



JESUS' TEMPTATIONS NARRATIVE AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR TODAY'S CHRISTIANITY: A THEOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION

A Narrativa das Tentações de Jesus e as suas Implicações para o Cristianismo Atual: Uma Interpretação Teológica

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ABSTRACT: Jesus' temptations narrative constitutes a foundational tenet within the Christian doctrines, elucidating Jesus' ordeal in the wilderness, where the devil gravely enticed him to exploit his divine status as the son of God in fulfilling the messianic expectations of his people for self-serving purposes. From earliest Christianity, this narrative has been a subject of theological interpretations, whose lessons still hold relevance to today's Christianity in the light of the excessive and unruly passion for wealth, fame and power that characterized contemporary society. Using a narrative-descriptive and analytical method, the study critically examines the temptation narrative in the context of its existential demands and implications for today's Christianity. It highlights the humans' daily moral trials and presents Jesus' disposition in the trials as a model for resolutions of ethical challenges and obedience to God.

KEYWORDS: Jesus. Son of God. Temptations. Christianity. Theological Interpretation.

RESUMO: A narrativa das tentações de Jesus constitui um princípio fundamental das doutrinas cristãs, elucidando a provação de Jesus no deserto, onde o diabo seduziu gravemente para que explorasse o seu estatuto divino de filho de Deus,

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cumprindo as expectativas messiânicas do seu povo para fins egoístas. Desde os primórdios do cristianismo, esta narrativa tem sido objeto de interpretações teológicas, cujas lições continuam a ser relevantes para o cristianismo atual, à luz da paixão excessiva e desregrada pela riqueza, fama e poder que caracteriza a sociedade contemporânea. Utilizando um método narrativo-descritivo e analítico, o estudo examina criticamente a narrativa da tentação no contexto das suas exigências existenciais e implicações para o cristianismo atual. Destaca as provações morais quotidianas dos seres humanos e apresenta a disposição de Jesus nas provações como um modelo para a resolução de desafios éticos e a obediência a Deus.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Jesus. Filho de Deus. Tentações. Cristianismo. Interpretação teológica.

Introduction

At the threshold of the attempt to interpret the life and ministry of Jesus lies his temptations narrative. The temptations of Jesus were significantly linked to his baptism. Following the experience at Jordan, the descent of the Holy Spirit, and the voice from heaven, where he was publicly adopted and presented as the beloved son, the Spirit at once led him into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil (Matthew 3:17; Mark 1:11; Luke 3:22). In the temptations, Jesus was severely tested to use for a selfish end his divine status to fulfil the messianic expectations of his people,¹ thereby defiling the mission of servant-messiahship as defined in Jordan. Thus, the temptations have been described as an attempt to lure him away from the true meaning and function of his messianic ministry to the popular demands of his age (ROBINSON, 1947, p. 43-48).

The temptations narrative is one of the fundamental doctrines of Christianity. It highlights the humanity of Jesus, his devotion to God, and the moral struggles common to humans. Since the dawn of the Christian faith, Jesus' temptations narrative has held a central position in theological inquiry and still maintains its relevance in ongoing discussions within modern Christian discourse. In light of the above, this study seeks to critically examine Jesus' temptation narrative, exploring its existential implications for contemporary Christian theology and praxis. Specifically, the study delves into the narrative's pertinence amid the pervasive and unbounded pursuit of material wealth, social recognition, and authoritative dominion that characterized prevalent societal paradigms in the present age contemporary society. The methodology adopted in the study is narrative-descriptive analysis. The

¹ Jesus lived among the people whose messianic expectation was wholly of the world. For them, the messianic age meant abundance, spectacular miracles, signs and wonder and finally, Israel's domination over all nations.

study is organized into four parts. The first part discusses the historical and contextual contexts of the temptations' narrative. The second part is the detailed analysis. It discusses the texts and contents of the temptation narrative. The third is a personal reflection on the narrative. The fourth and final part examines the implication of the temptation narrative for today's Christianity.

