

Luke 4:9-13

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/luke/luke-4/luke-49-13/>

For the third temptation, the devil takes Jesus to the top of God's Temple in Jerusalem and tells Him to jump. The devil argues that this will publicly proclaim Jesus's identity as the Divine Messiah. The devil uses scripture in his attempt to deceive Jesus. Jesus rejects the temptation with another passage from Deuteronomy.

The parallel gospel accounts for this passage are Matthew 4:5-7, 11 and Mark 1:12.

Once again, the second and third temptations of *Jesus* in Luke are presented in the reverse order as Matthew's. This is most likely due to Luke's original purpose of his Gospel account, which was "to write [everything] out for you in consecutive order" (Luke 1:3). Luke's Gospel account likely presents events in chronological order while Matthew probably listed the temptations thematically.

Luke writes:

And he led Him to Jerusalem and had Him stand on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down from here; for it is written, 'He will command His angels concerning You to guard You,' and, 'On their hands they will bear You up, so that You will not strike Your foot against a stone'" (v 9-11).

After *Jesus* resisted *the devil's* first two temptations, the tempter tries a third time. He takes *Jesus* into the holy city of *Jerusalem* and has *Him* stand on the pinnacle of the temple. The temple is the most holy and prominent building inside Jerusalem. It was Herod the Great's expansion of Nehemiah's restoration of Solomon's original temple built to honor God.

To learn more about the temple, see the Bible Says article: ["The Temple."](#)

Once again, *the devil* uses subtle language, "*If You are the Son of God*" to question *Jesus's* divine identity. The devil tempts *Him* to throw Himself down, that is to jump off from the temple's *pinnacle*. The highest point of Solomon's temple was the archway 120 cubits (2 Chronicles 3:4) or 180 feet. Herod's temple was bigger than its predecessor so it is reasonable to suspect that its highest *pinnacle* would have been even taller. The point is that to survive a free fall from such a height would be an obvious miracle.

The location for this temptation has special significance. The first reason is practical. *The temple* was the most public building in all Judea. If a man jumped from *the temple* and survived, many people would see it. Talk would spread from the Sadducees to Roman officials. Word of such an event and a man would quickly move not only throughout Judea but throughout the Roman world.

The second reason is symbolic. *The temple* was located on top of a hill in the northern part of the city. 2 Chronicles 3:1 tells us that this was Mt. Moriah, the same hill where Abraham offered Isaac to God, before the Lord stopped him. The symmetries between Abraham's sacrifice and the devil's second *temptation* would not have been lost to *Jesus* or Matthew's Jewish readers. Both *Jesus* and Isaac were promised sons. And as God had spared Abraham's son, Isaac, upon Mt. Moriah, surely, He would do the same for His own divine Son.

The devil emphasizes this point by quoting the Messianic Psalm 91:11-12, which speaks of God's protection for the one who trusts in the Lord. The tempter says, *He will command His angels concerning You*, but omits or infers the second half of this verse, which reads "To guard you in all your ways." He then quotes Psalm 91:12 in full: *On their hands they will bear You up/ So that You will not strike Your foot against a stone.*

The devil's use of scripture in this *temptation* is in response to *Jesus*'s use of scripture at the first test. Ironically, the devil's citation, though not a prophecy, is another Old Testament reference in support of *Jesus* being the Messiah. The psalm the devil uses to make his case was carefully crafted and selected for *Jesus*. *Jesus* denied the devil's first *temptation* by telling him that Man lives by trusting God alone. The devil now counteracts and says, "Ok, since you trust God alone then prove it by jumping off *the Temple*" before quoting a Psalm whose main theme is about trusting God alone.

Once again, *the devil* was tempting *Jesus* to take an easy path for people to recognize Him as the Messiah, instead of the path God had for *Him*—which included suffering first, before receiving a reward of glory (Isaiah 53:1-12).

And Jesus answered and said to him, "It is said, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test'" (v 13).

Once again *Jesus* responds to the devil's *temptation* by quoting law found in Deuteronomy,

"You shall not put the Lord your God to the test, as you tested Him at Massah." (Deuteronomy 6:16)

Massah means "to tempt; to test; to try." Massah refers to a place near Mount Horeb (Sinai). Massah received its name from Moses because it was there that the Israelites *put God to the test* (tempted *Him*) and demanded of *Him* to give them water. This incident is recorded in Exodus 17:1-7. The Israelites tested *God* by saying "Is *God* among us or not?" In other words, "If *God* doesn't do our bidding, then perhaps we will just need to get another god."

