

## **SIN OR GOD II?**

### **Matthew 4:1-11**

Online Sermon: [http://www.mckeefamily.com/?page\\_id=3567](http://www.mckeefamily.com/?page_id=3567)

Ever since creation Satan has been tempting humanity to sin against God. When going through the wilderness experiences of aloneness, physical or emotional pain, prepare oneself to be tempted by the Devil. The greater the pain the more likely the Devil will show up and tempt the person to pick the path that leads to self-satisfaction. Last week we learned that we have not been given free will to do as we please but instead so that we might be able to choose to obey God the Father in heaven. Jesus refused to give into the lust of the flesh by turning the stones into bread because it was not the will of God but the Devil. In a similar manner we need to live by every word that comes from God. This week we are going to learn how Jesus got victory over the pride of life.

### **JESUS' VICTORIES OVER THE PRIDE OF LIFE**

**<sup>5</sup> Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. <sup>6</sup> “If you are the Son of God,” he said, “throw yourself down. For it is written:**

**He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.**

**<sup>7</sup> Jesus answered him, “It is also written: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’”**

### **Matthew 4:5-7, NIV**

For the location of the second temptation the Devil took Jesus to the highest point of the temple of Jerusalem. Since the Devil wanted to get Jesus as close to God as humanly possible there was no better place to take Him than the holy city of David and its temple!<sup>1</sup> After all it was here that the presence, power and protection of God was supreme.<sup>2</sup> To make this event even

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<sup>1</sup> Nolland John, “Preface,” in *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 2005), 165.

<sup>2</sup> Robert H. Mounce, *Matthew*, Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 30.



more spectacular the Devil takes Jesus up to pinnacle of the temple. Situated fifteen stories high,<sup>3</sup> the great height of the Royal Portico or pinnacle was so high that the historian Josephus states “looking down into the valley below made one dizzy.”<sup>4</sup> How much dizzier would Jesus be? After all He was still on a forty day fast!

I am petrified of high places. I remember the year that my father and mother in law helped us renovate the outside of our home. To level the house, replace all the windows, remove all the clad boards, and put on new siding was a monumental task of gigantic proportions! To



make matters even more difficult, I had almost no carpentry skills so on my best day I was a somewhat ok helper. While time commitments scared me, even more so did the staging. It was homemade and even though my father in law said it was rock solid, I was still scared. After all, who could trust a platform that bounced when you walked or poles that in my mind swayed in the wind? Each day my father in law would go up the ladder and be as cool as a cucumber while working. For me, after climbing 28 feet in the air all I could do was to crouch, hug the beams and pray that my shorts

might stay clean! While my heights experience was scary imagine Jesus on that pinnacle. While we do not know the exact height of the pinnacle of the temple, one can estimate based the 80 feet<sup>5</sup> walls surrounding it that it was at least 180 feet high!<sup>6</sup> Near physical death balancing on a pinnacle of the temple surely must be scary to the human side of Christ!

While most scholars agree that the pinnacle of the temple was the location of the second temptation, they do not agree if this was a physical or visionary experience. Since there is no

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<sup>3</sup> D. A. Carson, “The Gospels and Acts,” in *NIV Zondervan Study Bible: Built on the Truth of Scripture and Centered on the Gospel Message*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015), 1934.

<sup>4</sup> Craig A. Evans, *The Bible Knowledge Background Commentary: Matthew–Luke*, ed. Craig A. Evans and Craig A. Bubeck, First Edition. (Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2003), 86.

<sup>5</sup> Carol Meyers, “Temple, Jerusalem,” ed. David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 365.

<sup>6</sup> R. T. France, *Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 1, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 104.

mention of spectators<sup>7</sup> and the phrase “If you are the Son of God” links both the first and second temptations,<sup>8</sup> some scholars conclude it was unlikely that Jesus was physically present at the temple and equally unlikely that the Devil was tempting him to prove His Sonship to a crowd.<sup>9</sup> While it is certainly possible that the second temptation was purely inward and visionary,<sup>10</sup> it is equally possible that Jesus was physically transported to the pinnacle.<sup>11</sup> After all, how can one truly be tempted to throw one’s life down and be physically saved when all one is experiencing is a vision? And if there was a crowd physically present why couldn’t Jesus’ temptation be twofold: to tempt God to physically save Him and to



prove to the crowd He was the Messiah?<sup>12</sup> Whether one favors the physical or visionary argument one must not lose sight of the fact that this second temptation was a real inward struggle.

