

Our Lord's Temptations in the Wilderness. Matthew 4. 1-11.¹

Adamsdown. 15 February 2011.

As I indicated at the close of last Tuesday's meeting, our subject this evening is that of our Lord's Temptations in the Wilderness. And our reading this evening is taken from the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 4, commencing with verse 1.

[Matthew 4. 1-11]

All three synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke) record our Lord's temptations in the wilderness.² And all three make it clear that it was the Holy Spirit who was responsible for the Saviour being in the place of temptation. Matthew tells us that Jesus was 'led up' by the Spirit into the wilderness; Luke that He was 'led' by the Spirit 'in' (not as the King James Version 'into') the wilderness³; and Mark, rather more vividly, that He was 'driven out' ('thrust forth') by the Spirit into the wilderness.⁴

Clearly it was God's will that the Lord Jesus should be tried and tempted for this is said to be the express intention of the Holy Spirit – Jesus was, Matthew makes clear, 'led up of the Spirit ... *to be tempted of the devil*'. It was God's purpose that our Lord should be tested⁵ in this way that He (our Lord) should be demonstrated to be holy and sinless.⁶

The point which each of the gospel writers makes is that the Lord Jesus did not deliberately expose Himself to the devil's attack. In this, as in all else, He has left us the perfect example – altogether consistent with the prayer which He later taught His disciples, 'do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one'.⁷

Mark tells us that 'He (the Lord Jesus) was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan'⁸, and Luke that 'Jesus ... was continually being led⁹ by the Spirit in the wilderness, for forty days being tempted by the devil'.¹⁰ The implication being that the devil's temptations lasted throughout the forty days of our Lord's fasting, and that the Holy Spirit has focused our attention on the last three – and doubtless greatest and crowning – temptations at the close of the period.

And now, at the close of the forty days, the tempter's¹¹ opening shot was, 'If you are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread'.

We know that the devil and his agents were well aware of our Lord's status as the Son of God. We have but to recall the confession of the demons as recorded in Mark 3 verse 11; 'the unclean spirits, whenever they saw Him, fell down before Him and cried out, saying, You are the Son of God'.¹²

Oh yes, the devil knew that He was the Son of God alright, and what is more, he knew that our Lord Himself was fully conscious of it also – partly because, long before, our Lord had referred to it Himself, 'Why did you seek me?', He had asked Mary and Joseph some 18 years before, 'Did you not know that I must be about *my Father's* business?',¹³ – and partly because it had recently been confirmed by God Himself, when, at Jesus' baptism, 'suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, This is my beloved *Son*, in whom I am well pleased'.¹⁴

'If – since¹⁵ – you are the Son of God', the devil opens, 'as declared by that voice from heaven some six weeks ago¹⁶, command that these stones may become bread. Indeed, speaking of baptism, I seem to remember that rather strange Baptist man once saying to the Jews, "Do not think to say within yourselves, we have Abraham for our father; for I say to you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children to Abraham"¹⁷

'Now, surely, with the power with which *you* have just been anointed ... (and Malcolm has his eye particularly on Acts 10 verse 38, where we are told that Jesus had been 'anointed ... with the Holy Spirit and with power'¹⁸)... ..now, surely, with the power with which *you* have just been anointed ... you are able easily to make stones into bread, and so satisfy your own hunger. And you are hungry, aren't you? What can possibly be wrong in exercising your *God-given* power to make bread? I am not asking you to steal it! Perish the thought! Nor am I suggesting for one minute that you spread some lavish and extravagant banquet for yourself, and that, as some self-indulgent rich man, you feast sumptuously every day'.¹⁹

'Surely you can't believe that God would want *you* – you His Son – to starve to death. I mean, who is there, *dare* I say, 'who, if *his son* asks for *bread*, will give him a *stone*?'²⁰ Ahem! After all, you have a very important mission to accomplish, don't you? And you are never going to accomplish this if you allow yourself to starve to death. What, the Messiah of Israel to perish of hunger in a desert? It's unthinkable!