1 Historical and Contextual Context of Jesus' Temptations Narrative

The trials of Jesus in the wilderness lie in the background of the rich historical experiences of the people of Israel with Yahweh.² "The narrative is drenched in Old Testament theological themes, imagery, and dialogue that reverberate with words and events of an entire nation tested to its core" (SCHMUTZER, 2008, p. 15). Three significant comparisons show the connection between the two events. First, Israel and Jesus were tested in the wilderness (Deut. 8:2-5; Matt. 4:1; Lk 4:1-2). Secondly, the subject of the test in each case is the 'son of God' (Deut. 1:31; 8:5; Matt. 3:7; Lk. 3:22.23-38). Thirdly, the time duration of the test for both was forty days (Num. 14:34; Matt. 4:2; Lk 4:2) (MORRIS, 2016, p. 290-301). Thus, Jesus' temptations in the wilderness resonate with the wilderness experiences of the people of Israel. They recapitulate in his individual life as the Son of God (Matthew 3:17) the temptations of Israelites in their corporate lives as the sons of God (Ex. 4:22). Both experiences provided opportunities for the sons to demonstrate their commitment and loyalty to God; but where Israel failed, Jesus succeeded.

Jesus' temptations narrative is found in the three synoptic gospels (Matthew 14-11, Mark 1:12-13, and Luke 4:1-13). The pericope falls between the story of his baptism and the beginning of his public ministry. In the triple tradition, Mark's account is notably brief and concise. He was remarkably silent about Jesus' fast. However, Mathew and Luke give a more detailed narrative, focusing on the dialogue between Jesus and Satan. A close reading of the three traditions or accounts reveals five areas of agreement among the synoptic gospels, namely (a) the Spirit led Jesus, (b) into the wilderness, (c) for forty days, (d) to be tempted, and (e) of the devil. The narrative, conventionally associated with *Quelle* (Q) source, albeit with a version discernible to Mark (DORMANDY, 2003, p. 183-187),

² Deuteronomy 8:2-3 "... God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that he may humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandment or not..." As in the case of Israel, so with Jesus. The background of the 'test' is to prove their loyalty.

likely finds its origins in Jesus himself, presumably communicated to his disciple in the form of a parable (JONES, 1956, p. 303-313). His disciples would not have thought that he would be subjected to temptations to have constructed the narrative; had they conceived such a scenario, they would have devised a completely different temptation for him, in line with the tales of numerous legends of the time.

The temptations narrative is structured in a triadic sequence, comprising three interrelated episodes (Matthew 4:1-4.5-7.8-11; Luke 4:1-4.5-8.9-13). Each episode is set on an imagery distinct scene- “into the wilderness”, “on the pinnacle of the temple”, and “on a very high mountain”, featuring a series of confrontational exchanges between two primary characters- namely, the Devil and Jesus- with the devil assuming the role of provocateur and Jesus as the respondent (SCHMUTZER, 2008, p. 15-42). The narrative follows a conventional structure, commencing with an introductory phase, which establishes the context for temptation, followed by the devil’s challenge, which constitutes the temptation itself, and then culminating in Jesus’ decisive responses to the devil’s challenge, concluding each individual episode.

2 The Synoptic Account of Jesus’ Temptations

Mathew 4:1-11	Luke 4:1-13	Mark 1:12-13
<p>¹ Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil.</p> <p>² And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungred.</p> <p>³ And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread.</p> <p>⁴ But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word</p>	<p>¹ And Jesus being full of the Holy Ghost returned from Jordan, and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness,</p> <p>² Being forty days tempted of the devil. And in those days he did eat nothing; and when they were ended, he afterward hungered.</p> <p>³ And the devil said unto him, If thou be the Son of God, command this stone that it be made bread.</p> <p>⁴ And Jesus answered him, saying, It is written, That man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God.</p> <p>⁵ And the devil, taking him up into an high mountain, shewed</p>	<p>¹² And immediately the spirit driveth him into the wilderness.</p> <p>¹³ And he was there in the wilderness forty days, tempted of Satan; and was with the wild beasts; and the angels ministered unto him.</p>

