Matthew Chapter 4:1-11

Why Was Jesus Tested/Tempted?

In Matthew 1:1, the gospel writer states that Jesus is the Christ. For the next two chapters he supports that pronouncement by demonstrating that Jesus’ genealogy (1:1-17), birth (1:18-25), worship (2:1-12), persecution (2:13-18), and early life (2:19-23) are a continuous unfolding and fulfillment of Old Testament scripture proving this statement. In chapter 3 he addresses the need of a scriptural anointing to the office he has come to fill, that of high priest.

Now in chapter 4 there is but one more topic to address before beginning his ministry—Jesus’ qualifications for being considered “...a lamb without blemish or spot” (1 Peter 1:19, ESV). Jesus had to be sinless. So now the Spirit leads Jesus into the wilderness where he will repeat the temptation of God’s first son, “Israel.” All these are Jesus’ credentials, the proof of his qualifications for his mission as Messiah.

The purpose of the temptation of Jesus is found in the failure of Israel to live a life obedient to God’s word. Jesus will now, acting as a true Israelite and representative of the nation, fully obey the Father as He suffers the testing and temptations that national Israel failed to endure—especially illustrated in the wilderness wandering under Moses. He will endure and succeed in their place and in so doing lay His obedience to the account of His elect.

In context, it is important to remember that chapter 4 follows the baptism of Jesus in chapter 3. There is symbolism here for Moses wilderness wanderings and temptations also followed the baptism of the nation into Moses.

“For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ. Nevertheless, with most of them God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness.” (1 Corinthians 10:1–5, ESV)

Moses and the children of Israel were in a state of conflict because the children of Israel were in a state of unbelief. As a result of the Exodus, “Israel saw the great power that the LORD used against the Egyptians, so the people feared the LORD, and they believed in the LORD and in his servant Moses.” (Exodus 14:31, ESV). This was the point at which the fathers were “…baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea…” By this is meant that they were united to him as their leader, and identified with him as second in importance only to God Himself. The cloud and the sea drove home the point of Moses’ greatness and authority. As a result, the disunited mass of Israelites became united to Moses. For the first time, he became truly their leader. There was a change of condition that resulted in Israel’s baptism into Moses. Whereas before they had not fully accepted him as their leader, as a result of the baptism in the cloud and in the sea that all changed. They now did so.

The Israelites having been baptized into Moses then went into the wilderness, were tested—and failed. The perfect Israelite, Jesus Christ, will also, following his baptism, go into the wilderness, be tested—and succeed.
"And you shall remember the whole way that the LORD your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not." (Deuteronomy 8:2, ESV)

"who fed you in the wilderness with manna that your fathers did not know, that he might humble you and test you, to do you good in the end." (Deuteronomy 8:16, ESV)

"but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross." (Philippians 2:7–8, ESV)

The two passages from the Deuteronomy 6-8 Jesus will soon quote when he is tempted.

The two following verses in the Book of Hebrews give us additional insight in why Jesus was tempted—to help us and to sympathize with our weaknesses.

"For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted." (Hebrews 2:18, ESV)

"For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin." (Hebrews 4:15, ESV)

The human race needs help and by successfully enduring the temptations, Jesus is able to help.

"Satan tries to foil God’s plan for humanity’s redemption by disqualifying Jesus as a sinless Savior and obedient Son."¹ But Jesus temptation did not result in sin when tempted. If he had sinned then he would be no better than anyone else who might try to help or sympathize with us. As nice as that is, it cannot address the sin problem in our lives. Because he was sinless, Jesus could address the sin problem by being the perfect sin offering we desperately need.

To be qualified for his roles as the prophet, priest and king that he was ordained to in His recent baptism, Jesus must now demonstrate that he possesses the spiritual qualities that one like Moses possessed. He must be the perfect Israelite, he must be without sin. As the book opened, Jesus was portrayed as the perfect Jew by his genealogy as son of David and son of Abraham.

"The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham." (Matthew 1:1, ESV)

Through Jesus’ baptism and temptation in the wilderness, he is portrayed as the coming prophet even greater than Moses himself.

¹ Michael J. Wilkins, Matthew (The NIV Application Commentary; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2004), 157.
"The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen—" (Deuteronomy 18:15, ESV)

The sequence in Matthew’s account of Jesus is similar: following the return from Egypt, we have the baptism (likened, by some scholars, to Israel’s crossing of the Sea of Reeds), the divine declaration of Jesus as God’s son, and the time of testing in the wilderness. The parallel is heightened by the fact that all of Jesus’ answers to the tempter are drawn from Deut 6–8, the very passage that describes Israel’s experience in the wilderness. Thus Jesus, the embodiment of Israel and the fulfiller of all her hopes, repeats in his own experience the experience of Israel—with, of course, the one major difference, that whereas Israel failed its test in the wilderness, Jesus succeeds, demonstrating the perfection of his own sonship.”

