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Temptation of Jesus (Part 2)



The Life and Teachings of Christ - Steve Gregg

In this talk by Steve Gregg, he delves into the temptation of Jesus and its symbolic meaning from a spiritual and biblical perspective. According to Gregg, the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness represents not only Jesus' own struggle but also the struggle of Israel, as depicted in the Old Testament. Gregg also discusses the different interpretations of the temptation to turn stones into bread and the significance of Jesus' refusal to worship Satan. Finally, Gregg emphasizes the importance of understanding the true meaning of scripture, rather than simply quoting it out of context.

Transcript

And, as a result of that, he left town. Shortly after that, he wrote 1 and 2 Thessalonians, saying, I've been wanting to come back, but Satan is preventing me. Really? By what means? We don't know.

Maybe Paul was sick. Maybe his thorn in the flesh was keeping him from traveling. But, it seems to me more likely that he's saying, the same forces that threw me out are preventing me from returning.

The Jewish unbelievers. Now, look what he says about them in 1 Thessalonians 2, a few verses earlier. In fact, just two verses earlier or so.

He said, well, we can start at verse 14. For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God, which are in Judea, in Christ Jesus. For you also suffered the same things from your own countrymen, just as they did from the Jews, who, that is the Jews, killed both the Lord Jesus and their own prophets.

They have persecuted us. They do not please God. They are contrary to all men, forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles, that they may be saved, so as always to fill up the measure of their sins.

But the wrath has come upon them to the uttermost. Sounds like he's a little heated there, against the Jews who resist him. And they're the ones who got him thrown out of Thessalonica.

And it's two verses later, he says, I wanted to come back, but Satan's hindering me. Maybe, I mean, it's true. The devil was no doubt who he means by Satan.

But, I think probably in the context, and in the context of what was really going on, reading from Acts, it was probably the Jewish unbelieving community in Thessalonica that was preventing him, and he saw them as the agents of the devil in that case. But how many times, the Bible, either Jesus or Paul or someone else, connects the resistance to the gospel, the resistance to Jesus Christ that was brought up by the unbelieving Jewish community, is connected to the work of Satan. Remember, John the Baptist called them the seed of serpents.

Did you, children of vipers, Jesus called them the same thing, called the scribes and Pharisees by that term. He said to the Jews, you have your father the devil, and so forth. Not all Jews, I want to make this clear.

This is not a racist statement. This has to do with the majority of the unbelieving Jews in the days of Jesus. But the point is, when Jesus was on earth, it was not the Gentiles at that point that were tempting God.

It was the Jews, just like in Moses' day. In Moses' day, the Jews tempted God for 40 years. In Jesus' day, and the 40 years that followed until 70 AD, the Jews tempted God even more greatly by rejecting Christ and rejecting the gospel that was preached to them for those 40 years by the apostles.

And I've said there might be yet another layer of meaning to this temptation of Jesus story. He is God. He's being tempted for 40 days by Satan.

But he is with the wild beasts. Now, the wild beasts in a number of places in scripture is used of the Gentiles. In Daniel chapter 7, four Gentile nations are represented by a lion, a bear, a leopard, and some other kind of wild beast that all come out of the sea.

Gentile nations are frequently referred to as beasts. In, for instance, Ezekiel 34, where Israel is compared to God's flock of sheep. It says that God will save them from their enemies, the wolves and the bears and so forth, the wild beasts that come and tear them up.

And he identifies them in Ezekiel 34 as the Gentiles. The Gentiles were the wild beasts that tore at God's sheep, Israel. Just like wolves and bears would come after real sheep, the Gentiles made life hard for Israel.

And in the comparison, the wild beasts represented the Gentiles, who were a problem to Israel in those days. Likewise, I'm even of the opinion, though I don't expect many to share it at this point until we talk about the passages in detail in Isaiah, but when it talks about the wolf lying down with the lamb, and the bear lying down with the young calf and so forth, in Isaiah 11 and also again in Isaiah 65, that this is a symbolic description of

the church age in which the Jew and the Gentile are united in peace, who were once hostile toward one another. The clean animals representing Israel and the unclean animals representing the Gentiles, their unity is like what Paul talked about in Ephesians, where God broke down the middle wall of partition between the Jew and the Gentile, made them one in Christ.

Like I said, I don't expect you to accept that until we have time to look at that passage in detail and many cross-references. But what I'm suggesting to you is there are a number of places in the Old Testament where wild beasts, lions, bears, leopards, and wolves and such, that they are symbolic of the Gentiles. Now, I really don't know whether Mark intended any symbolism at all when he said that Jesus was tempted for 40 days by Satan and the wild beasts were with him.