<p>that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.</p> <p>5 Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple,</p> <p>6 And saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone.</p> <p>7 Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.</p> <p>8 Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them;</p> <p>9 And saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me.</p> <p>10 Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.</p> <p>11 Then the devil leaveth him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto him.</p>	<p>unto him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time.</p> <p>⁶ And the devil said unto him, All this power will I give thee, and the glory of them: for that is delivered unto me; and to whomsoever I will I give it.</p> <p>⁷ If thou therefore wilt worship me, all shall be thine.</p> <p>⁸ And Jesus answered and said unto him, Get thee behind me, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.</p> <p>⁹ And he brought him to Jerusalem, and set him on a pinnacle of the temple, and said unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down from hence:</p> <p>¹⁰ For it is written, He shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee:</p> <p>¹¹ And in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone.</p> <p>¹² And Jesus answering said unto him, It is said, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.</p> <p>¹³ And when the devil had ended all the temptation, he departed from him for a season</p>	
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3 Detailed Analysis

The temptations of Jesus in the wilderness are intrinsically linked to his baptism. The experience in Jordan inevitably led to it, as indicated by the indefinite word of sequence *τότε* (tote) (then)- “Then Jesus was led up

by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil" (Matt. 4:1; Lk 4:1). The connection between the two events was further stressed by their linkage to the Spirit (THOMPSON, 1960, p. 1-12). The Spirit, which came upon him on baptism, led him into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. The word 'tempted' as used in the narrative, is the Greek term *πειρασθῆναι* (*peirasthēnai*), derived from the root word *πειραζιν* (*peiraziv*), meaning 'to test'. *Πειραζιν* (*Peirazin*) encompasses a wide range of meanings such as 'to assay', 'to prove', 'to examine', 'to tempt', 'to entice', 'to scrutinise', and 'to try' (STRONG, 1995, p. 81.99), thereby broadening the semantic scope of *πειρασθῆναι* (*peirasthēnai*), to include a range of evaluative and alluring actions.

Etymologically, the term is of neutral content with a sense of examination of character or quality. It is thus interchangeably used for 'test' and 'temptation'. Barclay, however, noted that *πειραζιν* (*peiraziv*) means more 'to test' than it means 'to tempt', as in an enticement to evil (BARCLAY, 2004, p. 61). In this context, God is said to 'tempt' his covenant people (Gen. 22:1-2; Ex. 16:4; 2 Deut. 8:2; Chron. 32:31). It does not imply an enticement to evil, but rather a 'test' of devotion and fidelity (HARRINGTON, 1991, p. 66). For "God cannot be tempted by evil nor does He tempt anyone" (Jas 1:13-15). In essence, temptation occurs when one is tried with the evil intention of being enticed to sin. The malicious intent or motive of the 'tempter' gives the word its sinister connotation. Therefore, the ordeal of Jesus in the wilderness can be understood in terms of these two concepts. The temptation of Jesus was the testing of Jesus. Jesus was tested during his temptations. The Spirit brought him into the wilderness to have his fidelity tested, establishing his qualification for his messianic mission. However, as the tempter was Satan, whose mission was to lure him to evil, thereby terminating his mission, he was tempted.

