King, the Messiah reveals himself, he will come and stand on the roof of the temple." Peseta Rabbati 36 (from The Real Devil, by Duncan Heaster p. 316)

6. "When the devil had completed every temptation, he departed from Him until another time." Lk 4:13

Problem: Besides the wilderness temptation, where do we see Jesus tempted by the cosmic enemy of God? What we do see are people following Jesus because He had fed them, people trying to make Jesus an earthly king, and people asking Jesus for signs that he is the Messiah. These demands follow the script of the three temptations of Christ. Are these groups of external tempters those referenced as coming to Jesus at "other times"?

C. AN ALTERNATIVE INTERPRETATION

Jesus used the power of the story to teach spiritual truths. He was the only witness to His wilderness temptation and it appears He condensed his 40 day ordeal of testing into a parable-like story. This passage has more instructive power and coherence when we consider the dialogue to be Jesus' inner reasoning using the scriptures he knew so well. Jesus was tempted to make scriptural, yet self-serving ego choices as opposed to staying in complete humble surrender to the full counsel of God. In this way, Jesus was truly tempted as we are—from within—instead of by an obviously nefarious character who could easily be dismissed. Because Jesus drew his answers from Moses' recapitulation of Yahweh's teachings and Israel's wilderness failures in Deuteronomy, His perfect faithfulness to God should be noted in contrast to Israel's persistent unfaithfulness.

1. FIRST TEMPTATION: USE SUPERNATURAL POWERS TO PROVIDE FOR PERSONAL NEEDS.

TEMPTATION: "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread." Lk 4:3

RELATED SCRIPTURE: "You must serve the LORD your God, and he will bless your bread and your water and I will remove sickness from your midst." Ex 23:25

ANSWER: "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God.'" Lk 4:4

FULL CONTEXT OF SCRIPTURE: "Remember the whole way by which he has brought you these forty years through the desert so that he might, by humbling you, test you to see if you have it within you to keep his commandments or not. So he humbled you by making you hungry and then feeding you with unfamiliar manna. He did this to teach you that humankind cannot live by bread alone, but also by everything that comes from the Lord's mouth...Be keenly aware that just as a parent disciplines his child, the Lord your God disciplines you." Dt 8:2-5

2. SECOND TEMPTATION: BECOME AN EARTHLY KING. THIS WAS THE JEWISH EXPECTATION.

TEMPTATION: "And he said to Him, 'I will give you all their authority and splendor; it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. If you worship me, it will all be yours.'" Lk 4:6-7

FULL CONTEXT OF SCRIPTURE: "It is I [Yahweh] who by my great power and my outstretched arm have made the earth, with the people and animals that are on the earth, and I give it to whomever I please. I have at this time placed all these nations [Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre, Sidon, Judah] of yours under the power of my servant, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon." Jer. 27:5-6

REPLY: "Get behind me, Satan [adversary]! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and you shall serve him only.'" Lk 4:8

FULL CONTEXT OF SCRIPTURE: "Be careful not to forget the Lord who brought you out of Egypt, that place of slavery. You must revere the Lord your God, serve him, and take oaths using only his name. You must not go after other gods, those of the surrounding peoples, for the Lord your God, who is present among you, is a jealous God and his anger will erupt against you and remove you from the land. Dt 6:12-15

3. THIRD TEMPTATION: SHOW HIMSELF TO BE THE SON OF GOD THROUGH ASTOUNDING FEATS

TEMPTATION: "If you are the Son of God, cast yourself down from here, for it is written, 'He will put his angels in charge of you, to guard you;' and, 'On their hands they will bear you up, lest perhaps you dash your foot against a stone.'"

FULL CONTEXT OF SCRIPTURE: "For you have taken refuge in the Lord, my shelter, the sovereign One. No harm will overtake you; no illness will come near your home. For he will order his angels to protect you in all you do. They will lift you up in their hands, so you will not slip and fall on a stone." Ps. 91:9-12

REPLY: "It has been said, 'You shall not tempt the Lord your God.'"

FULL CONTEXT OF SCRIPTURE: "You must not put the Lord your God to the test as you did at Massah.* Keep his commandments very carefully, as well as the stipulations and statutes he commanded you to observe. Do whatever is proper and good before the Lord." Dt. 6:16-18

*Massah: Israel did not believe God was with them because of lack of water.

Recommended: The Real Devil, by Duncan Heaster. Out of print but free online. <https://heaster.org/rd.pdf>