“Many have noticed that Jesus is often presented in the NT as the antitype of Israel or, better, the typological recapitulation of Israel. Jesus’ temptation after forty days of fasting recapitulated the forty years’ trial of Israel…”

Matthew 4:1 Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

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As we pursue this story we will see prominent echoes of Moses and other Old Testament characters. This is intentional, Matthew wants us to compare the failure of God’s first son, the nation of Israel with the victory of his only beloved son, Jesus.

Since Jesus was apparently alone in the wilderness, how did the three synoptic writers obtain the story and its details? The most likely answer would be in a private teaching session with Jesus where he would recount the event in considerable detail for their and our benefit.
Then ἄντως “…a point of time subsequent to another point of time—‘then.’”⁴ “…on this occasion it surely places what follows as next in time: after the baptism came the temptation.”⁵

*led*

Matthew’s use of words like *led* is to remind us that Jesus is recapitulating the story of Israel in the wilderness which was also led by God into the wilderness.

“But God led the people around by the way of the wilderness toward the Red Sea. And the people of Israel went up out of the land of Egypt equipped for battle.” (Exodus 13:18, ESV)

*by the Spirit … to be tempted by the devil*

“The same Spirit who has anointed Jesus in 3:16 now leads him to the place of temptation….⁶ Have you been “in the wilderness”? It is helpful at such times to remember that it is the Spirit of God that leads us there, and there we are given the power to triumph.

Mark has an interesting comment here.

“The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness.” (Mark 1:12, ESV)

drove ἐκβάλλω or threw him out

Mark’s use of the word drove or “threw him out” suggest the unpleasant expectation that the coming experience would be to Jesus. Being fully human, Jesus no more wanted to be in the wilderness than you and I do. There are no volunteers for wilderness duty. Jesus did not want to go there but he was obedient to the Spirit. We are reminded of Gethsemane and Jesus’ prayer to “let this cup pass from me”—and the Fathers answer.

*wilderness*

This is probably “referring to the highlands of the Judean desert west of the Jordan River and the Dead Sea.”⁷

Jesus is on the verge of beginning his public ministry but before he does so he prepares himself for that ministry in the wilderness “just as Israel had at one time lived in the desert before beginning her task in the Promised Land.”⁸

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⁷ Michael J. Wilkins, Matthew (The NIV Application Commentary; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2004), 154.
⁸ Michael J. Wilkins, Matthew (The NIV Application Commentary; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2004), 154.
The rugged terrain of the wilderness of Judea west of Jericho. Tradition places the temptations of Jesus in this desolate terrain.9

**tempted πειράζω** “...to obtain information to be used against a person by trying to cause someone to make a mistake—'to try to trap, to attempt to catch in a mistake.'”10 “To try, to prove in either a good or bad sense, tempt, test by soliciting to sin.”11

The same Greek word is used for both temptation and testing. The key is intent. If the intent is to cause one to fall and fail, then it is demonic temptation. If the intent is to test the character of God’s own, then it is a testing. In this passage there is “a tension which Matthew here reflects in that the devil’s intention to "tempt" Jesus to do wrong is subsumed under God’s good purpose to "test" his Son.”12 The “temptation and testing are flip sides of the same coin.”13

“Then the LORD said to Moses, “Behold, I am about to rain bread from heaven for you, and the people shall go out and gather a day’s portion every day, that I may test them, whether they will walk in my law or not.” (Exodus 16:4, ESV)

“Moses said to the people, “Do not fear, for God has come to test you, that the fear of him may be before you, that you may not sin.”’ (Exodus 20:20, ESV)

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It is significant that the Old Testament temptation is in the section from Deuteronomy 8 that serves as the background for Jesus’ temptation. The LORD God is disciplining his own son, not as punishment for sin or failure, but as a tool of maturity.

“Like most of his heroic predecessors in biblical history (Abraham, Joseph, Moses, David, Job), Jesus had to pass the period of testing before beginning his public ministry.” 14 It would seem that everyone called by God endures a testing. “If God is calling and empowering you to do something for him (3:16–17), you can expect to be tested … and you can expect testing commensurate with the seriousness of your call. The devil may not show up in person or test you on the same supernatural level that he tested Jesus, but your hardships may seem unbearable apart from the grace of God.” 15

devil διάβολος “…(a title for the Devil, literally ‘slanderer’); Σατανᾶς, … (a borrowing from Aramaic; a title for the Devil, literally ‘adversary’): the principal supernatural evil being—’Devil, Satan.’ 16 “ ‘Devil’ in Greek means ‘accuser’; in Hebrew, the word ‘Satan’ means the same (4:10).” 17

There are three temptations: 1) stones to loaves of bread, satisfy hunger; 2) jump from the Temple, his angels will deliver you; 3) fall down and worship, receive all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. “Jesus quotes three texts from Deuteronomy, all of them commandments that Israel failed to obey but that Jesus is determined to obey.” 18

In considering Jesus’ temptation, the first temptation in the garden immediately comes to mind.