The narrative presented Jesus as being tested under the direction of God. SCHMUTZER (2008, p. 15-42) states: "The spirit's agency ultimately defines the entire temptation as God's doing." Mark gave a vivid description of the activity of the Holy Spirit in the leading of Jesus into the wilderness: "The Spirit at once *drove* him into the wilderness...." (1:12). The verb used here, *εκβαλλεν* (*ekballen*), is the imperfect indicative active of *εκβαλλει* (*ekballei*). It has an aggressive connotation of driving out or casting forth a thing, such as expelling a demon (HEIL, 2006, p. 63-78; VAN HENTEN, 1999, p. 349-366). This is one of the forceful expressions in Mark that other synoptic gospels avoided. The narrative presupposes the dynamic and objective paradigm of the activities of the Spirit in the Old Testament, where the Spirit of God takes hold of a prophet and transports him to another location, as induced several times in the Book of Ezekiel (3:12.14; 8:3; 11:1.5.24; 37:1; 45:5). The leading was a compelling directive rather than mere psychological movement (BUTTRICK, 1951, p. 654). Jesus, having

been baptised and under an imperative impulse of the Spirit, withdrew into the wilderness to be tempted.

Significantly, the temptations were in the wilderness. The wilderness is a place of deprivations and the abode of the evil Spirit (Ps. 107:4; Mat. 12:43-44), an antithesis of supply and safety. Jesus suffered loneliness and hunger in the wilderness for forty days 'and forty nights', exclusively added in Matthew. The scenario brings to mind the parallel situation of Israel, Yahweh's son, who suffered hunger and deprivations for forty years in the wilderness (Mk. 1:12-13; Matt. 4:1-2; Luke 4:1-2; Deut. 8:2; Deut. 29:5-6). Matthew, here, could be re-enacting Moses' forty-day and forty-night fast experience on Mount Sinai, when he received the Law from the Lord (Ex. 34:28; Deut. 9:9); therefore, relating to his audience the image of Jesus as a new Moses- the new Lawgiver (ORLOV, 2016, p. 1-2; DORMANDY, 2003, p. 183-187). Unlike Mark and Luke, who took the 'forty days' time-frame to encompass the whole period of temptation in the wilderness, Matthew mainly linked it to the fasting period and presented the trial to have occurred after the fast. Matthew, therefore, could be highlighting the vulnerability of Jesus as he confronted Satan, thus presenting Jesus as having overcome Satan at the weakest point of his life.

3.1 The Temptations

Matthew and Luke gave an account of a threefold temptation of Jesus in the wilderness but slightly in a different order. In both accounts, the first temptation was for Jesus to make bread out of stone. But the second temptation for Mathew was the third Luke and vice versa. Most scholars believe that the gospel of Matthew is closer to the original ordering of the temptation than the gospel of Luke. Luke presents the inversion of this initial order (GERHARDSSON, 1966, p. 11). Jones postulates that "these three temptations, however, do not exhaust Jesus' experiences with the tempter- they are representative temptations. They are significant because of what they reveal about Jesus' Messianic purpose and his interpretation of the Messiahship to which God had anointed him" (JONES, 1956, p. 303). The threefold temptations are Satan's best shot, his most persuasive proposal in the mind of Jesus as he mediates on his mission. They represent the most common human temptation experiences: the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life.

3.1.1 The First Temptation (Matthew 4:2-4; Luke 4:2-4)

After forty days without food, Jesus was hungry. Then the tempter said, "If you are the son of God, command these stones (Luke, stone) to become loaves of food." The title "Son of God" draws attention to the divinity of Jesus and his one-of-a-kind relationship with God. The conjunctive particle $\epsilon\acute{\iota}$ (ei) (if) employed in the statement does not necessarily convey a sense

of doubt, but it does, among many other things, mean ‘since.’ The sentence, therefore, could read: “Since you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.” Thus, Satan did not doubt Jesus’ divine Sonship in the phrase “if you are the Son of God.” Instead, he relied on it to tempt him. According to Kirk, “the testing of Jesus was not merely as to whether he was God’s son or not, but in what way, with what end, and through what process, he would demonstrate this sonship” (1972, p. 4).

