

6. Victory in the Wilderness (1Q 2016—Rebellion and Redemption)

Biblical material: Matt. 1:20–23, John 9:39, Matt. 3:7–12, 4:1–10, Deut. 34:1–4, Rev. 21:10; Luke 19:10.

Quotes

- Every moment of resistance to temptation is a victory. *Frederick William Faber*
- Temptation is the devil looking through the keyhole. Yielding is opening the door and inviting him in. *Billy Sunday*
- No temptation can gravitate to a man unless there is that is his heart which is capable of responding to it. *James Allen*
- All men are tempted. There is no man that lives that can't be broken down, provided it is the right temptation, put in the right spot. *Henry Ward Beecher*
- Lead us not into temptation. Just tell us where it is; we'll find it. *Sam Levenson*
- The last temptation is the greatest treason: to do the right deed for the wrong reason. *T. S. Eliot*

Questions

Why are we so intrigued by Jesus' temptation experience? What does this tell us about Jesus and the part he played in answering the issues in the Great Controversy? How can we learn the way to deal with temptations in our own lives—is it just a matter of quoting Scripture? What was the real nature of Jesus' victory?

Bible summary

The Great Controversy reaches a major climax in the temptations of Jesus. Here we see the issues revealed as never before. We also see how God in Jesus is answering the charges in a very direct way.

John the Baptist's "baptism for repentance" is noted in Matt. 3:7–12 before Jesus' baptism, and then his temptations in Matt. 4:1–10. Jesus' miraculous birth is recorded in Matt. 1:20–23, while in John 9:39 Jesus says he came into the world for judgment. Deut. 34:1–4 describes the death of Moses (having previously failed in a temptation). Rev. 21:10 tells of the coming of New Jerusalem, a great culmination of God's victory in terms of the Great Controversy and our redemption. Jesus says that he "came to seek and to save the lost." Luke 19:10.

Comment

In the temptations we see Jesus responding as a divine being—for the temptations are not ones that are likely for a being with only human powers. The real question is what do we see as to the kind of person God is in the form of Jesus? The truth is that God in human form lived among us, shared our experiences, and died at our hands. He lived in a sinful world yet did not compromise his principles, revealing in the most practical way how God operates, his true nature, and his desire to restore harmony through the universe.

What is really important to note is that while these are temptations that relate to very human situations (hunger, pride, and presumption) they are directed at Jesus' divinity—to misuse his power. Human beings are not tempted to turn stones into bread,

for example, but Jesus could have done this. The temptation was to misuse his divine power to satisfy his human hunger. Similarly this is true in relation to the Devil's invitation to worship him. Though some find this absurd (for once you worship, you have ceded power and authority), it was a way for Jesus to "short-circuit" his mission to reclaim the world. Like the temptation to turn stones into bread, an action capable of rationalization—what would be wrong in acceding to either of these suggestions if it accomplished his objective? To die from hunger would have nullified his mission, so it would have been "logical" to satisfy his human needs in this way. To have acknowledged Satan as ruler was surely not such a great issue, logically. After all, didn't Jesus identify him as "prince of this world." Lastly the temptation to use divine aid to prevent self-destruction would at least have proved God's support, a demonstration of the Father's care, thinking in this rationalizing way. But in all instances, Jesus saw through the ploys, and refused to misuse his power or to place his Father in an impossible situation. He did not enter into argument, but answered with Scripture. And when in the end, the Devil also quotes Scripture, (or misquotes it), Jesus refuses to "put God to the test" in this provocative and presumptuous way.

While these examples of how temptations come and how to deal with them are not exhaustive, they provide a useful baseline of principles. The most significant is not to be misdirected from mission, keeping to God's values and methods, never seeking to use God's blessings for our own personal gratification.

Ellen White Comments

In the word of God... the curtain that separates the visible from the invisible world is lifted, and we behold the conflict of the opposing forces of good and evil, from the first entrance of sin, to the final triumph of righteousness and truth; and all is but a revelation of the character of God. {CE 65}

Imagine, if you can, yourself in Christ's stead in the wilderness. There is no human voice you hear, but you are surrounded with demons under deceptive pretensions as angels from heaven in the most seducing attractions presenting Satan's wily insinuations against God, as he did to our first parents. His sophistry is most deceiving and artful in undermining your confidence in God, destroying your faith and your trust, and keeping your mind on a constant strain so that he can get one clue that he can use to his own advantage to allure you into a controversy, as if reading your thoughts to which you will not give utterance, just as he did to Eve. {6MR 110}

It would be wisdom on our part to make a study of the temptations of Christ in the wilderness, and with humble, contrite hearts, seek to understand their import, and learn their significance to us as individuals. RH, October 9, 1894}

Satan held a council with his angels, as to the course they should pursue to prevent the people from having faith in Christ as the Messiah whom the Jews had so long been anxiously expecting. He was disappointed and enraged that he had prevailed nothing against Jesus in the manifold temptations in the wilderness. He thought if he could inspire in the hearts of Christ's own people, unbelief as to His being the promised One, he might discourage Jesus in His mission and secure the Jews as his agents to carry out his purposes. {Con 56}