“So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.” (Genesis 3:6, ESV)

“The victorious encounter surpasses the experience of Adam. Jesus as the Son of God will fulfill what Adam, the first “son” of God in the creation, failed to accomplish. The first Adam failed in the best conditions, Jesus as the last Adam succeeds in the worst. Death was the result of Adam’s sin, but Jesus’ suffering and temptation will enable him to make atonement for his people and bring life.” 19

This is similar to how John divides sin.

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15 Craig S. Keener, Matthew (vol. 1; The IVP New Testament Commentary Series; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), Mt 4:1.
17 Bruce B. Barton, Matthew (Life Application Bible Commentary; Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1996), 54–55.
18 Craig S. Keener, Matthew (vol. 1; The IVP New Testament Commentary Series; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), Mt 4:1.
19 Michael J. Wilkins, Matthew (The NIV Application Commentary; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2004), 156.
“For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world.” (1 John 2:16, ESV)

In each of the temptations of Jesus all three methods of temptation are present. The question here then becomes which one of the three is most prominent with each temptation. The first temptation, stones to bread, would most likely correspond to desires of the flesh. The third temptation, worship and receive the kingdoms of the world and their glory, is preceded by the phrase "showed him all the kingdoms" which suggest desires of the eyes. The second temptation, jump and be rescued, might be understood as the pride of life for their would be a great public outcry of praise at such an event.

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Matthew 4:2 And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry.

fasting

“None of the Evangelists indicates why Jesus fasted, but fasting was a natural accompaniment of serious thinking and prayer. It was a common practice among the Jews of those days and a suitable accompaniment of reflection….”20 “The fasting was spontaneous, not ascetic, due to mental preoccupation. In such a place there was no food to be had, but Jesus did not desire it.”21 The phrase “mental preoccupation” catches one’s attention. Jesus was so occupied in prayer and thought that eating did not enter his mind. This provides interesting insight into the purpose of fasting.

forty days and forty nights

“When I went up the mountain to receive the tablets of stone, the tablets of the covenant that the LORD made with you, I remained on the mountain forty days and forty nights. I neither ate bread nor drank water.” (Deuteronomy 9:9, ESV)

The reader is to see here that as Moses was an intercessor for Israel, so Jesus is now the final and perfect intercessor of the nation. As Israel suffered for 40 years in the wilderness, so Jesus endures the same trial. “…the resulting hunger has its clear parallel in the testing of Israel in the wilderness (Dt. 8:2–3), while ‘forty days and nights’ is almost certainly intended to echo the forty years the Israelites spent in the wilderness in order to be tested (v. 2).”22

“So he was there with the LORD forty days and forty nights. He neither ate bread nor drank water. And he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments.” (Exodus 34:28, ESV)

What did Moses do after he fasted forty days and forty nights? He went up on a mountain and wrote the Ten Commandments. What did Jesus do after he fasted forty days and forty nights? He went up on a mountain and taught the law of the kingdom in Matthew chapters 5-7—the Sermon on the Mount. Do you think the relationship and the symbolism was accidental?

he was hungry

This is a good time to stop and take note of some of the ironies in Matthew. “Jesus is hungry (v. 2) but feeds others (14:13–21; 15:29–39); he grows weary (8:24) but offers others rest (11:28); he is the King Messiah but pays tribute (17:24–27); he is called the devil but casts out demons (12:22–32); he dies the death of a sinner but comes to save his people from their sins (1:21); he is sold for thirty pieces of silver but gives his life a ransom for many (20:28); he will not turn stones to bread for himself (4:3–4) but gives his own body as bread for people (26:26).”

Is Jesus To Be A Wonder-Worker Using His Powers To Meet His Own Biological Needs?

Lust of the Flesh

As Israel of old was tested with hunger, so Jesus, the perfect Israelite is again tested with hunger.

Matthew 4:3 And the tempter came and said to him, “If (since) you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.”

If (since) you are the Son of God

If εἰ “Ei with the indicative of all tenses denotes a simple conditional assumption with emphasis on the reality of the assumption…; the condition is considered ‘a real case.’…” Therefore “if” is not the best translation in this passage but for some reason the common one. Instead, in this passage “if” should be translated: “Since you are God’s Son ….” Unlike moderns, Satan is perfectly aware of Jesus’ divine nature.

We see awareness of Jesus sonship in Mark also where Satan’s demons are perfectly cognizant who Jesus is.

“What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God.” (Mark 1:24, ESV)

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Satan knows who Jesus is and “it is on the basis of the possibilities that are his as Son that Jesus is being encouraged to act. Jesus knows that he has a special status with God and relationship with him…; the devil suggests that sonship is a privilege to be exploited, that Jesus should use his opportunities to see to his own needs.”

So, “The Devil isn’t tempting Jesus to doubt his divine sonship—rather, to use it for his own advantage, which would amount to disobeying his commission to “serve [others], even to give his life as a ransom in substitution for many [people]” (20:28).”

“even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” (Matthew 20:28, ESV)

the Son

“Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered.”
(Hebrews 5:8, ESV)

stones λίθος “…a piece of rock, whether shaped or natural—‘stone.”