Overlooking the Kidron Valley from such a great height the Devil tempts Jesus to jump in order to force the angels of God to save Him. Repeating the phrase “since you are the Son of God” in verses three and six invites the reader to link both temptations.<sup>13</sup> Jesus overcame the first temptation by placing His full trust in every word from the mouth of God. The Devil now tempts Jesus to jump and trust that God will save Him<sup>14</sup> in accordance with Psalms 91:11-12 which says:

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<sup>7</sup> D. A. Carson, “Matthew,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 113.

<sup>8</sup> Nolland John, “Preface,” in *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 2005), 165.

<sup>9</sup> Craig A. Evans, *The Bible Knowledge Background Commentary: Matthew–Luke*, ed. Craig A. Evans and Craig A. Bubeck, First Edition. (Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2003), 85.

<sup>10</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 76.

<sup>11</sup> James Montgomery Boice, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2001), 56.

<sup>12</sup> George Whitefield, *Selected Sermons of George Whitefield* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1999).

<sup>13</sup> Nolland John, “Preface,” in *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 2005), 165.

<sup>14</sup> Robert H. Mounce, *Matthew*, Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 30.

**For He will command His angels concerning You to guard You in all Your ways; they will lift You up in their hands, so that You will not strike Your foot against a stone.**

In late antiquity, this passage was understood as providing assurance and aid against demons which would be very fitting considering it was the Devil who was tempting Jesus!<sup>15</sup> The promise is that those who trust God will be protected, lifted and carried by His angels (cf. Numbers 11:12; Deuteronomy 1:31; Isaiah 49:22; Hebrews 1:14).<sup>16</sup> The Devil tempted Jesus to use His privileged status as Son of God to force God to release Him from the life-threatening fast by jumping from the pinnacle of the temple.<sup>17</sup> If you truly trust in every word from the mouth of God, the Devil argues, then jumping from the pinnacle should not lead to death but life and the end of the fast because God's



angels will be forced to attend to your every need! The Devil was appealing to the pride of life in 1 John 2:15-17 to entice Jesus to place His own well-being above the will of God.

Jesus responds to the Devil's request by quoting Deuteronomy 6:16 which says "Do not put the LORD your God to the test as you did at Massah." The reference alludes to Exodus 17:2-7 (cf. Num 20:1-13), where the Israelites "put the lord to the test" by demanding water.<sup>18</sup> In essence Israel was saying to God: give us water as proof that You are with us (Exodus 17:7)<sup>19</sup> and that we are better off than we were in Egypt.<sup>20</sup> This was a sin against God because Israel

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<sup>15</sup> Craig A. Evans, *The Bible Knowledge Background Commentary: Matthew-Luke*, ed. Craig A. Evans and Craig A. Bubeck, First Edition. (Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2003), 86.

<sup>16</sup> D. A. Carson, "Matthew," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 113.

<sup>17</sup> Nolland John, "Preface," in *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 2005), 165.

<sup>18</sup> D. A. Carson, "Matthew," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 114.

<sup>19</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 76.

<sup>20</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 76.



had no right to dictate how God was to express his covenantal commitment to His people.<sup>21</sup> For both Israel and Jesus, demanding the miraculous as proof of God's fidelity<sup>22</sup> was wrong because we are always called to trust and do the will of God the Father (Deuteronomy 6:17).<sup>23</sup> While Psalms 91:11-12 is a promise of protection for God's own, Jesus refused to use this passage to manipulate God<sup>24</sup> into breaking His will that He should keep on fasting. Also, jumping from the pinnacle would have been a sin because God had not encouraged or commanded Him to do so.<sup>25</sup>

### APPLICATION

While God's word is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness (2 Timothy 3:16), it can also be misinterpreted and used to justify one's own sin. When Satan, the master Deceiver, quoted Psalms 91:11-12 he left out an important clause "to guard all you in all your ways."<sup>26</sup> God's promise of protection was not to be used to force God's will to bow to that of our own but as assurance that when we allow God's will to guide our lives He will keep us from stumbling and falling.<sup>27</sup> The Devil is also constantly tempting us as to manipulate scripture to justify sin. For example, who has not heard of Matthew 7:1 "do not judge, or you too will be judged" as justification for the sins of 1 Peter 4:3: "debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry?" While we are to trust the Word of God

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<sup>21</sup> Nolland John, "Preface," in *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 2005), 166.

