

# Overcoming Temptation



Following Jesus' Example  
*Robert C. Newman*



# What is Temptation?

- Particularly in the KJV, "temptation" covers several different ideas:
- Sometimes *test*, when God brings us into difficulties to prove our faith.
- Sometimes *challenge*, when we try to make God do something we want, or we dare him to punish us.
- Usually, we think of it as meaning to *attract us to sin*.

# To Test Us

Gen 22:1-2 (NIV) Some time later God **tested** Abraham. He said to him, "Abraham!" "Here I am," he replied. 2 Then God said, "Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about."

James 1:2-3 (NIV) Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, 3 because you know that the **testing** of your faith develops perseverance.

# To Challenge God

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Exod 17:7 (NIV) And he called the place Massah {[7] Massah means testing.} and Meribah {[7] Meribah means quarreling.} because the Israelites quarreled and because they **tested** the LORD saying, "Is the LORD among us or not?"

Acts 15:10 (NIV) Now then, why do you try to **test** God by putting on the necks of the disciples a yoke that neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear? 11 No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are.



# To Attract Us to Sin

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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; 14 but each one is **tempted** when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed.

Gal 6:1 (NIV) Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be **tempted**.

# Where Does Temptation Come From?

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- **Testing** comes from God, though he often uses circumstances, other people or demonic forces to bring it to us.
- **Challenging God** comes from within, though often stirred up by Satan.
- **Attraction to sin** does not come from God, who is holy, but God allows it.

# Where Does Attraction to Sin Come From?

*Three traditional sources:*

- The World
- The Flesh
- The Devil





# Jesus as our Example

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- Jesus was doubtless tempted many times; for example:
  - Peter's suggestion that he needn't die.
  - The taunts by the crowd to come down from the cross.
- We will look here at Jesus' temptations in the wilderness as an example of how we too can overcome temptation.



# Jesus' General Preparation

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*His whole life was a preparation to face temptation:*

- He was interested in the things of the Lord (recall his response at age 12).
- He spent much time in prayer.
- He knew the Bible well.
- He habitually trusted God (here in the wilderness & when sleeping in the boat)



# A Lesson for us

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Part of the purpose of God in leaving us here on earth after we trust in Him is that our lives be a testimony to God's life-changing power, which includes our being able to stand faithfully in the midst of strong attractions to sin.

# Jesus' Specific Preparation

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*Jesus also was prepared for this specific attack of Satan:*

- He knew he had come to earth to carry out God's will, that he must obey Him perfectly in every action, word, thought.
- He knew he was about to begin a public ministry in which he would be unjustly opposed, slandered, attacked, and finally murdered.

# Jesus' Specific Preparation

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- He knew the Holy Spirit had led him into the wilderness to get ready for this ministry.
- We aren't told what Jesus was doing in the wilderness besides fasting, but we can be sure it included prayer and meditation on God's Word.



# A Lesson for us

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- None of us are Jesus.
- But if we are really trusting God, we are each a little "Jesus" (a Christian).
- We have been called to live lives like his, so others may see something of Jesus in us, and be drawn to him.
- We cannot do this in our own strength.



# A Lesson for us

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- We must have God filling our lives.
- If we do, we too will face situations which will testify to the truth of Christianity by our doing spectacular things for Jesus' sake.
- Many of these will not be pleasant to go through...
- ...but they will be very pleasant to remember later, if we were faithful.

# Jesus' 1<sup>st</sup> Temptation: Turn these stones to bread!

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Matt 4:1-4 (NIV) Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. 2 After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. 3 The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." 4 Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.' {[4] Deut. 8:3}"

# Jesus' 1<sup>st</sup> Temptation: Turn these stones to bread!

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- Jesus has been fasting for 40 days.
- He is near starvation.
- Satan tempts him to bail out of this very uncomfortable, life-threatening situation.
- Knowing that God has put him into this situation, Jesus refuses to do so.



# Jesus' 1<sup>st</sup> Temptation: Turn these stones to bread!

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- Though God normally works through natural means like food, water, air, health, etc., to sustain our lives...
- Ultimately we live by God's decree rather than the inherent power of food.
- Jesus refuses to take the untrusting way out of this situation just because it is getting desperate.

# A Lesson from the 1<sup>st</sup> Temptation

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- Every day, we too are tempted to take matters into our own hands, to run away from some difficult situation because we cannot see how we can succeed by our own powers.
- How many really spectacular opportunities have we missed because we wouldn't trust Him in this?