But in Jesus' ministry and in the time that followed, we see that the Jews were against Jesus, tempting him like they did God in the wilderness in Moses' day, and the Gentiles came to him. The Gentiles were with him. Now, in suggesting that, it almost suggests that the story is more symbolic than real.

But I believe the story is absolutely real. I believe this temptation happened exactly as it says. But I'm just wondering why.

Why did it happen this way? The Holy Spirit was behind all this. The Holy Spirit led Jesus in the wilderness to have this encounter. Now, that's an important point too.

Because this was not the only time in Jesus' life that he was ever tempted. He was tempted on other occasions too. Certainly when he was in the Garden of Gethsemane, he was tempted.

In fact, the Bible says that he sweat great drops of blood in resisting sin. According to Hebrews chapter 12, it was his resisting against sin that was the struggle there. He was also tempted, no doubt, when Satan spoke through Peter.

And maybe in a number of other times not recorded. We certainly would be, I think, overly naive to suggest that these three temptations, the only temptations Jesus ever had in his life. But this is the only time it says that the Spirit led him to this particular set of encounters.

This particular cluster of temptations was Spirit-directed. For what reason? These temptations could have been spread out during his ministry more. But I'm of the impression that the Holy Spirit is into giving new meaning, spiritual meaning, to things natural.

Very many times in the Old Testament, things that are in the natural find a spiritual fulfillment in the new. And I wouldn't be surprised if the principal reason for this particular encounter in the wilderness between Jesus and Satan was because the Spirit

wanted to fulfill some types, fulfill some symbolism here. And so I've suggested three kind of things that this corresponds to.

Feel at liberty to reject any or all of them if you want. But I have suggested that the temptation of Jesus corresponds to the temptation of Adam in the garden, because Jesus is the last Adam being tempted in this place. And again, the fate of the world rests on his temptation and the outcome, just like the fate of the world rested on Adam's temptation and his outcome.

I've suggested that this also corresponds to the beginning of Israel's history when they came through the water and then into the wilderness and were tested there. Jesus, a representative of the ultimate Israel, the true Israel, the new Israel. He goes through the water of baptism, and then he's tempted for 40 days in the wilderness.

Seems a clear correspondence to me. And then, of course, this third one is perhaps more tenuous and much more difficult to defend. And that is that it also may portray the temptation of God.

Because it says in Psalm 95 that the Jews tempted God in the wilderness for 40 years. And there certainly was a tempting of God on there. If that was a tempting of God, if they said, we won't go to the promised land because there's giants there.

If that tempted God, and if their misbehavior, those 40 years in the wilderness tempted God, how much more was God tempted by their crucifying his own son and persecuting his apostles for those 40 years before 70 AD? That 40 years was a time of tempting of God as well. Certainly far more. And therefore, if we suggested there might even be some hint of that, that 40 years in these 40 days Jesus spent in the wilderness, then, in my opinion, this gets a little far out.

And therefore, I keep giving disclaimers about it. But if there's any symbolism of that kind at all, that Satan, the one who's resisting and tempting Jesus, would represent the Jews who were resisting and tempting God during that period of time. And I'm not saying that the modern Jews are tempting God in quite the same way.

I mean, they're not persecuting the church now. But for the first 40 years of church history, they were the only persecutors of the church. Except for Nero, who did it for a while, but it had nothing to do with them being Christians.

He just needed a scapegoat. But the Jews hated Christ. And that's why they persecuted the church.

Nero didn't hate Christ. He didn't even believe in him. But he just needed someone to blame.

So, the wild beasts, in that case, that were with Jesus, would be mentioned possibly just

for the sake of pointing out that while the Jews tempted God those 40 years, Gentiles were accepting Him. Unclean animals, wild beasts, formerly uncultivated, not like God's flock, Israel. But the wild, uncultivated nations, the Gentiles, they have come to Him.

And they are with Him during that time. Well, that one, to me, sounds a bit far-fetched, but not impossible. So, I give that to you for your personal judgment.

And you might have no difficulty throwing that out immediately. Okay, some other observations, then we'll get into the... Well, no, I don't think we need to do any more general observations. I think I've made most of these points.

Let's go on into the verses themselves. Okay, Matthew 4, verse 1. Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. Now, this has bothered some people because James said that God, don't let anyone say when he's tempted, I'm tempted by God, because God doesn't tempt anyone.

That was James 1, verse 13. We saw it a little earlier. God doesn't tempt anyone with evil.

And yet, we have God is clearly the one who's leading Jesus into this place of temptation. But that doesn't contradict what James says, because it specifically says it wasn't God who tempted him, but the devil who tempted him. In every temptation, there are two factors at least, or three.

Certainly, your flesh is one of the factors, too. And that's what James points out. You're tempted when you're drawn away by your own lusts and enticed.