Having fasted for 40 days, Jesus would be supremely hungry; his appetite would be driving him to obtain relief from starvation. Certainly this would be an opportune time for Satan to tempt Jesus with food.

“In this proposal we already hear an echo of Israel’s wilderness experience of hunger, which was met by God’s supply of manna (picked up from the ground, like stones, Exod 16:14–16).…” God made manna under these conditions, what is wrong with Jesus making bread in similar circumstances? There is biblical precedent here; surely that in itself is adequate reason for you to do this!

It is interesting that Satan’s temptations did not involve doing anything that on the surface was wrong. As we can see, “a temptation is not always trying to get a person to do something that is inherently sinful.” Jesus will in fact make bread on two occasions, the feeding of the five thousand and the feeding of the four thousand. And I don’t doubt that he had some of that bread on those occasions to satiate his own hunger.

If we put ourselves in the same situation, what would be wrong about doing something harmless to solve this problem? Nothing. That being the case, it would seem that there was something going on here that was not harmless but in fact very wrong. Jesus’ answer about living by bread alone must be the clue. In some way Satan is tempting Jesus to ignore heavenly nourishment for the immediate benefit of physical nourishment. And Jesus instinctively knows this. Therefore he refuses to reorder his

29 Michael J. Wilkins, Matthew (The NIV Application Commentary; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2004), 158.
priorities for this immediate benefit. He refuses to succumb to the lust of the flesh ignoring his specific heavenly call.

In vastly different ways, we are also threatened by difficulty and pain—health, job, finances, family, and others. We instinctively avoid them but in some cases we may do so by compromising our testimony and faith. Not all pain should be avoided. Jesus was tried by hunger, he did not avoid it; Jesus was tried in the Garden, he did not avoid it. We are often under the impression that our life should be without difficulty, pain and death, and when these come into our life we are agitated and demand of God that he explain why this is happening to us, as did Job for instance. In fact, difficulty, pain and death are the natural result of our sin, fully what we deserve, and it is utterly amazing that God has decided to address these things for our benefit at all. Sometimes it is through these difficulties that we must pass when confronted by the temptation of living by means other than “every word that comes from the mouth of God.” “The” cross does not lie in our future, but perhaps “a” cross does. There are decisions that we sometimes make that do indeed deliver us from these pains, but they may also deliver us from walking with God. God whispers in the word but yells in the pain.

Matthew 4:4 But he answered, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’ ”

“And you shall remember the whole way that the LORD your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not. And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.” (Deuteronomy 8:2–3, ESV)

Notice it says, “he humbled you and let you hunger”. The crises was of God’s own making. And it was the Spirit that led Jesus into the wilderness; that crises was also of God’s own making. And there Satan offered a solution to his hunger problem. But Jesus did not take the short cut solution; he continued in his hunger. And the crises in your life? That also is of God’s own making. Some mean your crises for evil but God means it for good.

“In this instance the text he cites originally underscored God’s provision of manna as an alternative to the Israelites’ reliance on their own abilities to feed themselves.”30 And so Satan acting as God also provides manna in the form of stones. God provided bread, Satan provides bread. In both cases bread is provided. Is there a problem? “…the text he cites originally underscored God’s provision of manna as an alternative to the Israelites’ reliance on their own abilities to feed themselves.”31 This is not unlike what Jesus will say on the Mount.

“But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.” (Matthew 6:33, ESV)

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30 Craig Blomberg, Matthew (vol. 22; The New American Commentary; Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 84.
31 Craig Blomberg, Matthew (vol. 22; The New American Commentary; Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 84.
The “all these things” are not in themselves wrong but the “seek first” is the priority. The priority for Jesus and us is not the immediate satisfaction of our appetites but the prior commitment to God and his word at the expense of those appetites.

Our appetites make demands on us and we are all to inclined to submit to these demands. The material bread is an illustration or an indication as to what is in the heart. The message here is the necessity of self-denial.

In both cases the issue is what is in your heart: trust or distrust? Israel failed, Jesus passed because what was in his heart was commitment to the will of the Father. In time he will eat angel's food, God’s time. But for now he will except the hunger as from the Lord.

Bread is a mere detail in the big picture.

Some years ago a psychologist, Abraham Maslow, developed a theory of human motivation which he called a hierarchy of needs. The first of the needs is the physiological and includes: air, water, food, shelter, warmth, sex, and sleep. The following levels included safety, love, self-esteem and last, self-actualization. What can we make of this in the light of Jesus’ temptation? Jesus is in desperate need for food. Yet there is something here of more importance than food—it is the word of God.

Martha, the sister of Mary, was very anxious and troubled because she needed some help but was not getting it. So Martha complained to Jesus asking him to instruct Mary to get up and help. Jesus reply was “…one thing is necessary” Luke 10:42. That one thing was the living word of God, Jesus Himself. “Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her.” (Luke 10:42, ESV) The “one thing” is not food, it was Jesus. There is an element of error in Abraham Maslow’s hierarchy of needs. Jesus is nowhere on his list, let alone the number one need.