The first temptation was an appeal to self-preservation, a basic instinct in every man. What temptation could have been more natural than that for a man without food for forty days? The offer seems lawful and reasonable in light of the prevailing circumstance, but there is more to it. The subtlety of the proposal lies in the fact that Satan wanted Jesus to use his privileged position as the “Son of God” for a self-serving end, just as most elites do. It was also a question of the best strategy for his messianic mandate. It suggests a mission more concerned with physical and economic welfare than spiritual transformation envisioned in Matthew 1:21 (ROBINSON, 1947, p. 43-48). In the temptation, Satan seeks to set Jesus’ divinity against his humanity. By subtly prompting Jesus to perform at his command, he hopes to entice him away from his father’s will. If Jesus makes bread out of the stones, it would be in obedience to the instruction of the Devil (ANISH, 2019, p. 53).

But Jesus rebuffed Satan’s appeal, saying, “Man shall not live by bread alone, (and Matthew added) but by every word that comes out of the mouth of God” (Mat. 4:4). This is the lesson God intended to teach his son, Israel, in the wilderness. His refusal of Satan’s offer is not because he could not achieve it, nor was he indifferent to man’s physical and economic needs. But doing so would be turning away from the path that leads to the cross. Jesus understood the hunger of man. It was a hunger that nothing could satisfy- not bread, riches, nor any physical comfort, but the intimacy of knowing and obeying the Lord (Mat. 4:4). Therefore, Jesus would not centre his mission on an economic crusade or forsake the cross for a bakery. He would not use for Himself power given only to be used in love (BUTTRICK, 1951, p. 271). Because he was in the world to gain men through sacrifice, Jesus refused the call for self-gratification. For him, life is more than physical survival; obedience to God’s word is the way of life.

3.1.2 *The Second Temptation (Matthew 4:5-7; Luke 4:9-12)*

The second temptation in Matthew is the third in Luke. It was for Jesus to throw Himself down from the pinnacle of the temple, which Luke situated in Jerusalem. Matthew refers to it as ἡ ἁγία πόλις (hē agia polis) (the holy city), probably in keeping with the notion of royalty that runs through his narrative (Matt. 5:35). In the temptation, the devil took him to the holy

city, set him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down. For it is written, He will give His angels charge of you, and on their hands, they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone." The temple setting of the temptation is significant. The temple is par excellence, where divine presence and protection are assured. (Ps.17:18; 61:5; 63:8; 87:2 etc). It should not be taken for granted that this temptation at the temple was placed last in Luke. Luke characteristically ends blocks of his material at the temple. For instance, the birth-infant report (2:46), the end of his public ministry (21:37), and the end of his gospel narrative (24:53), all ended up in the temple. That may explain why the temptation at the temple was placed last in the gospel. The prominence of the temple in Lucan theological geography is reflected in this narrative ordering (HAYS, 2016, p. 266).

The choice of the pinnacle calls for public notice. It was a set-up for Jesus to show the people a stunning and convincing sign to persuade them to believe in him (KIRK, 1972, p. 1-19). The temptation here is to give in to the Jews' pandering for signs. "For the Jews seek after signs," says Paul, who knew them well (I Cor. 1:22). This temptation carries a subliminal message of betrayal and faithlessness. It was an attack on Jesus' consciousness of his superhuman ability, a test for him to prove the faithfulness of God. According to Erdman (1921, p. 48), the temptation is "in the sphere of the intellectual desire and comes in the delicate guise of presumptuous trust. It forms the climax in the testing of an ideal man."

The temptation is closely related to the taunting of onlookers during his crucifixion: "If you are the son of God, come from the cross" (Mat. 4:6; Mat. 27:40). The parallel between Satan's message to Jesus and the taunting by passers-by during his crucifixion is more than a grammatical accident. It depicts a relationship between the two events. In both cases, Jesus was challenged to use his power to advance his interest and avoid his destiny. In both circumstances, yielding would imply a spiritual descent greater than the physical fall (WILLIAMSON, 1984, p. 54). However, Jesus rejected this notion of being a sign-giving Messiah or social crusader. He would not be a showman. No other sign shall be given to this generation save the sign of Jonah, the sign of one rising from the belly of the earth, not one jumping down from a height. Through the humble way of the cross, he will draw men to himself, not by a spectacular display of his strength and power. He told the devil, "You shall not tempt the Lord your God".