But there is the devil who is there presenting the temptation. And he is the one called the tempter. In verse 3 here, it says, now, when the tempter came to Jesus.

The devil's title is the tempter. God's not the tempter. But to say that God isn't the one who tempts us with evil, doesn't mean that he will never lead us into a situation where the devil will tempt us.

The word tempt, the Greek word actually means to test, or to put to the test. Same thing in the Hebrew equivalent in the Old Testament. When you find the word tempt, the word itself means to put to the test.

Jesus was led here to be put to the test. And the tester, or the tempter, was the devil. This shows, again, as so many places do, that God has use for the devil.

If God didn't, he'd get rid of him right now. Think about it for a moment. What is there in the universe right now that would prevent God from grabbing the devil by the nap of the neck and hurling him into the lake of fire at this very moment? What prevents God from doing that right this minute? Is there anything that forces God to say, okay, devil, I'll give

you a free hand.

I'll give you a little longer, a little longer. I mean, God doesn't owe anything to the devil. He beat him at the cross.

He can dispose of him any time he wants. The one thing that prevents God from, at this moment, getting rid of the devil finally is that it's not his will to right now. He's still got use for him, for us to be tested.

Why do you think Jesus said when he prayed for us in John 17, 15? In John 17, 15, Jesus said, Father, I do not pray that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the wicked one. Why not take us out of the world? That'd be a good place to go if you want to be kept from the wicked one. I mean, either that or take the wicked one out of the world.

You know, listen, if you want to keep me from the wicked one, you can either take me out of the world, take me to heaven. And that seems to me a very desirable thing to do. Or you can take the wicked one out of the world.

But Jesus made it very clear he didn't desire either. He didn't desire for us to be taken out of the world, but he wanted us to remain in the realm where the wicked one is. To be kept safe from him.

But why? Why doesn't he want us to get out? Because we apparently have something to gain by the interaction with the wicked one. One thing we have to do is be delivered from him. But God could deliver us just by smashing him like a bug, and that'd be the end of the wicked one, and we'd be delivered once and for all.

It's clear that Jesus wants us to stay in the world for a purpose. Now you might just say, well, that's just so we can evangelize the world. Well, no doubt.

That's a very major part of our purpose. I'd like to suggest to you, though, it's also partly because of the need for us to be tested. For us to be grown up through the challenge, through the exercise of resisting temptation, and having our loyalty to God tested just like everybody else's had theirs tested.

The Jews had to be tested. Adam had to be tested. Jesus had to be tested.

You've got to be tested too. And God's got use for the devil for that. Which is one of the reasons, as I pointed out before, that I'm not so convinced that God had to make a good angel to become a devil, as is the traditional view.

I think it's not impossible that God made a devil to be a devil. Because he has use for him. If he didn't, he'd be rid of him by now.

And wouldn't have made him in the first place, by the way, in my opinion. Even if he'd

made a good angel that he knew would become a devil, he would have never done it unless he had use for a devil. And he clearly did in this case.

The Spirit led Jesus into an encounter with the devil. Why? Apparently God wanted him to have that encounter. There was something there.

Symbolic, maybe partly, but also maybe more practical. Something that had some effect on Jesus' own conditioning and Jesus' own spiritual development. I mean, it seems strange to speak of spiritual development for someone like Jesus.

But in Luke it said that he increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man. Favor with God certainly speaks of the spiritual dynamics of his life. He increased in all those things.

He had to develop them spiritually as well as mentally in other ways. I know that's mysterious to us, but it seems to be stated in the Bible. Now, we do know one other thing too of very great interest about this.

And that is the result of it, mentioned particularly graphically by Luke. In Luke chapter 4, after the temptation is over, in Luke 4.14, it says, Now Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee. He was nowhere said to be in the power of the Spirit previous to this.

Luke 4.14. In Luke 4.1, at the beginning of the temptation story, it says, Now he's filled with the Spirit. He's led by the Spirit. But after the temptation, he returns in the power of the Spirit.

Now, I don't know whether the tempting experience was something that helped him to release that power. I frankly think it was sort of the precursor of Jesus' ultimate victory over Satan. He sort of got a taste of it.

When Jesus said that he was casting out demons because he had bound the strong man, and that you can't do that. You can't plunder a strong man's house unless you first bind him. And by casting out demons, he was proving that he had bound the strong man and was now plundering his house.

When did he bind him? In one sense, he bound him at the cross. Certainly in the later writings of the scripture, in the epistles, it always points back to the cross. It's the time when Jesus disarmed principalities and powers and made a show of them openly.