As we know, otherwise civilized peoples have been guilty of many gross and inhuman acts when faced with extreme hunger. We have only to think of the poor starving mother in the days of Elisha, who, in time of famine, agreed to boil and eat her own son.²¹

And our Lord, Himself a man, felt hunger as keenly as any other. And the Judean desert offered no vegetation to provide Him with any nourishment. There wasn't so much as a barren fig-tree – as there would be, when, three years later, He 'hungered' while entering Jerusalem²² – from which He could at least have taken and ate the leaves. There was nothing – *nothing* apart from the innumerable round flat stones of the desert, resembling, both in form and in size, the pancake-like bread which the common people of His day all ate.

To some extent, Satan's initial focus on that which was or was not available to be eaten was, of course, a rerun of the tactic he had deployed so effectively in the Garden. Could he shake the Saviour's trust in God's goodness and care – as he had so successfully shaken Eve's.²³

We will find that, in responding to each of the three temptations, our Lord resisted and overcame the devil with a well-chosen text of Scripture.²⁴ And it is interesting that, in each case, He drew His arrow from the same quiver – from the book of Deuteronomy. There are, of course, *five* books to the Law of Moses, but – just as young David, a thousand years before, had used only one of the five smooth stones which he had available when doing battle with *his* formidable foe, the Philistine champion – so the Lord Jesus used only one of the five books.

And we should perhaps note that – unlike the woman in the Garden – at no point did the Saviour enter into any argument or discussion with the tempter. For Him, God's word was final. 'It is written' – 'it stands written' – was His first and His last word.²⁵

His first quotation, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word which proceeds from the mouth of God', lifted from Deuteronomy 8. 3, was, as you would expect, ideally suited to the occasion.

Let's pause for a moment to remind ourselves of Israel's early experiences. We know, for instance, that they had been taken down into Egypt by a man named Joseph, who cared for them there²⁶ – that, following the death of many children, the nation – spoken of by God as His 'son' – had been 'called' by God *out of Egypt*.²⁷ After which, they had been *baptized* ('to Moses in the cloud and in the sea', as the apostle Paul expresses it in 1 Corinthians 10),²⁸ and had been *led by God into a wilderness* where they had remained for a period of *forty* something or others²⁹ – during which time, Deuteronomy 8 informs us, they both *hungered* and were '*proved*'.³⁰

I need hardly tell you that Matthew in his early chapters has been tracing the way in which our Lord Jesus, Israel's Messiah, has been treading in detail the same road they had – right up to His present wilderness experience.³¹ Hence the relevance of our Lord's quotation from Deuteronomy, the 'Book of the Wilderness'.³²

The source of his quotation, Deuteronomy 8. 3, reads, 'He (the Lord) caused you to hunger, and fed you with manna ... that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word which proceeds from the mouth of God'

And by appealing to this verse the Lord Jesus was pointing out that one of the great lessons Israel had been taught in the desert was that the sustaining of life depends altogether on *God* – who, if He will, can provide nourishment by the power of His own creative word, without relying on ordinary and common means – as indeed He had with the manna. That is, the very context of our Lord's quotation showed that God had first allowed His people Israel to hunger, and had then supplied them with food in a miraculous manner, that they might thereafter acknowledge their dependence on Him for their sustenance.

So, in effect, our Lord's reply was, 'Yes, granted, I have the power to do this, but for me to use that power would imply impatience and lack of faith in God, who can, by the mere word of His mouth, provide for the sustenance of life – mine included if He will – in an *extraordinary* manner when, as here in this wilderness, the *ordinary* means of supply are lacking'.

It was not then, our Lord was saying, that which *went into His* mouth which was of supreme importance – but that which *came out of God's!* His Father's word was of far greater importance to Him than bread – and He had received no word from His Father about making stones into bread! So, 'No', He replied in effect, 'I am content to stay hungry and await my Father's time. I trust God. I will look *upwards* for the meeting of my needs, and not *downwards*'.

We ought perhaps note that our Lord's quotation speaks of 'man'; '*Man* shall not ...'. Satan had opened with, 'If you are *the Son of God*' and I suspect that Jesus may well have been saying, 'I do indeed acknowledge that I *am* the Son of God, but would point out that, as One now 'found in fashion as a man', I am subject to, and dependent upon, God'.³³

And it is thrilling for us to remember that the One who refused to use His power to satisfy His own hunger, will, in chapters 14 and 15 of this very gospel, use that very power to feed two separate multitudes who otherwise would

have gone hungry.³⁴ Yes, indeed, Peter, as you told Cornelius, the One 'anointed with the Holy Spirit and power ...went about ('passed through')', not gratifying Himself, but 'doing good'.³⁵

Following the order of the temptations as recorded by Matthew³⁶, the devil then took Him into the holy city, and stood Him on the pinnacle (the wing) of the temple.³⁷ Our Lord had just openly asserted His faith and trust in God.