Tempting the Lord is an anthropomorphic concept. It is to seek God's proof that he can be trusted (THOMPSON, 1960, p. 1-12). It implies baiting God to see the length of His power, the willingness of his grace, and the strength of His endurance. It amounts to treating the Lord with contempt: an exhibition of disobedience and unbelief (Numbers 14:22), similar to what the Israelites did when they compelled the Lord to give the mira-

culous sign of water from the rock (Ex. 17:1-7), and that Jesus would not do. Throwing oneself down from the pinnacle of the temple because of the promise of protection is not an act of faith but a display of doubt. "If faith cannot believe without sensation, it is not faith. It is doubt looking for proof" (BARCLAY, 2004, p. 69). The kind of faith that demands more than a promise to believe is a temptation to God.

3.1.3 *The Third Temptation (Matthew 4:8-11; Luke 4:5-8)*

For the final onslaught, the devil took him up to a high plane, which Matthew explicitly called a mountain, and showed him "all the Kingdom of the world in a single moment." This phrase, 'in a single moment, only found in Luke, set aside the idea of physical translation. There is no physical mountain on which all the world's kingdoms would be observed (BARCLAY, 2004, p. 71). It was the battle of imagination of the mind and not necessarily a visionary experience, as Anish suggested (ANISH, 2019, p. 61). Rather than referring to a geographical location, the kingdom here depicts authority and splendour (Lk. 4:6). Since the issue of political domination is significant to the Jews, the appeal was for political authority, a dream that had long haunted the Jews. The devil claimed that 'the kingdom had been given to him and he could, in turn, give it to whosoever he wished' (Lk 4:6; Jn 12:31; 16:11). Johnson argued that by Satan's victory over man, the legitimate heir to creation in Eden, the right appears to belong to him (JOHNSON, 1996, p. 349).

The devil took him to a high plain, showing him the world and its grandeur. Daube (1978, p. 506) observed an Ancient Near East legal custom of property transfer, particularly land, in the act, in which the vendor takes the buyer to a vantage point to assure him of his desire to transfer ownership by letting the buyer see the property and receive it with his eyes. The devil promised to transfer the rights of all the kingdoms of this world to Jesus in exchange for worship. Worship here depicts more than a mere honour; it is "a demand for change of command." It denotes submission, subjugation and acknowledgement of authority (BRYAN, 2020, p. 407-423). In this temptation, the devil came fully unmasked as "the prince of this world," according to Paul (2 Cor. 4:4; John 12:31). He jeopardises his most significant asset, "the kingdom of the world", in exchange for reverence. Satan's assertion that "he will give the kingdom to whomever he wishes to" resonates with the repeated phrase in Daniel (4:17), which asserts the unique prerogative of the Highest, "Who rules in the kingdom of men, to give the kingdom to whomever he will". Fedra (2019, p. 18) suggested that Satan attempted to usurp God's exclusive right in this temptation.

The third temptation of Jesus was an appeal to compromise and apostasy, the very sin that marred the old Israel, "the son of God." It is a temptation to secular messianism, the use of political power to accomplish the end

of the messianic mission (KARRIS, 1972, p. 689). The temptation had once occurred in Matthew 16:21-23 cf. John 6:13- 15, when the people wanted to make him king. But would the “Son of God” cave into this and simply establish God’s dominion in the world in exchange for worship? Would he compromise with evil to achieve his goal? Dilemma! Jesus had the decision to make. He then agreed to his father’s value scale. The method, he showed, justifies the end.