He just reduced to inactivity him that had the power of death, that is the devil, and so forth. These later New Testament writings suggest that the cross was the place where Jesus did it. But it was during his ministry before the cross that he said, or implied, that he had bound the strong man already.

I think that his encounter with the devil right at the beginning of his ministry, and his

victory over Satan there, was a precursor. And the first stage of his conquering of the devil, which was culminated at the cross. And in a sense, he had bound Satan even here, because Satan, as Jesus would put it later, had nothing on him.

He had to be faced with temptation like everybody else, but as it turned out, the devil had nothing on him. He didn't succumb to any. And he came out in a more spiritually powerful place than he went into that wilderness.

Just like we can, I believe. In fact, that's basically why God keeps the devil around and lets him test us, because we gain strength by overcoming. We gain power by fighting the battles.

And Jesus seems to, there seems to be an emphasis in Luke in particular, that Jesus came out in greater power of the spirit after this victory that he had over Satan. Anyway, let's go on a little bit here. Matthew 4.1, Jesus was led up by the spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

And when he had fasted 40 days and 40 nights, afterward he was hungry. You might think that's obvious. I'd be hungry too if I go in even a couple of days without food.

But actually, as I may have mentioned to you before, that the physiological dynamics of fasting are such that after several days at the beginning of a fast, if you maintain a complete fast, you actually lose your hunger. Your hunger disappears. And it's gone for weeks.

And when it returns, it only returns because your body has already consumed everything that's consumable except its own tissues. I mean, you've got all kinds of junk in your colon and body and stuff like that. That all has to be burned off before you get hungry again after the end of a long 40-day fast, or approximately 40 days is how long a complete fast usually would be.

And basically, after the first several days or a couple of weeks of your fast, the hunger actually is gone. I'm judging by what people have written about this. I haven't ever gone that long myself.

But the hunger is gone and it doesn't come back until your body has burned off every bit of alien foreign substance in it and there's nothing left to eat but its own self. And when the body starts burning off its own tissues, its own organs, self-cannibalizing, then the sensation of hunger returns. And when it does, you're quite nearly dead.

And when that hunger returns at the end of a long fast like that, it's suggesting that you're starving to death and you've got to break your fast now. Although, usually it's dangerous to break it suddenly. These health experts about fasting say that you should actually take almost as long breaking your fast as the length of your fast.

That you have to start out with watered-down juices for a week or something. I'm not sure if Jesus had to break it quite that gradually or not. But anyway, you might say, well, how do we know that the regular dynamics of fasting were going on in Jesus? He was, after all, God and there's a lot of miracles in his life.

Maybe this is a miraculous fast. No reason to think so. Because a man can fast.

A man of average build can fast 40 days and that's no serious problem. And he will get hungry at about that time. We have every reason to believe that Jesus' body was acting in the normal fashion here.

Notice it doesn't say that he didn't drink for that period of time or that he was thirsty at the end of that time. He must have drunk. Because to go more than three or four days without water and survive would be a miracle.

Your body can go a lot longer without food than without water. And it's, I think, significant. It doesn't say that he ate and drank nothing.

Although it says something like that about Moses. When Moses was up receiving the law, he ate and drank nothing for 40 days. Then he came down, broke the tablets, went back up and ate and drank nothing for another 40 days.

That was a miracle. And that was just one of the many miracles associated with Moses was that a man could go 80 days without water. He might have taken a glass between the two fasts.

I'm not sure, but he didn't go long. And, you know, we're left to believe that that was just supernatural. God sustained him supernaturally on the mountain.

But there's no language like that about Jesus here. There's no supernatural sustenance going on here, as far as we can tell. He didn't go without water all the time.

It says he ate nothing. It says nothing about whether he drank. And at the end, he was hungry.

It doesn't say he was thirsty. Therefore, I think we should assume that he just went through this fast the same as any other able-bodied human being would have to. The same with no particular physiological advantages over the average person in this.

That he was as hungry as you would be after 40 days of fasting. And, of course, that's the point at which the first temptation come. And it was to feed his stomach.

Look at what happens here in verse 3. Now, when the tempter came to him, he said, If you are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread. But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. So he got through successfully that time, quoting from

Deuteronomy chapter 8, verse 3. Now, the temptation was to turn stones into bread.

Why would that be wrong? Now, there's been a number of different opinions about why that was the wrong thing to do. I mean, why couldn't Jesus, who was the Lord of the universe, why couldn't he just turn a rock into bread? What's so wrong with that? Well, some have said that this would amount to a selfish use of his miraculous powers. In fact, this is what almost all the commentators say.

I totally disagree with their opinion on this, but almost every commentator I've ever read says this. The devil was tempting him to use his supernatural powers in a selfish way, and that Jesus was only come to use his supernatural powers in an unselfish way to help other people. To help himself would have been wrong in this case, and he was tempted to do that.