*bread alone*

Down the centuries Christians have taken Jesus’ words seriously—“Then Jesus told his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me” (Matthew 16:24, ESV)—and denied themselves that they might pursue the “one thing” of eternal significance—the living and written word. In other words, *Man shall not live by bread alone*. Bread is important but *every word that comes from the mouth of God* is even more important and worth giving one’s life for.

Here Jesus denies his own appetites that he might first feast from “*every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.*” (Deuteronomy 8:2–3, ESV)

This test of Jesus was symbolic of all fleshly appetites. In every case, notwithstanding the demand of the flesh to be satisfied, it must be denied till God brings righteous satisfaction. There is no end to the excuses people make as to why it was alright for them to indulge the flesh. The flesh is demanding and screams for satisfaction, but here in the midst of starvation we see Jesus’ response to these demands, setting us an example as to how we must act when faced by the demands of our flesh.
This test in the wilderness that Israel failed to pass, Jesus now endures and passes. Jesus is the perfect Israelite fully obedient to the Father. Where the nation failed this test, Jesus, standing in their place, passes.

“Obedience to God’s will takes priority over self-gratification, even over apparently essential provision of food.” His obedience is now laid to their account as if they themselves had passed those tests in the wilderness.

**every word**

The phrase does not teach that God’s revelation is found somewhere in the words of the Bible, it is every word that is God’s revelation. Be cautious of those that talk about God speaking “in the Bible.” They may be serpents denying that “every word” is from God.

To properly live “by every word” would require a knowledge of “every word.” This may explain why there is so little “life” in so many Christians today, there simply is not much “word” in the Christian. As one values bread to sustain physical life, so one must value the word to sustain spiritual life. Bread will sustain you for some 70 years; the word for 70 million years and counting. The analogy suggest value; what do you value most? As the roots of a tree sink deep in the soil to obtain nutrients, so must the roots of our minds sink deep in the soil of God’s word.

It is through every word that we gain a knowledge of God. It is through this knowledge of God’s word that we find solutions to all things that pertain to life and godliness.

“His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence,” (2 Peter 1:3, ESV)

Abraham Maslow knew nothing of this Word; he thought that life could be successfully lived in pursuit of “bread alone” without the priority of “every word.”

**that comes from the mouth of God**

By this phrase we can see that Jesus views God as the author of Scripture. Notwithstanding the intermediary role of prophets, it all comes from his own mouth. We talk about the authors of the various books of the Bible, but in doing so we must not forget that their words “come from the mouth of God.”

**In Conclusion**

“Jesus’ use of this OT text shows that he understood his experience of hunger as God’s will for him at the time, and therefore not to be evaded by a self-indulgent use of his undoubted power as the Son of God.”

So, “With ‘every tree of the garden’ for food, Adam fell; with desert stones mocking His hunger, the second Adam conquered.”

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Is Jesus To Do Spectacular But Pointless Miracles for the Glory and Admiration That They Bring Him?

Pride of Life

Matthew 4:5 Then the devil took him to the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple

devil διάβολος “…the principal supernatural evil being—‘Devil, Satan.’”

the holy city—meaning Jerusalem

pinnacle πτερύγιον “…the tip or high point of a building—‘pinnacle, summit (of the Temple).’”
end, edge."

The outermost or farthest point regarded either vertically or horizontally.

“Portico [pinnacle] refers to the flat-topped corner of Solomon’s porch on the southeast corner of the temple complex overlooking the Kidron Valley.”

“On the southern side of the temple court was a range of porches or cloisters forming three arcades. At the south-eastern corner the roof of this cloister was some 300 feet above the Kidron valley. The pinnacle, some parapet or wing-like projection, was above this roof, and hence at a great height, probably 350 feet or more above the valley.”

Josephus’ description of the effect of looking down from the top of the portico well illustrates this passage: “for while the valley was very deep, and its bottom could not be seen, if you looked from above into the depth, this farther vastly high elevation of the cloister stood upon that height, insomuch that if anyone looked down from the top of the battlements, or down both those altitudes, he would be giddy, while his sight could not reach to such an immense depth.”

**temple**

This does not designate the main building of the temple, properly speaking, “but the whole area of the temple with its buildings.” This would include the walls around the temple.

“Some scholars believe that Satan wanted Jesus to take advantage of the prophecy in Malachi 3:1; the people believed that this prophecy meant that the Messiah would appear suddenly at the temple. What a spectacular proof of Jesus’ messiahship this would be if he suddenly appeared on the pinnacle of the temple before all the people and then jumped off, only to be carefully placed on the ground by God’s angels. Surely everyone would believe then.”

> “Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts.”

(Malachi 3:1, ESV)

Matthew 4:6 and said to him, “If (since) 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, lest you strike your foot against a stone.’”

**If (since) εἰ** See verse 3.

The Devil quotes Psalm 91.

> “For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways. On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.”

(Psalm 91:11–12, ESV)

Satan will now attempt to manipulate Jesus using Jesus’ own confidence in the written word. If Jesus can quote Scripture, so can the devil. We are reminded here that not everyone that quotes a bible verse to instruct us in our behavior is to be automatically believed. People use the scripture in perverse ways; hence cults and other great errors in Christian doctrine.