The essence of the third *temptation* of *Jesus* is *to test God* in the same way Israel tested *God* at Massah. Satan tempted *Jesus* to treat *God* as a genie in a bottle. To demand *God* do His bidding, rather than submit to *God*'s bidding. *Jesus* recognized this and made it clear that we are to accept our circumstances with faith that this is for our best, rather than demand *God* perform for us according to our plans and desires. *God* had promised to provide for Israel, but they demanded He provide on their time schedule.

By using this passage, *Jesus* reminds *the devil* that it is not for us to demand anything of *God*. We are to trust *God*. *God* does not answer to us. We answer to Him.

When the devil had finished every temptation, he left Him until an opportune time (v 13).

Luke's phrasing of *the devil had finished every temptation* may point to Satan having attempted his original schemes for the tempting of *Jesus* and failed for now, or that the three specific *temptations* are broadly representative of different categories of *temptations* in general. We know from Matthew's account that *Jesus* commanded *the devil* to go away (Matthew 4:10). *Jesus* did as James counsels: "Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you" (James 4:7).

Each of *the devil's* three *temptations* can be seen as corresponding to what the aged disciple, John, refers to in one of his letters as the "lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life":

"Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever."
(1 John 2:15-17)

The tempter's first *temptation* to turn stone into bread is an example of the lust of the flesh. It focuses on appetites. By creating the mental image of bread, it could also focus on lust of the eyes, or senses. *The devil's* second *temptation* is the offer of giving kingly power to *Jesus* in exchange for worship. This is an instance of the boastful pride of life. Satan's third *temptation* is jumping off the Temple, potentially creating a spectacle for all to see, which might correspond to the lust of the eyes. It might also overlap with the boastful pride of life, in that *Jesus* would be demanding particular behavior from His Father. It lusts after control, and the esteem and reputation of others.

The devil left Him at this time, but he did not give up. While this is the most direct form of *temptation* that *Jesus* encounters (that we have on record), He surely was tempted during His earthly ministry in other ways. For instance, the author of Hebrews explains that *Jesus* was tempted in "all things as we are, yet without sin," giving believers hope that we are not alone when facing temptation in life (Hebrews 4:15).

Satan leaving *Him until an opportune time* is most likely a reference to *Jesus's* trials leading up to and including His crucifixion. *Jesus* reveals to His disciples that Satan is at work in John 14:30, immediately after telling them He will "go away" and "go to the Father" in John 14:28:

"I will not speak much more with you, for the ruler of the world is coming, and he has nothing in Me;"
(John 14:30)

Jesus also seems to allude to *the devil* being at work through the actions of men as the religious authorities came to arrest *Him* in the Garden of Gethsemane later in Luke:

“While I was with you daily in the temple, you did not lay hands on Me; but this hour and the power of darkness are yours.”
(Luke 22:53)

Satan’s *temptation* is also seen when *Jesus* is on the cross and He is tempted to display His power to miraculously save Himself from His pain and suffering. The Roman soldiers first mock *Jesus* on the cross by saying, “If You are the King of the Jews, save Yourself!” (Luke 23:38). *Jesus* is then tempted in a similar way by one of the thieves on the cross: “Are You not the Christ? Save Yourself and us!” (Luke 23:39). Just as He does in the three different temptations from Satan in Luke 4, *Jesus* does not succumb to *temptation* and take the easy way out.

We are not told how Luke came to know of this episode. We might presume that *Jesus* told His disciples about it as a means of instruction. Luke’s inclusion of this experience immediately after *Jesus*’ baptism, approval, and anointing from God the Father, and *Jesus*’ genealogy from Adam indicates that this *temptation* in the wilderness is the beginning of *Jesus*’ ministry on earth. Luke’s Greek-Gentile audience would also likely have resonated with *Jesus* resisting *the devil*’s *temptation* as proving that He is the perfect man and worthy of being followed. *Jesus*’ example also serves as an instruction to believers that God allows testing for those living a life that pleases *Him*. It is preparation for great service. By noting how *Jesus* resisted, Luke also instructs us how to resist, by clinging to God’s perspective through His written word.

Biblical Text

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10 for it is written,

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11 and, ‘On their hands they will bear You up,

So that You will not strike Your foot against a stone.’”

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