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## The Temptation of Jesus

### If Jesus is God, was it really possible for him to be tempted to sin?

Jesus, as solely God, could never sin. But somehow, when Jesus left heaven and came to earth, he restricted his divine attributes and became fully a man. This means that Jesus had all the limitations that face every human being, apart from a sinful nature. It also means Jesus had to make the same types of decisions Adam and Eve had to make, and each of us have to make daily. He had to struggle with the same tensions that every man has to face physically, emotionally and spiritually.

#### **Hebrews 4:14-15 (NIV)**

*Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. <sup>15</sup> For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are--yet was without sin.*

### Did not Jesus have an unfair advantage, dealing with temptation, due to the fact that he did not have a “sin nature”?

This actually made the type of temptations Jesus faced much more intense. The majority of the times we are tempted are focused around our sin nature. Due to our sin nature we are inclined to do wrong and be self-serving.

The temptations that Jesus faced (turning stones to bread, or jumping off the temple and having angels catch him or worshipping Satan) were not wrong inherently in and of themselves or, on the surface, they promised a greater good for others. Jesus was tempted according to his perfect nature and this made the temptation much more appealing and strong, yet Jesus still resisted.

### The Bible describes three types of temptations we all face in 1 John 2:15-17

#### **1 John 2:16 (NIV)**

*For everything in the world--the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has [vanity/pride] and does--comes not from the Father but from the world.*

### Describe these three temptations in your own words.

- 1) Cravings:
- 2) Lust of the eyes:
- 3) Boasting of what he has (vanity/glory/pride):

**Luke 4:1-13 (NIV)**

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the desert, <sup>2</sup> where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry.

<sup>3</sup> The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread." <sup>4</sup> Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone.'"

<sup>5</sup> The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. <sup>6</sup> And he said to him, "I will give you all their authority and splendor, for it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. <sup>7</sup> So if you worship me, it will all be yours." <sup>8</sup> Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.'"

<sup>9</sup> The devil led him to Jerusalem and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down from here. <sup>10</sup> For it is written: "'He will command his angels concerning you to guard you carefully; <sup>11</sup> they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'" <sup>12</sup> Jesus answered, "It says: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

<sup>13</sup> When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time.

**How do Jesus' temptations correspond to the ones listed by John?**

**Stones to Bread: Cravings**

**Authority over all the kingdoms: Lust of the eyes**

**Jumping off the temple: Vanity/Glory/Pride/Boasting**

**What was Jesus' secret to consistently resisting temptation throughout his entire life?**

Have them discuss their thoughts. We will look at each temptation specifically to determine why Jesus responded with the words he did.

**Temptation 1****Luke 4:3 (NIV)**

The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread." <sup>4</sup> Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone.'"

**Explain the nature of this temptation and why it would have been wrong for Jesus to give in.**

Jesus was on the verge of physical starvation. At this point the body starts to deprive lesser parts of the body of what they need so that the brain can get all it needs to fight for survival.

Every fiber of Jesus' being would have desperately craved food for survival. Satan is merely encouraging Jesus to do what he naturally longed to do.

**Would it have been "sinful" for Jesus to turn a stone into a loaf of bread to avoid starvation?**

Jesus performed many such miracles. He turned water to wine, multiplied loaves and fish, cursed a fig tree that bore no fruit, got tax money from a fish's mouth, etc. There was nothing intrinsically sinful about turning a stone into bread.

**Why was Jesus in the wilderness in the first place?**

Jesus was led by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness to fast. God's plan was to have him experience the same challenges faced by the Israelites when they travelled through the wilderness for forty years. Jesus' forty days is symbolic of the years Israel spent in the wilderness. The Israelites failed when they were tested, as to their faithfulness. Jesus now needs to prove his righteousness where the rest of mankind failed.

The fast was God's agenda, God's timing, and God's purpose and the fast was not yet declared over by God.

If Jesus gave into Satan's encouragement to eat, it would have broken God's ordained fast, apart from God's timing. **It meant that Jesus would have allowed his physical needs to direct his life, as opposed to the will of the Father.** If Jesus couldn't survive this physical suffering, there was no way he would make it to the cross.