With great indignation in his Spirit, he commanded, “Away from me, Satan, for it is written: ‘You shall worship the Lord your God, and only Him shall you serve’” (Mat. 4:10). There is a slight alteration in the statement taken from Deuteronomy (6:13). Φοβηθήση (phobēthēsē) (you shall fear) was substituted with προσκυνήεις (proskunēeis) (you shall worship). Jesus thus re-established that worship is uniquely God’s prerogative, and service is an expression of worship. The authority and glory Satan promised to give, Jesus indicated, will only be gained by submission to divine rulership and not compromise. “Then, the devil left him and beheld angels came and ministered to Him” (Mat. 4:11). According to Jeremias, the presence of angels caring for Jesus is a metaphor for a paradise regained. It is reminiscent of the restoration of the peaceful relationship and paradisaal harmony before the Fall (1971, p. 69-70). Jesus, having resisted Satan, regained paradise.

4 Reflections: Theological Interpretation

The theological interpretation of Jesus’ temptations centres on his humanity and mission as the “Son of God.” The temptation was an attempt to lure him away from his messianic ministry. It highlights the moral trials common to humans and Jesus’ unwavering devotion to God. Ratzinger (2007, p. 26) noted that Jesus’ temptation in the wilderness was “a descent into the perils besetting mankind.” He was tempted like every other man, and by his victory, he provided a model of faithful obedience and submission to the will of God. Jesus’ temptation holds a promise for human living and its daily moral conflicts. It shows human susceptibility to temptations. Though the degree of experience varies from person to person, its implications are common to all.

The first temptation deals with the seduction of materialism and consumerism, pervasive in modern Christianity. It is the temptation to fill the voids in one’s life with items that are so conveniently available to sate physical hunger. The quest for immediate comfort has become the reason for blood sacrifices and rituals to the god of greed on the altar of discontentment, in whose worship people do anything to get comfort. There was never an age in Christianity where luxurious living and self-indulgence were more common than in the present. The mindset of an average Christian is that

if one has the means, one should satisfy one's craving. Thus, people are induced towards lasciviousness both in materialism and sexuality. Jesus forewarned that a man's existence depended not on his abundance of material possessions. Having them makes no man blessed, nor will their absence be the cause of misery. Obedience to God's word is essential to human existence.

The second temptation is a temptation that comes with a subtle scriptural endorsement. It uses the scripture to make God serve human interests. This temptation is ubiquitous among zealous but immature Christians. It turns God into our Butler and his word into a list of magical incantations through which we try to manipulate God to fulfil our agenda (DELASHMUTT, 2005). Today, in Christendom, God's promises have often been twisted into a license for unwarranted risk to show his power and love. The word of God is no longer enough to convince the people of his love, presence and faithfulness but a sensational and spectacular sign. This is the rationale for the fake and staged miracles that define contemporary Pentecostalism. Bock, therefore, noted, "If God's prophetic word cannot convince and put a crack in a hard heart, neither will miracle" (BOCK, 1994, p. 278). If they are not convinced by the word preached, they will still not also be persuaded, no matter the signs and wonders.

The last temptation is a call to idolatry and compromise. This is prevalent in today's Christianity. It deals with the concession of standards, conviction and principles for personal goals and gains. For many, their possessions are their gods. Therefore, they bow before their demands and serve them at the expense of their relationship with God. This is a false religion. When those made in the living image of God bow to serve material things, it is a reversal of the created order. This inversion of this created order makes greed a notorious sin, even idolatry (BOCK, 1994, p. 278).

5 Implications of Jesus' Temptations Narrative for Christianity Today

The lessons for today's Christianity from the temptation of Jesus are numerous. Firstly, it shows Jesus' humility and obedience to the will of God in contrast to the disobedience and rebellion of Israel in the wilderness. Jesus' willingness to submit himself to temptation is fundamental to his humility. In his trials, he accepted to be the Messiah who would win the kingdom not by economic reform, scintillating miracle, or political revolution but by a wilful submission and obedience to his father's will. "This paradoxically exalted basement makes it possible for Jesus to be the second Adam, in whom the primordial yielding to temptation is reserved and the pattern of true humility restored"

(WILLIAMSON, 1984, p. 53).