Well, the same kind of people are probably the people who say, I would never pray for anything for myself. I only pray unselfish prayers. But it occurs to me that if you belong to the Lord, and your well-being is God's concern, that for you to pray for your daily bread, as Jesus said to pray for, is not a selfish prayer.

Because your daily bread keeps your life alive, and your life is devoted to God, and every day you live, you're going to do more for God. It's not strictly selfishness. You might even be willing to die of starvation if that be the will of God.

But since you believe him to want you to live, you pray for things to sustain your life. There's nothing selfish about that. And if there was nothing wrong with Jesus using his miraculous powers to feed other hungry people, I mean, why couldn't he use them to feed himself if he was starving to death? There's nothing intrinsically evil about him doing that.

Furthermore, we know of at least one case where he did a miracle to feed himself, or to take care of his own needs, and that was when he sent Peter out to go fishing and get a coin out of the mouth of a fish, which would pay for Jesus' taxes, as well as Peter's. So I think it's quite wrong what all the commentators say. You know, Jesus couldn't use his powers to meet his own needs.

He did at least once. And I don't think that would have been wrong in this case in itself. That's not the problem here.

Some would say, well, what Jesus was really tempted here by was not so much the question of feeding himself. This is what William Barclay says, for instance, and I've heard others follow him. The temptation here wasn't really the matter of solving his own hunger, but really he was kind of picturing... They say he was out there trying to decide how he was going to conduct his ministry.

He hadn't started yet, but he knew he was going to any time. He was trying to hit upon a

philosophy of ministry, of how to influence people. And the temptation came to him, he could turn rocks into bread, and he could feed the multitudes and attract them with bread like he did later when he fed the 5,000 and so forth.

But he rejected that. And Barclay likes to psychoanalyze Jesus all the time and say, well, here's what was going through his mind, and here's what it really meant and so forth. And his view is that these three temptations represented three different ways that the devil tempted him to proceed on his ministry through the use of sensationalism, jumping off the temple, through the use of feeding people's stomachs and their carnal desires through making bread and so forth.

But I disagree with this too. First of all, there's no mention of any temptation to him to make bread to feed other people. The temptation was for him to feed himself because he happened to be starving to death.

It was pretty relevant to his situation. Furthermore, he later did do miraculous things to feed multitudes. Although he didn't allow that to become the basis for people following him, he nonetheless did that.

And if that's what he was rejecting on this occasion, why did he not reject it on a later occasion? I mean, to me, I reject that explanation. I'll tell you what I think it is. I get it from what Jesus said.

When the devil tempted him to turn rocks into bread, he said, well, man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God. The reason Jesus was fasting in the first place is because he was being led by God's Spirit to do it. The Holy Spirit was driving him, leading him to do this.

And therefore, he had a word, as it were, or a leading from his Father to fast, but he had no such leading or word from God to break his fast. Hunger itself was not a good enough reason to break a fast. He wanted to do everything that proceeded out of the mouth of his Father, and he didn't want to do anything until he heard his Father on it.

It's true, it could be argued, you're going to die if you don't eat, but he had to remind himself from Deuteronomy 8.3, that's not the most important thing. Man doesn't live just by bread alone. It's true, if I turn this into bread and eat it, I'll live physically, but I'll die in another sense, because a more important thing that man lives on is doing everything that proceeds out of the mouth of God.

And I haven't heard, this has come from the mouth of Satan, not from the mouth of God. The synonym would be in obeying Satan and letting Satan call the place instead of letting the Father call the place. Jesus was here to do not his own will, but the will of him that sent him, as he often said.

And therefore, since he had no indication that it was the will of God for him to break his

fast at this particular point, even though necessity was upon him and natural considerations would have compelled him, he still was so committed doing only what proceeded from the mouth of God that he wasn't going to do that on this occasion, because the mouth of God had not issued any instructions about it being time to break his fast. Therefore, what I see here is a temptation, it's not so much the temptation is to use his powers in the wrong way, but to use them at the wrong time, or to trust in himself and his own schedule, his own calendar of how things are going to go, rather than wait on God. Now, it's hard to wait on God when your natural mind tells you, I'm dying.

You know, God hasn't released me yet. I mean, maybe he's fallen asleep or something. I'm dying here.

I'm going to starve to death. It only makes sense for me to feed myself. How could God object to that? Well, Jesus was not going to fall for that one.

He decided rather he'd wait until God did something himself about it. And he did. At the end, God sent angels to minister to him.

And I would imagine that those angels either brought him food, or in some other way, administered supernatural strength and sustenance to him, and he was able to eat shortly after that. But he was not going to break his fast just on a whim, even if it was a life-threatening kind of a situation, as it certainly was. Okay, the next one, verse 5. Then the devil took him up into the holy city, the parallel in Luke 4.9. It specifies it was Jerusalem they took him to.