**Why did Jesus respond with the words, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone'"?**

Discuss various ideas

Jesus is quoting a passage from the Old Testament. The following is the broader context of the verse.

***Deuteronomy 8:2-3 (NLT)***

*Remember how the Lord your God led you through the wilderness for forty years, humbling you and testing you to prove your character, and to find out whether or not you would really obey his commands. <sup>3</sup>Yes, he humbled you by letting you go hungry and then feeding you with manna, a food previously unknown to you and your ancestors. He did it to teach you that people need more than bread for their life; real life comes by feeding on every word of the Lord.*

**Why did God allow the Israelites to go hungry at various points in time?**

He did this to test their faithfulness, not that he needed to know where they stood, but he wanted them to see how much they really trusted him. By letting them go hungry it revealed their heart relationship to God. It exposed whether they were servants of God, or whether they viewed God as there to serve them. It exposed who they felt was really in charge.

**Which of the three temptations did the Israelites give in to?**

The temptation was to set their cravings above obedience and faithfulness to God. In other words, they made their stomach their God, and God was merely a means to serve the demands of their stomach.

Because it appeared to them that God wasn't going to meet their craving for food, they rebelled against him and even threatened to turn back to Egypt where they would submit themselves once again to slavery to a nation ruled by pagan gods. It would be better to serve pagan gods and have their stomachs filled than to serve the true God and be hungry.

**How are we often tempted in a similar way?**

**Can you share a time when you were mad at God because he didn't meet your expectations?**

**Have you ever been tempted to follow God only if he did things a certain way? Share.**

**Can you describe a time when you questioned God's love for you when you were in a wilderness experience of life?**

**Have you ever tried to take control of a situation yourself because God didn't seem to care?**

**Have you ever tried to shortcut God's purpose for your life simply because it wasn't comfortable?**

**What was Jesus' key to resisting this temptation? What statement did he make to Satan?****Jesus is declaring that:**

- He will not make the same decision that the Israelites made. They chose their stomachs over God.
- He understands true life comes from obedience to God, more than from food.
- Cravings/feelings will not determine what he does with his life, but rather the will of God.
- He will not cut short God's purpose for his life simply because it is uncomfortable.

Had Jesus given into this temptation to remove suffering from his life, he would never have made it to the cross which would prove to be a much greater suffering.

## **Temptation 2**

### **Luke 4:5-7 (NIV)**

*The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. <sup>6</sup> And he said to him, "I will give you all their authority and splendor, for it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. <sup>7</sup> So if you worship me, it will all be yours." <sup>8</sup> Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.'"*

**Explain the nature of this temptation and why would it have been wrong for Jesus to give in?**

Satan is called in scripture, the "Ruler of this World".

### **1 John 5:19 (NIV)**

*We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one.*

Jesus never disputes Satan's claim of authority over the kingdoms. This means that Satan actually could release his grip on the nations and they would be free to follow the leadership of Jesus without Satan's interference.

This would have been a great temptation to Jesus. To have Satan release his hold on the world would assist greatly in people coming back to faith in him and submitting to his rule.

**What are the problems with this temptation?**

**a) It would require worshipping Satan.**

This is extremely problematic as scripture says that only God is worthy to receive worship. To bow down and worship Satan would not only deny God of worship, but would also deny the very identity of Jesus himself.

To worship Satan in order to bring freedom to the nations would involve embracing evil to accomplish a godly goal. This is not possible. You cannot accomplish a godly goal through an evil approach. In other words, "the end-justifies-the-means" approach to life is not a concept that is even remotely consistent with the character of God. **God will always provide a godly way to accomplish his will.**

**b) The freedom offered was not the freedom ultimately desired**

Jesus was not sent merely to align the nations under his rule. He came to die.

If Jesus was tempted to establish his rule on this earth at this point, it would imply that he would not be rejected and sent to the cross to die as a sacrifice for our sins. True, he could establish "image rule" and bring peace to the earth, but mankind would still be eternally lost. It was only through his rejection, death, and resurrection that he could truly redeem mankind. Satan's offer, if accepted, would have entirely derailed the mission Jesus was sent to fulfill.