# Jesus' 2<sup>nd</sup> Temptation: Jump! God will catch you!

Matt 4:5-7(NIV) Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. 6 "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down. For it is written: 'He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.' {[6] Psalm 91:11,12}" 7 Jesus answered him, "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.' {[7] Deut. 6:16}"

# Jesus' 2<sup>nd</sup> Temptation: Jump! God will catch you!

- Well, if Jesus is going to depend on God's miraculous help, why not go whole hog?
- Satan now suggests such faith could be put to good use, probably by getting the crowd at the temple to be witnesses of a spectacular miracle.



# Jesus' 2<sup>nd</sup> Temptation: Jump! God will catch you!

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- Jesus could jump off the high point, shout all the way down, and make a soft landing on the temple platform!
- Isn't this the sort of faith many today call "stepping out on faith" or "claiming the promises of God"?
- What's wrong with this?



# What's wrong with this?

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- Is it just because Satan suggested it?
- So we should do the opposite of whatever Satan suggests?
- No, this too is bound to get us in trouble.
- This suggestion, which at first looks like great faith, is actually great unbelief.

# What is faith?

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- Faith is not just believing something hard enough, it is *trusting God*.
- When we set the agenda for what we want to happen, we are not trusting God, we are asking Him to trust us!
- When we do this and get ourselves into a situation that only a miracle can get us out of, we are tempting God.

# Jesus' 2<sup>nd</sup> Temptation: Jump! God will catch you!

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- As Jesus points out (Deut 6:16), God forbids us to put Him to the test.
- So how do we follow Jesus' example here?
- We put away the temptation to be great Christians for whom God will work spectacular miracles.



# A Lesson from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Temptation

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- We try to trust Him, really trust Him, with each & every circumstance of our lives.
- We accept His way:
  - The way of the meek & lowly Jesus
  - The way of the stable & carpenter's shop
  - The way of unaccredited disciples
  - The way of the cross

# A Lesson from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Temptation

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- This way says, "Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, and He will exalt you at the proper time."
- This way says, "The first will be last, and the last first."
- If we will do this, God will do some spectacular things through us, better than we could have devised on our own.

# Jesus' 3<sup>rd</sup> Temptation: Worship Me!

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Matt 4:8-11 (NIV) Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor.  
9 "All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me." 10 Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.' {[10] Deut. 6:13}"  
11 Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.

# Jesus' 3<sup>rd</sup> Temptation: Worship Me!

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- This 3<sup>rd</sup> temptation seems *so crass* after the other two; no subtlety at all!
- It reminds us that Satan has many techniques & strategies he uses.
- Back in the old days, fortified cities were sometimes taken by trickery and sometimes by frontal assault.
- This is frontal assault.

# Jesus' 3<sup>rd</sup> Temptation: Worship Me!

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- Satan has no morals; he will use whatever works.
- Jesus, though he is Son of God & infinite in wisdom, isn't ashamed to respond to a simple temptation with a simple & basic answer.

# Jesus' 3<sup>rd</sup> Temptation: Worship Me!

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- Satan thought it worthwhile to offer Jesus, without a struggle, the very thing Jesus came to get – rule over all the nations of the world.
- But Jesus knew this was not the main problem.
- The main problem is rebellion, human and Satanic.

# A Lesson from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Temptation

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*We, too, will often be tempted in this way:*

- We can be good Christians and get the best of the world, too.
- We really can serve both God and money.
- These are lies! Don't buy them!

# A Lesson from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Temptation

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- God has sometimes let some of His servants be rich or famous...
- But let Him choose who they will be.
- If we follow Him faithfully, we will one day be richer & more famous than our wildest imagination.
- If we follow Satan's temptation, we will lose everything when we die.



# A Lesson from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Temptation

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- Only God is worthy of our worship.
- We really worship Him when:
  - We treat His word as our command
  - We treat His agenda as the best thing we can do with our lives.

# Conclusion

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- The best way for us to overcome temptation is to be a certain sort of person.
- A person who:
  - Loves God with all his/her heart
  - Wants to serve Him faithfully in everything
  - Depends on Him for strength & goodness in every situation

# Conclusion

- That's what Jesus was like.
- The best way to overcome temptation is to be like Jesus!





# Overcoming Temptation

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Lord, help us to be like Jesus!