<sup>22</sup> Craig A. Evans, *The Bible Knowledge Background Commentary: Matthew–Luke*, ed. Craig A. Evans and Craig A. Bubeck, First Edition. (Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2003), 86.

<sup>23</sup> D. A. Carson, "Matthew," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 114.

<sup>24</sup> D. A. Carson, "The Gospels and Acts," in *NIV Zondervan Study Bible: Built on the Truth of Scripture and Centered on the Gospel Message*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015), 1935.

<sup>25</sup> James Montgomery Boice, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2001), 57.

<sup>26</sup> George Whitefield, *Selected Sermons of George Whitefield* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1999).

<sup>27</sup> George Whitefield, *Selected Sermons of George Whitefield* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1999).



implicitly and absolutely,<sup>28</sup> one simply cannot dismiss the possibility that one's interpretation of scripture comes not from God but from the Devil. To make sure this is not the case always interpret verses in context of the chapter, book, author and the entire Bible. Since God is the author of Scripture, statements of Scripture will always complement and reinforce each other when rightly understood.<sup>29</sup> If your interpretation conflicts with any other passage in Scripture,

then you can be rest assured it has come to you from the Devil and not from God.

Jesus' second temptation also invites us to see miracles as blessings from God. Created beings are not to try and manipulate God into giving them blessings, even if they are promised.<sup>30</sup> Living in this "ME" generation where everything is permissible and acceptable, it is tempting to stand on the broad path of self-seeking choices while foolishly demanding the promises of God meant for those on the narrow path of obedience! Those who have kept God at the periphery of their lives should not expect God to intervene when their choices have led to bad circumstances. Also, just because one has been obedient does not mean one can demand God to perform a miracle that would overturn His will in your life. Jesus refused to turn the stones into bread or throw Himself down



because it was Satan and not God who asked Him to do so! We are to trust in the Lord with all our hearts (Proverbs 3:5) that when we seek first His kingdom (Matthew 6:33),<sup>31</sup> His hand of protection and blessings will be offered to us either in this life or the next!

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<sup>28</sup> James Montgomery Boice, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2001), 57.

<sup>29</sup> James Montgomery Boice, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2001), 57.

<sup>30</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 76.

<sup>31</sup> Robert H. Mounce, *Matthew*, Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 30.

The third thing we can apply from Jesus overcoming this temptation relates to how we work inside of God's kingdom. The Devil tempted Jesus to cast Himself down not only to tempt



God to save Him but in doing so to vainly promote His title of Son of God to the large worshipping crowds at the temple.<sup>32</sup> Jesus saw through Satan's deception and refused to "advance the work of God by spectacular and obviously worldly means."<sup>33</sup> In a similar manner we as Christians are to see our spiritual gifts and divinely assigned roles in the church as blessings from God. They are not to be used to vainly puff ourselves up but instead to build one another up in the faith (Ephesians 4:11-13).

Never forget, we have been "created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do" (Ephesians 2:9).

## CONCLUSION

We have been given free will not to do as we please but instead so that we might be able to choose to obey God the Father in heaven. To overcome the pride of life one must learn how to obey and trust God in all matters. One cannot stand on the broad path of self-seeking choices while foolishly demanding God to miraculously remove the subsequent bad results of those choices. When going through tribulation one is not to try to escape by forcing God to provide another path, but instead one must persevere in His will and trust that he will do good to those who love Him. When using scripture to validate one's path always make sure one's interpretation is correct by allowing scripture to interpret scripture. Finally, from this temptation we learn that spiritual gifts are only to be used for God, not for our own vainglory. Next week we are going to conclude this series by exploring how Jesus overcame the lust of the eyes of Satan's third and final temptation.

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<sup>32</sup> George Whitefield, *Selected Sermons of George Whitefield* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1999).

<sup>33</sup> James Montgomery Boice, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2001), 56–57.