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Psalm 91 was written to believers to remind them that they are secure in their God, that nothing can harm them apart from God’s own permission. Satan uses this verse to assure Jesus that if others are secure in God then Jesus more so.

**throw yourself down**

What is wrong with Jesus doing this? In and of itself, Jesus descending from the temple or from heaven is not wrong. Something about this, however, is wrong.

Why does Satan think Jesus would want to do this? To win the acclaim and worship of the crowd; to “win over the masses for Himself. For the multitudes … are understood to be, as a *matter of course*, on the temple area.”43 This goal explains why Jesus is brought to the temple. There were plenty of high cliffs in the wilderness, but they had no adoring crowd for Jesus to play to in order to obtain their adoration. He is being asked to glide down into the midst of the multitude like superman and receive the acclaim and worship such an act would generate.

Like the first temptation, this in itself is not wrong. In fact, one day he will glide down from heaven to receive acclaim, adoration and worship when he comes again on the last day.

“For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.” (1 Thessalonians 4:16, ESV)

But like so many situations, timing and intent would make it wrong this day.

**He will command his angels concerning you,’ and ‘On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.’**

And of course Jesus could have called on the angels for help.

“*Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels?*” (Matthew 26:53, ESV)

“Jesus had rejected the first temptation because he trusted God to supply his need; now he is tempted through that very assurance.”44 If God will supply in the first instance, will he not do so in this second instance as well?

“The vivid imagery of the psalm envisages some of the hazards which may be expected to confront God’s people, and promises God’s protection for them, but it does not suggest that they should take the initiative in courting such dangers.”45 Nor does it suggest that it is always desirable to live without the danger. Jesus chose to live with the danger instead of a jump to the safety of an angelic hosts. A jump to safety would have gained him the adoration of the crowd—but put him off the path to the cross.

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The accuracy of what the devil says does not necessarily translate into the accuracy of what the devil suggests be done. This is an important lesson. Satan was accurate in his description in what the Bible said, he was in great error as to his following advice. We might call it the difference between description and prescription. Just because someone accurately describes the details and emotions concerning a crises in your life, does not mean that what they then propose to do about it is of necessity correct. Many in the psychological industry have great descriptive gifts. Unpacking the emotions in your life and the crisis you are facing, they can thoroughly convince you that they understand “what you are going through.” And in some sense, they no doubt do. But here is the danger, that description does not necessarily translate into prescription. Their counsel⁴⁶ on what to do about this is not necessarily correct and in fact is almost always in error. This is an old satanic trick used on Jesus. It still continues to be used on us.

“The man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers,” (Psalm 1:1, ESV)

Again, there were plenty of precarious cliffs in the wilderness. Why bring Jesus to Jerusalem to find one? The reason that Jesus is brought here to the temple is because this is where the multitudes are and it is in their midst that Jesus can do this miracle, wow the crowd, and obtain their adoration. “If Jesus were to cast himself off the high place of the temple and the angels rescued him, think of the reaction of the people! Such a spectacular display would gain Jesus a messianic following...”⁴⁷ It is here at the temple in the midst of multitudes that Jesus can demonstrate that he is truly the Son of God. When the Father sends a host of angels to the rescue of the Son—the issue is settled, truly this Jesus is the Son of God. The crowds will now certainly follow him. Whether he has power to forgive sins or not is not the issue. But, does he have power to conquer Rome? That is the question! Soaring from the Temple like Superman, he will make a spectacular statement that will enlist the following off all.

Matthew 4:7 Jesus said to him, “Again it is written, ‘You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.’ ”

“The words are not meant as a command to the devil not to test Jesus.”⁴⁸ It is a command to us not to test God. Here Jesus as the perfect Israelite and in our place is stating that he will not test God.

Jesus is quoting Deuteronomy 6:16.

““You shall not put the Lord your God to the test, as you tested him at Massah.””
(Deuteronomy 6:16, ESV)

The command here in Deuteronomy is based on the experience of Israel from Exodus 17:1-7. When suffering a maddening thirst, Israel tested the Lord with unbelief.

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⁴⁶ A good source for Biblically sound counselors is: http://www.biblicalcounseling.com/counselors
⁴⁷ Michael J. Wilkins, Matthew (The NIV Application Commentary; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2004), 160.
“Therefore the people quarreled with Moses and said, “Give us water to drink.” And Moses said to them, “Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the LORD?” But the people thirsted there for water, and the people grumbled against Moses and said, “Why did you bring us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?” So Moses cried to the LORD, “What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me.” And the LORD said to Moses, “Pass on before the people, taking with you some of the elders of Israel, and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb, and you shall strike the rock, and water shall come out of it, and the people will drink.” And Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel. And he called the name of the place Massah and Meribah, because of the quarreling of the people of Israel, and because they tested the LORD by saying, “Is the LORD among us or not?”” (Exodus 17:2–7, ESV)

This is the second of our temptations. The first was a legitimate and direct appeal to eat bread and be satisfied. Yet the fulfillment was in an illegitimate fashion. The second is indirect, “you can trust God to take care of you.” True enough, but do you blackmail God to get that legitimate need satisfied? No. Throwing himself from the Temple amounted to just this, the creation of an illegitimate crisis in order to obtain a legitimate result! “It is a temptation to manipulate God, to create a situation not of God’s choosing in which God would be required to act as Jesus dictated. Jesus rejects the suggestion …”49 And for a second time Jesus rejects the easy way. This time the easy way to fame and adoration. He will take the long and painful way of the cross instead. Be careful of the easy way.

