

# One God

## Jesus was Tempted

by Sean Finnegan

Instead, he scoured his mind for Scriptures that could deflect this fiery dart and responded, "It is written, 'MAN SHALL NOT LIVE ON BREAD ALONE, BUT ON EVERY WORD THAT PROCEEDS OUT OF THE MOUTH OF GOD.'" At this moment, Satan probably felt a little off-balance. Things were not the same as when he spoke to the mother of humankind. This mortal did not try to resist him on his own, instead he leaned all his weight on the words of God.

After forty long days of wandering in the Judean deserts without food, Jesus was at his weakest, and Satan came to him in order to derail his messianic destiny. By this time, it was clear to Jesus that he was the hope of mankind, the Messiah sent by God to save the world through preaching and sacrifice. Satan narrowly focused his temptations with laser-like precision on Jesus' belief that he was the Son of God—the one to rule the earth (Psalms 2:6-8).

### Round One

(Matthew 4:3 & 4; Luke 4:3 & 4)

He said to the would-be king, "If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread." The temptation was designed to inspire doubt in the all-important belief that Jesus must have found at once precious and overwhelming, "I am the Son of God." In order for any temptation to be alluring, it must be 1) desired and 2) possible. Jesus wanted bread. Jesus could have turned that stone into bread.

### Round Two

(Matthew 4:5-7; Luke 4:9-12)

Having been repelled by the force behind the words of the Almighty, the devil decided a change of setting would be beneficial. He transported Jesus to Jerusalem and set him on the highest point of the temple. Surely, this change of setting would at once disorient him and focus his attention on all the people milling around, stories below, totally oblivious to the fact that their fate was being determined at this very moment. "...and said to Him, 'If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down; for it is written, 'HE WILL COMMAND HIS ANGELS CONCERNING YOU'; and 'ON *their* HANDS THEY WILL BEAR YOU UP, SO THAT YOU WILL NOT STRIKE YOUR FOOT AGAINST A STONE.'" The tempter was not going to fail twice; he would use this human's strength against him as judo wrestlers use their opponents' weight against them in a match. The fulcrum was Jesus' dependence on Scripture. Satan must have reasoned, "Scripture

says that he will be fine if he falls from a great height. If he really believed this, then he should prove it." Again Jesus thought hard about which Scripture would apply and responded, "YOU SHALL NOT PUT THE LORD YOUR GOD TO THE TEST." He neither agreed nor disagreed with Satan's interpretation and application of Scripture, but rather took a step back and saw that if he were to pull off this stunt, it would be putting God to the test and there was Scripture specifically forbidding this.

### Round Three

(Matthew 4:8-11; Luke 4:5-8)

Ouch! That one hurt. Here is a thirty something year old human handling the devil who is now more than 4,000 years old and using the words of his archenemy—Yahweh, the God of Israel. How insulting! But he could not let his disdain show. Once more, new strategy had to be employed. Satan brought Jesus up to a very high mountain and paraded his supernatural abilities by somehow showing Jesus all of the kingdoms of the world and their glory in a moment of time. The title "son of God" (according to the Old Testament) means the one who would rule the kingdoms of the world. Thus, the serpent was putting in view the destiny of the "son of God" (I Chronicles 17:11-14; Luke 1:31-35) and dangling it like a carrot before Jesus when he said, "I will give You all this domain and its glory; for it has been handed over to me, and I give it to whomever I wish.

Therefore if You worship before me, it shall all be Yours." Here it is: the shortcut to the Kingdom. No blood, no pain, no suffering in front of unappreciative scoffers, but he still would get the kingdoms of the world. If there were one temptation that would truly allure the Messiah, it would be to give him his own destiny. Remember that a few short years later, Jesus would be on his knees in the Garden of Gethsemane and would sweat with intensity in agonizing anticipation of his future and would be crying out, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not as I will, but as You will." Jesus did not want to die! It is now clear to see where the devil was coming from. No pain, but gain all. Nonetheless, this man who was the hope of the human race (unlike his predecessor who had failed) did not depend on his own strength and for the third and final time, replied with force, "It is written, You shall worship the Lord your God and serve Him only." Ding! KO!

Like a wounded animal, the evil one slithered off with not so much as a word to say for himself. He was defeated. Jesus overcame. He is the one who, with all the forces of evil focused upon him and every contrivance imagined by the crooked serpent hurled at him, did the one thing that could defeat even this superhuman foe—he leaned with all his weight on his God, his Father, and quoted His very words. What a model for us to follow!

Nevertheless, the example of dealing with temptation dissipates

like fog in the morning sun when Jesus is elevated to a superhuman god or incorporated within the Godhead as the second member of the trinity. Besides, God would not be tempted with evil. He is the only One Who is truly "all good" (i.e., the opposite of evil; Mark 10:18). James set the record straight when he said, "Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am being tempted by God;' for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone" (James 1:13). There it is: God cannot be tempted by evil. Is the devil evil? Yes! Thus, God cannot be tempted by the devil. So then, one more question remains: "Was Jesus really tempted, or did he just sort of go through the motions so we would have an example?"

Hebrews 2:18

For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted.

Hebrews 4:15

For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we *are*, yet without sin.

Jesus is the man. Jesus is our man, our chief representative—the one who did it right so we can follow in his steps. He was tempted, that is what the Scriptures say. Because he *really* was tempted, he can understand us, sympathize with us, and aid us. Jesus was

tempted, he overcame and, because He did, so can we. Still, we cannot do it on our own strength; we must depend on God, as our example, Christ, did. All of this is undermined if Jesus were really God!

Let us summarize:

- 1. God cannot be tempted**
- 2. Jesus was tempted**

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### **Jesus is not God**

My intention is not to demean Jesus. I am not trying to "bring him down to our level." On the contrary, I would like to elevate the Messiah. He, as the second Adam specially created by God, never sinned! Would someone be impressed if God never sinned? Certainly not! It is in His nature—it is the norm for the Father to be holy. It would be like pitting an NBA All-Star against a six year old for a one-on-one tournament. Would anyone be surprised if the professional basketball player won? Certainly not! But what if both sides are equal in strength? Then there would be something worth watching. Consider a human, a true member of the children of Adam, never giving in to temptation. Remarkable! He could have failed; he could have lost the game; the odds were stacked against him; but, he won! Some may say, "It is impossible for a true man to live without sin." I say, "For nothing will be impossible with God" (Luke 1:37). Jesus always depended on God (John 5:19, 30; 8:28; 12:49 and 50; 14:10, 31), which is the grand secret to living without sin. In fact, Jesus requires us to be perfect

(Matthew 5:48), and he has uniquely equipped us to do it through the spirit. God and Christ live within the believer to help him or her to live as an obedient child. We can do it because he did it. But this is all lost if he were truly to be God. We cannot allow "our man" to be ripped from us and transmuted into a dual-natured contradiction. He is human. That is why we are enamored with him. He represents what each of us can be if we just follow his example.

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