Interestingly enough, after his resurrection, Jesus was granted complete authority over the nations. However, this was done on God's terms, not Satan's. In fact, through Christ's death and resurrection, Satan's rule was destroyed and Christ now reigns supreme.

**Why did Jesus respond with the words, "It is written: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only'?"**

Discuss various ideas

Jesus is quoting a passage from the Old Testament. Following below is the broader context of the verse.

***Deuteronomy 6:10-15 (NLT)***

*"The Lord your God will soon bring you into the land he swore to give your ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It is a land filled with large, prosperous cities that you did not build. <sup>11</sup>The houses will be richly stocked with goods you did not produce. You will draw water from cisterns you did not dig, and you will eat from vineyards and olive trees you did not plant. When you have eaten your fill in this land, <sup>12</sup>be careful not to forget the Lord, who rescued you from slavery in the land of Egypt. <sup>13</sup>You must fear the Lord your God and serve him. When you take an oath, you must use only his name.*

*<sup>14</sup>You must not worship any of the gods of neighboring nations, <sup>15</sup>for the Lord your God, who lives among you, is a jealous God. His anger will flare up against you and wipe you from the face of the earth.*

**Why did Jesus refer to this passage? What temptation does God warn the Israelites to not give in to?**

The Israelites were constantly tempted to embrace the worship and belief systems of the nations around them. Whenever they did so, they were declaring that they did not trust God to meet all their needs and they needed to pursue another path for getting what they wanted. Their lives became self-focused and they merely used "deities" to serve their expectations. However, turning to false gods always led them into a disadvantaged state as they stepped out from underneath God's protective care and usually became oppressed by the gods/nations they turned to.

**How are we often tempted in a similar way?**

**Have you ever done anything "wrong" in order to accomplish a greater "good"? Share.**

**Have you ever sought another answer apart from God because you did not trust God to provide?**

**Have you ever felt that something or someone could provide you with more contentment in life than God?**

**What was Jesus' key to resisting this temptation? What statement is he making to Satan?**

Jesus was declaring to Satan that he would not make the same mistake the Israelites did.

He will not worship Satan as a shortcut to getting what he wanted.

He was determined to keep the Father as the sole object of his worship and devotion, trusting him for all things.

The end does NOT justify the means.

God will always provide a means to accomplish his purposes and meet our needs – his way!

By standing on this scriptural truth that only God is to be worshipped, he defeated Satan's lure in his life.

### **Temptation 3**

#### **Luke 4:9-12 (NIV)**

*The devil led him to Jerusalem and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down from here. <sup>10</sup> For it is written: "He will command his angels concerning you to guard you carefully; <sup>11</sup> they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone." <sup>12</sup> Jesus answered, "It says: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"*

**Explain the nature of this temptation and why it would have been wrong for Jesus to give in.**

To jump off the temple and be rescued by angels, in front of all the masses, would provide irrevocable evidence that Jesus was the Son of God. He would prove it to himself; he would prove it to everyone else. Nobody could dispute it.

This would have made Jesus' ministry so much easier. Instead of walking around from town to town, gradually building a reputation, he could start with a glorious bang. People right from the start could not question his identity, but would be forced to acknowledge he truly was from God. This would seemingly pave a greater receptivity to his message and people would seemingly then respond to his identity more appropriately.

**What are the problems with this temptation?**

a) This was not part of the Father's plan.

The Father's plan was that Jesus would gradually allow people to struggle with his identity over a three year period. Whenever demons wanted to reveal Jesus' identity too soon, Jesus always commanded them to silence.

Even Jesus' message was often cloaked so that only the serious seekers would get it. That is why Jesus spoke in parables as opposed to straight forwardly speaking the truth. He always made the people ponder what he said.

**b) Jesus did not need to “prove” himself to anyone.**

When anyone challenged Jesus to give them a “sign” to authenticate who he claimed to be, he always refused.