Luke made a substantial presentation of Jesus as the second Adam, the antitype of the first Adam, in his baptism-temptation story. He changed the order of the story, sandwiching the genealogical tale between the two happenings. Unlike Matthew, who traces Jesus' ancestry to Abraham, Luke traces him to Adam. The assertion that Jesus is descended from Adam is followed by the temptation narrative, in which Jesus' devotion to God is emphasised. By this, Luke suggests that Jesus' commitment to God in his weakness and difficulties is intended to encourage man to stand steadfast to God in times of temptation and prioritise the will of God above our physical needs and desires.

Secondly, through the temptation, Jesus identified with a fundamental aspect of human existence. Temptation and trials are inevitable experiences of the Christian life. The life of faith is a life of repeated moral struggle. However, the temptation of Jesus assured us of God's help in times of temptation. His victory gives us hope of success in our daily moral challenges. The Hebrew writer noted, "...we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet he did not sin." The significance for us lies not just that we are tempted as he was. But he was tempted as we are, yet without sin (WILLIAMSON, 1984, p. 53). His unalloyed allegiance and unflinching love for God kept him from falling as He chose his father's scale of value over self-gratification. His perfection forms the basis of our eternal redemption and his position as our great high priest. Because he suffered when he was tempted, he can help those who are tempted.

Thirdly, Jesus' appeal to the scripture in his moral struggle with Satan holds a great lesson for today's Christianity. It teaches the power of God's word as a moral bulwark in times of temptation. The Psalmist stated, "Your word have I laid up in my heart, that I might not sin against you" (Ps.119:11). The heart is the battleground of temptation. "Heart wandering is the imperceptible inroad of temptations" (WATSON, 1980, p. 6). James states, "Everyone is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed" (1:13–14). The hallmark of temptation is that it subtly presents a course of action that initially seems alluring and advantageous. However, when evaluated in the context of the overall hierarchy of values, this course of action would be adjudged as evil. Temptation, characteristically, subtly offers a path of action that appears appealing and advantageous; however, it would be considered evil when examined in the overall hierarchy of values, and it is only through the word of God that we can assess the true worth of the action and, as a result, make an informed decision.

Finally, Jesus' temptation taught that no one is immune to temptation. If Jesus, the son of God, can be tested, it shows that regardless of spiritual maturity or height, we are all susceptible to the attack of evil desires, ideas, and thoughts. We are most vulnerable to failure at a point of a significant spiritual milestone as he was tempted to fall from the temple's pinnacle. However, Jesus was willing to relinquish self-aggrandizement to gain God's approval. He chose God's long-term values and fellowship over transient pleasure. It is a challenge to today's Christianity to live for something higher than selfish and physical pleasure. It is a call to discipleship. It means denying oneself, taking up the cross, and following him.

Conclusion

The temptations of Jesus in the wilderness, chronicled in Matthew 4:1-12, Mark 1:12-13, and Luke 4:1-13, serve as a poignant portrayal of his humanity and divine mission as the son of God. They were deliberate attempts to deter him from his messianic calling, shedding light on the ethical struggles common to all humans, and Jesus' unwavering devotion to God. The three temptations represent materialism, consumerism, and idolatry prevalent in modern Christianity. The first temptation underscores the allure of materialism and consumerism in today's Christianity. The second temptation manipulates scripture to prioritize human interest over divine purpose, turning God into a Butler and a source of manipulation. The third temptation called for idolatry and compromise, where people sacrifice their standards and convictions for personal goals and gains.

Jesus' temptations hold a promise for human living and its daily moral conflicts, showing human susceptibility to temptation. His victory provides a model of faithful obedience and submission to God's will, highlighting the importance of prayer and scriptural guidance in facing temptation. The narrative shows that even the Son of God was not immune to temptation, a poignant reminder of human vulnerability and the imperative of constant reliance on God's strength. Finally, the temptations of Jesus emphasized the ongoing struggle between good and evil and the need for ongoing spiritual discipline and growth.

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