I mean, we would know that probably anyway. The holy city is not identified by name here, but Luke identifies it in Luke 4.9 as Jerusalem. And set him on the pinnacle of the temple.

That'd be the highest point of the temple complex, which was hundreds of feet above the Kidron Valley floor, which was on the outside of the wall, just down from the highest point of the temple, was the Kidron Valley. And it was several hundred feet. I forget the exact, 600 feet or something, dropped an enormous distance.

Maybe that's not, maybe it's 300, but it's still quite a long drop, a dizzying height. And he set him at the pinnacle of the temple and said to him, if you are the son of God, again, the same if as before, throw yourself down, for it is written, he should give his angels charge concerning you. And in their hands, they will bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone.

Jesus said to him, it is written again, you shall not tempt the Lord your God. Now, Satan, of course, found out the first time he tempted Jesus here, that Jesus was committed to the scriptures. Because instead of Jesus trying to respond in the flesh, he just called

upon the authoritative word of God.

So this is what I follow. I follow what is written. It is written.

Man shall not live by bread alone, but every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God. So the devil said, okay, you want to use scripture? I can use scripture too. After all, doesn't the Bible say this too? You know, you can jump down and the Bible says, it is written, he's given his angels charge of you.

Now, this temptation is, of course, far more actually subtle. Because it seems to have biblical support. By the way, when you're tempted, the devil can sometimes give you all kinds of scriptural arguments for it too.

I heard recently about a young couple that were living together unmarried and having fornication. They were both Christians, but they reasoned from scripture. That, you know, well, Isaac took Rebecca into his tent and there's no mention of any wedding ceremony.

So they just took each other. And so marriage is a matter just before God and not before man. No legal thing is necessary.

Well, frankly, I don't think they were right about that. And they were using scripture. No doubt the devil suggested that scripture to them.

You know, got them to succumb to a temptation they might have otherwise resisted. The devil can quote scriptures and use scripture in a damaging way. But always he can only do so by obscuring the truth of the scripture, either by taking it out of its context or misquoting or obscuring the principal idea in the scripture that he's quoting.

The devil quotes a lot of scripture. Where do you think the cults come from? They got a lot of scriptures that led them astray. The devil certainly knows how to deceive by use of scripture.

But how do you avoid being deceived by scripture then? Well, you got to take the scripture at what it intends. You got to take the spirit of it, as well as the letter of it. And when the psalm said, he has given his angels charge over thee to keep thee in all thy ways.

And in their hands, they will bear thee up lest thou dash thy foot against a stone. This is Psalm 91 verses 11 and 12. The devil quoted the first part of that verse and the second part of the verse, and he left part out in the middle, which is connected here in verse six with and.

He quoted the first part of the passage in the Psalm 91. Then there's an and, and then he quoted the last part, but he left out the middle phrase. The middle phrase is to keep thee

in all thy ways.

He left that part out. He has given his angels charge concerning to keep thee in all thy ways. And in their hands, they'll bear thee up.

The part the devil left out was the central idea. It's not just that God has promised that his angels are protecting every situation, but to keep you when you are in the proper way, when you're doing the thing you're supposed to do, when you're following God's will, you can count on his protection. But the devil left out the part that made reference to that.

And therefore, the subtle suggestion was, you can do your own thing and God is committed to protecting you. But that's not what the essence of the idea of the scripture was. You see, this points out something very important.

There are Christians who take sort of a magical approach to the scripture. They think that if you just quote Bible verses, the devil will run away. Or that in any temptation, all you have to do is quote a relevant text and it'll make the devil go.

The devil's not afraid of scripture. He quotes it himself. It's not something magical in the words of scripture that gives the devil the creeps.

The reason the scripture is effective against Satan is because of the truth in it. And the devil gains his advantage by lies and by deception. He's the father of lies.

And what overcomes Satan's lies is the truth of the scripture. Now, you can quote or misquote or quote out of context scriptures, the actual words from scripture, and still put such a slant on it that it's not true. You've got the words, but you've extracted the truth of it that it's trying to say.

And it's not the words, but the truth that is embodied in the words. And you can know the words without knowing the truth in it. And here the devil's quoting words that are biblical words, but he's trying to put a spin on that is not true.

The truth of the passagy quotes would be that if you walk in the ways that God gives you, he will guarantee his angels will be there to keep you and can prevent you from having the slightest injury to keep you in your ways. But the devil leaves out the part that makes reference to your ways so that the suggestion is then that the angels are coming to do this to you no matter what you do, no matter who makes the choice, whether it's God's will for you or not, you just do it and God will come to your aid. Now, this is what we call tempting God, trying to control God, saying I'm going to do what I want to do, but God, you have to supernaturally support me and save me from any particular risks I take.