By needing to “prove” himself to others, he would have actually been placing himself under their authority, as if they were his judge. His need for their approval and acceptance would have manipulated his message and ministry. If Jesus determined in his mind that he needed the approval and acceptance of others to feel good about who he was and what he did, he would never have made it to the cross.

**c) This approach really called into question God’s strategy.**

Satan was proposing that there was a better way for God’s purpose to be fulfilled. It was really the same temptation that Satan used to cause Adam and Eve to morally fall. He convinced Eve that there was a better way to approach life (by eating the fruit) rather than having to rely on God for constant leading, direction and wisdom. Satan challenged Jesus to question God’s very plan and to resort to a different plan that would be more comfortable and glorious.

**d) The goal of Jesus’ ministry was not to gain the approval of others, but to die.**

Such a glorious display of leaping from the temple only to be rescued by angels would not have paved the way for his crucifixion. It would have publically raised Jesus’ ratings in the polls and would have defeated any attempts by others to discredit him. This would again have defeated God’s purpose for Jesus in coming to earth and left mankind in a hopeless situation.

**Why did Jesus respond with the words, “It says: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’”?**

Discuss various ideas

Jesus was quoting a passage from the Old Testament Following is the broader context of the verse.

**Deuteronomy 6:16-19 (NLT)**

*Do not test the Lord your God as you did when you complained at Massah. <sup>17</sup>You must diligently obey the commands of the Lord your God—all the stipulations and laws he has given you. <sup>18</sup>Do what is right and good in the Lord’s sight, so all will go well with you. Then you will enter and occupy the good land that the Lord solemnly promised to give your ancestors. <sup>19</sup>You will drive out all the enemies living in your land, just as the Lord said you would.*

**Why did Jesus quote this passage? What temptation did the Israelites give in to?**

The Israelites frequently challenged God’s strategy for their lives. This was clearly shown when they were wandering through the wilderness and forced to rely on God for provision. God had just miraculously rescued them from slavery in Egypt, miraculously brought them across the Red Sea on dry ground and miraculously destroyed their enemy before their very eyes. He had proven that he was more than sufficient to meet their every need...until they got thirsty (Exodus 17:1-7).

At this point, the Israelites had to make a decision. Either they simply trust God’s wisdom and patiently wait for his provision, or they grumble against God and start to revolt. They started to grumble and revolt, even questioning the very proven presence of God in their midst.

God graciously responded by providing a stream of running water from a rock, but still chastened them for their lack of faith. He named that place Massah, which means “testing”. God tested their faithfulness and they failed. They tested God’s leadership and provision, but he provided.

**How are we often tempted in a similar way?**

**Can you recall a time when you felt you had to prove yourself to others as opposed to simply being content with who you were and what God called you to do?**

**Do you ever question God’s purpose for your life?**

**What was Jesus’ key to resisting this temptation? What statement was he making to Satan?**

Jesus made the declaration to Satan that he was not going to hold God accountable for his plan or purposes for his life. He was merely going to trust that God knew best and that he would provide everything he needed to accomplish his purpose for his life. Jesus was not going to second guess God’s strategy or love for him.

This freed Jesus to not need affirmation from anywhere else - from Satan or the masses. He could simply approach each day by the leading of the Holy Spirit as a moment by moment adventure. Jesus understood from scripture that God’s path is always best even when it feels like life hangs in the balance. God always provides and Jesus refused to question or challenge this biblical and practical truth.

## **Applying what you’ve learned**

**What can we learn about Satan’s strategy to make us fall spiritually?**

**What can we learn from Jesus about resisting temptation?**

Jesus always based his response on the Word of God. It was not quoting scripture that scared Satan off; it was the declaration that he was standing on the scriptural truth as the determiner of how he lived his life.

**Discuss your thoughts about each of the following verses.  
How does each one give you hope or strength?**

**1 Corinthians 10:13 (NIV)**

*No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.*



**Hebrews 2:18 (NIV)**

*Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.*

**James 1:13-14 (NIV)**

*When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; <sup>14</sup> but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed.*

**What are some steps you can take to avoid giving in to temptation?**