In the first temptation, Jesus was encouraged to escape from hunger. In this second temptation Jesus is encouraged to escape from danger. Both the hunger and danger were ordered by God.

I remember a conversation I had with a brother who was very committed to supporting Christian ministries around the world. Every payday he would send the greater part of his income to support these ministries. His family was in dire straits, they were living poorly and were not paying their bills. When I drew this to his attention his response was that God would take care of them because he was taking care of God’s ministries. In time their marriage failed and they divorced. Later he married again. This time he tithed and used the rest to support his new family. They are doing well.

It does appear that this man was tempting God, perhaps blackmailing God, demanding that God provide richly for them since he was giving so much to the Lord. It would seem that he came to realize that this was in error and stopped making these demands on God at which point life got better—for his second family.

Matthew 4:8 Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory.

showed him

The temptation of Satan “…showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory.” (Matthew 4:8)

There is a correspondence here with John’s “desires of the eyes.”

“For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world.” (1 John 2:16, ESV)

the kingdoms of the world and their glory

Why is this a temptation to Jesus? It is because he cared about the world. “Satan holds out before him the prospect of a mighty empire, one that would embrace the whole world. When we contemplate the evils that flourish in even the best states we know and the wickedness that abounds in high places, we can see that to establish a worldwide empire that would be ruled with perfect justice was a real temptation, not a sham parade.”

Here Satan holds out an option to the universal rule of Christ. There is no need to go to Calvary, it’s all here now for the taking. You want to help all these people don’t you? Why wait and leave them in their suffering? Use your power to do good. Act now and rule the world in goodness.

God’s way was the way of the cross; Satan offered a shortcut to glory that bypassed Calvary. Peter was all for taking this shortcut in Matthew 16. But Jesus’ response was to identify Peter’s efforts as in keeping with God’s foe:

“But he turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.”” (Matthew 16:23, ESV)

“Jesus’ mission involved the cross (26:54), and whether we like it or not, so does our mission….”

“Then Jesus told his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?” (Matthew 16:24–26, ESV)

We should not “dismiss the whole episode as something that happened to Jesus but has no relevance to anyone else. Many who profess to follow the Christ have purchased their own “empires” at the cost of the acceptance of evil.”

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51 Craig S. Keener, Matthew (vol. 1; The IVP New Testament Commentary Series; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), Mt 4:1.
Matthew 4:9 And he said to him, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.”

I will give you

And for a season, he could have delivered.

“All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.”

Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out.” (John 12:31, ESV)

“In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.” (2 Corinthians 4:4, ESV)

“in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—” (Ephesians 2:2, ESV)

“and said to him, “To you I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will.” (Luke 4:6, ESV)

I will give you—has been given to me

“And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.” (Matthew 28:18, ESV)

if you will fall down and worship me

fall down πίπτω “…to prostrate oneself before someone, implying supplication—’to prostrate oneself before, to fall down before.’”

“As in the very first account of testing, failed by Adam and Eve (Gen 3:1–7), the question centers on a choice between the will of Satan or the will of God, which involves implicitly the rendering of worship to the one or the other. Satan indeed vaunts himself as god in place of the only God. Thus, at stake here is the fundamental issue addressed by the first of the commandments: “I am the Lord your God … you shall have no other gods before me” (Deut 5:6–7).”

“The devil’s offer of all the kingdoms of the world is a parody in that God has already promised the messianic king….”

“Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession.” (Psalm 2:8, ESV)

Israel had a history of falling down and worshiping foreign gods. If Jesus was no better than his biological ancestors, he would now do the same thing.

“And he received the gold from their hand and fashioned it with a graving tool and made a golden calf. And they said, “These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!”’ (Exodus 32:4, ESV)

But the perfect Israelite will not “forget the LORD.” He will not worship on his own terms. You often hear today “I can worship God in nature just as easily as I can in church.” This is a modern day expression on an ancient practice. People feel quite at liberty to determine how, when, where and why they will worship God, regardless of His own instructions on how we are to legitimately worship Him.

 “…then take care lest you forget the LORD, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. It is the LORD your God you shall fear. Him you shall serve and by his name you shall swear.” (Deuteronomy 6:12–13, ESV)

They fail to “take care” and they forget what He has said about how we are to fear and worship God.

The offer had a legitimate appeal to Jesus simply because such rule was his by right, but the timing, place and circumstance were wrong.

“Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (Philippians 2:9–11, ESV)

“Satan tempted Jesus to take the world as an earthly kingdom right then, without carrying out his plan to save the world from sin. For Jesus, that meant obtaining his promised dominion over the world without experiencing the suffering and death of the cross. Satan offered a painless shortcut.”56

Matthew 4:10 Then Jesus said to him, “Be gone, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.’ ”

Be gone ὑπάγω, present active imperative, 2nd person singular; you—go!

“Jesus sends him away with a command that calls attention simultaneously to his victory and to his authority.”57

“As powerful as Satan may be, and as frail as Jesus must be because of the extended fasting and the intensity of the temptations, Jesus vanquishes him with a word.”58 There is no need for Jesus to battle Satan for the Devil is not strong enough to offer battle to the Son of God; a mere word sends him in flight.

Compare Jesus’ command with Daniel’s experience.

56 Bruce B. Barton, Matthew (Life Application Bible Commentary; Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1996), 62.
58 Michael J. Wilkins, Matthew (The NIV Application Commentary; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2004), 161.
“Then he said to me, “Fear not, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart to understand and humbled yourself before your God, your words have been heard, and I have come because of your words. The prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me twenty-one days, but Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, for I was left there with the kings of Persia,”” (Daniel 10:12–13, ESV)

Only with difficulty can angelic power contend with Satan but Jesus with one word sends him fleeing. How great is this Jesus.

**Satan Σατανᾶς** “…a Greek form derived from the Aramaic (Heb., Satan), “an adversary,”…” It is used just one time in this section. Devil, διάβολος, the accuser, is used four times. The Tempter, πειράζω, is used one time.

**For it is written**


“It is the LORD your God you shall fear. Him you shall serve and by his name you shall swear. You shall not go after other gods, the gods of the peoples who are around you—” (Deuteronomy 6:13–14, ESV)

**worship προσκυνέω** “…to express by attitude and possibly by position one’s allegiance to and regard for deity—to prostrate oneself in worship, to bow down and worship, to worship.”

What the wise men readily offer Jesus, Satan seeks from Jesus—worship.

“And going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him…” (Matthew 2:11, ESV)

“Worship of God is the tangible demonstration that a person has given over the rule of one’s life to God’s will, not one’s own.”

**serve λατρεύω**

The story of the human race is one of worship and service to the creature, those things made by God, instead of the service of God.

“Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.” (Romans 1:24–25, ESV)

What others had done, Jesus is now asked to do. He will not. They that do not serve, do not worship.

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But, “What Jesus declines to exploit on the mount of temptation, his messianic power and authority, he proclaims as his on the mount of the commission at the end of the Gospel.”  

“And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.” (Matthew 28:18, ESV)

Matthew 4:11 Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and were ministering to him.

In the Father’s time Jesus had His appetites satisfied in legitimate ways. But He first had to “deny himself” for a season.

angels came and were ministering to him.

And it is not only Jesus who is ministered to by angels when experiencing a crises in life. God ministers to us in the same way.

“Are they not all ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation?” (Hebrews 1:14, ESV)

In Conclusion

Jewish Zealots

In the context of first century Judea these temptations are most interesting. The devil calls Jesus to do exactly what the Jews of his day were looking for in a Messiah—especially in their conflict with Rome. First, make bread, an army travels on its stomach. Two, protect us from injury in our conflict with Rome, one who can safely leap from the Temple can do that. Three, reign over the world (then ruled over by Rome) as a Jewish king. “…to rule the earth would include the subjection of the Roman emperor.”  

“Jesus could well have perverted the nature of his messianic sonship and bypassed the way of the cross in favor of some more glamorous political or military role as liberator of Israel.”

Satan is asking Jesus to become the king Israel has been waiting for. “Since … you are God’s Son,” he declares, act according to various worldly expectations for that role….

In time, Jesus will do all three but in the meantime something more important than these must be accomplished—the salvation of the lost. Calvary stands between Jesus and the complete fulfillment of these three missions. Israel will get a glimpse of these during his ministry. Jesus will make bread, he will heal broken bodies, and he will cast out demons and rule over a spiritual realm. But these are but a taste of the fulness that is yet in the future, but first he must go to Jerusalem:

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64 Craig Blomberg, Matthew (vol. 22; The New American Commentary; Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 82.
“From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.” (Matthew 16:21, ESV)

**In the Church**

But, at the resurrection, Jesus will receive these at a higher level. The Church will feast with Jesus in the bread and the wine. It will adore and worship him. It will ascribe to him kingship over his creation. Yet, even now he has not yet obtained the fulness of what is rightfully his.

**The Last Day**

Only on the last day will this become true. On that day, he will with us eat of the marriage supper of the lamb. He will receive the full honors, adoration and worship that are his due. And at that time every knee shall bow and every tongue shall proclaim him Lord of Lords and King of Kings.

It is an amazing fact that he voluntarily continues to receive less that what is by right that he might fulfill the will of the Father and save a fallen race.

This story was carefully crafted and placed between chapters 3 and 5-7 to tell the story of Jesus’ qualifications to be God’s intercessor with the human race.