This is basically what snake handlers do in some of the snake handling cults in the

Ozarks and stuff where the Bible says they shall take up serpents and if they drink any deadly thing it won't hurt them, so they actually bring poison and poisonous snakes to their services and they drink the poison, they handle rattlesnakes and so forth and some of them have died, some of them have, I think, avoided being bit. Once a rattlesnake is being handled, it probably calms down a little and doesn't always bite. At least that's true of most snakes.

I think it'd probably be true of rattlesnakes too. I haven't handled them myself. But is this faith on their part or is this tempting God? Well, you see, if you're on a mission for God through the desert and a rattlesnake bites you, I would believe you could claim that scripture.

They shall take up serpents, they won't harm them. So Paul was gathering sticks once where he was shipwrecked and a serpent bit him and he just shook it off into the fire and he was supernaturally delivered from it. I've given you authority over serpents and scorpions, Jesus said, and over all the power of the enemy, nothing shall in any wise hurt you.

But if you say, okay, then let's bring on the serpents and you're deciding that you're going to have an encounter with serpents. It doesn't just happen to you as you're doing the will of God, but you're initiating and saying, I want to see this. And so you decide that God's going to have to do something miraculous for you and you're going to initiate a situation that he's not leading you to do, but because you're just going to say, well, God's going to have to take care of me because he might as well jump off a pinnacle of a temple and say, well, God's got to send his angels.

How often does he do it though? Only so often as he tells people to jump off pinnacles of temples. As far as I know, he's never told anyone to. If he did, and Jesus certainly knew this, if God told him to jump off the pinnacle of a temple, he could pretty well count on the angels coming to hold him up.

But it wasn't God, but again, it was the devil telling him to do it. And basically the suggestion was for Jesus to go ahead of God to insist that God come to his rescue when it was not God who was putting him in the situation where he'd need a rescue. It's like saying, I'll do my thing, I'll call my own place for my life, but God, whenever I'm in trouble, I need you, and I'm going to expect you to come through.

That's tempting God. God's supernatural assistance is for people who are doing his will. And when you do his will, you'll have his supernatural assistance.

The devil was trying to get Jesus to tempt God, namely to require God to come through in a dangerous situation that God hadn't put you in. You be the one who's leading God around by the nose. You're the one who's controlling God.

And that is what is tempting God. Jesus said, you shall not tempt the Lord your God. By the way, in that statement of Jesus from Deuteronomy 6.16, quoted here in verse 7, you shall not tempt the Lord your God, could have two meanings too in a way.

I mean, in a sense, as he's tempted to do this, he says, wait, I would be tempting God if I did that. I can't do that. I'd be tempting God.

Could be in a sense a correction to the devil himself who was there tempting God at that very moment, Jesus being God. And he says to the devil, you shall not tempt the Lord your God. Remember, it was God who was tempted by the Jews and the wilderness for 40 years as well.

And that's why Moses said to them in Deuteronomy 6.16, you shall not tempt the Lord your God as your fathers did. Now, we come to the last temptation. Remember in Luke, they're reversed order.

The last two are in reverse order for reasons I can't say, and I'm not sure anyone knows. Verse 8, again, the devil took him up on an exceeding high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to him, all these things I will give you if you will fall down and worship me.

Then Jesus said to him, away with you, Satan, for it is written, you shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve. Then the devil left him, and behold, the angels came and ministered to him. Now, this temptation was an actual temptation to worship Satan.

It actually crossed Jesus' mind. It was a temptation that came to him to worship the devil, bow down and worship Satan. You think you've had bad temptations? Have you ever been tempted to bow your knee and worship Satan? Maybe you have.

A lot of people do these days. Maybe you've had that temptation. I don't think I've... I don't recall having had that specific temptation.

In fact, it would seem so repugnant. Of course, I've always been a Christian. I don't know about non-Christians.

They probably are tempted to do that quite a bit, maybe some Christians too. But to think that Jesus actually had that temptation to worship the devil. Of course, he rejected it right away, but it crossed his mind.

A lot of times when a bad thought comes to our mind, a suggestion from the enemy, we feel all guilty about it. In fact, the devil sometimes, if he can't get us to succumb, will at least want us to feel condemned because that's all he wants from us anyway, is to condemn us. If we succumb to temptation, then he can condemn us about that.

If we don't, he'll still try to condemn us. He'll say, how could a good Christian like you have an awful thought like that that crossed your mind? You call yourself a Christian. No Christian who's worth anything to God would ever have an evil thought like that cross his mind.

Really, the devil's the one who put it there. It's not your fault it came. It's what you do with it after it comes that determines your character.

But remember, next time you feel condemned about having a bad thought cross your mind, Jesus had the thought cross his mind to bow down and worship Satan. It did come. It was suggested to him.

But it was no more his own thought than the evil thoughts when they first come to you or your own thoughts. The devil will get you to fall if he can get you to own them, if he can get you to think they're yours and to agree with them. But as long as you are resisting such thoughts, no matter how atrocious they may be, you don't have to feel any condemnation about them coming.

That's temptation. Temptation is not sin. Jesus was tempted, but he didn't sin.

And to have that thought cross your mind, as long as you put it out, doesn't involve you in any guilt or any complicity with the enemy. Now, the devil said to him, he showed him in a moment of time, in Luke's version, it adds that expression in Luke 4, 5, that he showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time in their glory. This was, as I said earlier, I think a supernatural kind of a vision that he received.

And he saw, I don't know if it's all the future kingdoms, like the modern kingdoms of this world are just the ones existing at that time. But whatever the case, he was tempted to take over the world that way. That if he just bowed to Satan, the devil would arrange it for him to be the world ruler.

In Luke's version, Satan's offer is expanded on a little bit. Because here in Matthew, it just says, all these things I will give you. In Luke 4, 6, he adds, I will give you this and the glory of them for this has been delivered to me, and I give it to whomever I wish.

Luke 4, 6 has Satan adding those words, that it's all been given to Satan and he gives it to whoever he wishes. Now, I've heard a lot of Christians say, and Jesus didn't dispute him on this, so we have to expect that this is true, that Satan does give the kingdom to whoever he wishes. But I think we should realize, the Bible says throughout, that God's the one who gives the kingdom to whoever he wishes.

It says that four times in Daniel chapter 4 alone, that God is the one who rules over the kingdom of men and he gives it to whoever he wants to. It says, God raises up kings and brings down kings in Daniel chapter 2. The Bible indicates it is God, not Satan, who's sovereign over the rise and fall of rulers. The fact that Satan said it to Jesus doesn't

make it true.

And the fact that Jesus didn't refute him in that particular line doesn't make it any more true either. Remember, these were temptations coming to Jesus from the devil. Lots of things the devil says weren't true.

But I can imagine a person being tempted by this thought, and you say, boy, it seems like the people who really win in this world are the ones who really play along with the devil's game. It seems like only wicked people rule. David was tempted to think that way.

He said, it seems like the wicked people prosper and the righteous don't. And that thought could have entered Jesus' mind. Here, God has sent me to be the Messiah, but man, doing it God's way doesn't seem to work very well.

Nice guys finish last. Seems like by submitting to Satan's ways of doing things, like everyone else does who gets to rulership, that's the way to power, because Satan seems to be the one who hands out the honors. Satan seems to be the one who has the power to give honors, because look at who's in positions of power.

But that was all part of the temptation. It's not true that Satan is the one who raises up rulers and brings down rulers. It just appears to be.

And one could be tempted to think that way from the way things look in the world. And one could be motivated by that to say, well, maybe I should compromise a little too, and that way I could get some power. By the way, a lot of people are tempted that way about building their media ministries.

Some of them succumb. They say, well, the only way to really get this thing to build up is to use this kind of fundraising and this kind of advertising and stuff, many times involving dishonesty or other kinds of manipulation. And why do they do that? Because they found out from the world.

That's how Satan, that's how things grow, you know. And you do it the devil's way, you get results. And Jesus was tempted to be pragmatic that way too, but he wouldn't do it.

He said, get behind me, Satan. And he quoted from Deuteronomy 6.13, you shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve. So he didn't savor that thought for very long.

Then the devil left him. It says in Luke that he left him until an opportune time, where in the King James Version, he left him for a season. Which means that he came back at a later time.

This was just one reprieve. And the angels came and ministered to Jesus because Jesus

had remained faithful. God did honor him.

God's angels do keep him in all his ways. He seemed like he was going to die, but things don't always seem the way they really are. God had made a promise that if he would be in the right way, the angels would keep him and prevent him from harm.

And sure enough, Jesus kept himself in the right way though he was tempted to go the wrong way in this situation. The angels did come and minister to him, just as the promise of Psalm 91 said they would. And they kept him from experiencing any harm.

They came and ministered somehow, no doubt, by bringing him food. Or in some other way, you know, giving him strength. And that was the end of his temptation.

After which, there were other temptations at other opportune times that the devil found, according to Luke's version. But the next chronological portion we come to in the Gospels will take us to the Gospel of John Chapter 1. We'll have to take that next time though, because we've just run out of time.