'All right', the devil seems to say, 'then prove it. You don't want to turn stones into bread then. Well, never mind. Perhaps I have been looking at stones the wrong way. Let's have another go.'³⁸

'So you rely on God and His word, do you? Isn't that nice!

'Well, you know, don't you, that His word assures you can safely cast yourself down from here. For '*it is written*' – and I know you like those words – 'He shall give His angels charge concerning you, and, On their hands they shall bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone'. Well, if you trust God so fully – and the Psalm from which these words are taken³⁹ (Psalm 91) more or less opens with the words, 'I will say of the Lord ... My God, in Him I will trust' – if you trust Him then you need have no qualms about throwing yourself down, for you have His specific promise to preserve you.

'If you won't use *your own* power to perform a miracle for yourself, at least demonstrate your faith in *God's* power to perform one for you.⁴⁰ Cast yourself down'.⁴¹

Satan is certainly versatile. For, having failed on one front, he immediately attempts to outflank the Saviour and attack Him from the rear. You have to give it to him, when fighting, his footwork is superb!

And I note that he comes carrying his Bible under his arm!⁴² He knew the text of Psalm 91 very well – and, speaking personally, I see nothing particularly significant in the fact that he omitted the clause 'to keep you in all your ways'⁴³ – for it was not at all relevant to his purpose. And most certainly the omitted clause is *not* speaking about *God's* ways – as I have seen it quoted – but about the Messiah's own ways!

But if the devil knew *the text*, our Lord knew *the context* from which the devil had chosen his quotation!

And that context reveals something of Satan's audacity in quoting from Psalm 91 of all places. For in the earlier section of the psalm, verse 3 says, 'Surely He (the Most High) shall deliver you from the snare of the fowler (one who sets a trap to catch a prey)' – and I note that the Greek Old Testament (the Septuagint) uses the same word there as Paul does in 1 Timothy 3. 7, when he requires the overseer in the local assembly to 'have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and *the snare* of the devil'.

Again, verse 4 of Psalm 91 says, 'His truth shall be your shield' – and we all know whose word is truth!⁴⁴

And, yet again, verse 5 says, 'You shall not be afraid of the arrow that flies by day'- and I see that the Greek Old Testament uses the same word there as Paul does in Ephesians 6. 16, translated as 'darts' – 'taking the shield of faith, wherewith you shall be able to quench all the fiery darts (arrows) of the evil one'.

But *even more* significant is the verse immediately following the passage which the devil cited; which reads, 'You shall tread upon *the lion* and *adder*: the young lion and *the dragon* you shall trample under feet' – promising Messiah victory over the lion (the 'fierce lion' as the word is⁴⁵), the serpent and the dragon – treading and trampling them down.

And, frankly, I regard it a profound cheek for the devil – known to us from scripture as the prowling lion, the ancient serpent, and the great dragon – to raid Psalm 91 of all scriptures for ammunition to fire at God's Messiah.⁴⁶

But this ploy didn't work either.

'It is written again', our Lord responded, 'you shall not tempt⁴⁷ the Lord your God'.

'The promises to which you refer indeed hold true', our Lord replies in effect, 'but no one is entitled to misapply God's word so as to create unnecessary danger for himself. For that would be putting God to the test. It would not be a case of *trusting* God, but of *tempting* God. And there is a whole world of difference between faith and folly'.

'And so a second text of Scripture must qualify and balance the one you have just quoted: 'It is written *again*, you shall not tempt the Lord your God'.

And, once more, the context of the Lord's quotation is all-important. For our Lord selected His scripture from a verse which was warning others⁴⁸ not to make the same mistake as Israel once had. In full, Deuteronomy 6. 16 reads, 'you shall not tempt the Lord your God, *as you tempted Him in Massah*⁴⁹ – the original name of which had

been Rephidim, where, according to Exodus 17. 7, Israel, when thirsty, had 'tempted the Lord, saying, Is the Lord among us or not?'⁵⁰

So that, if our Lord's response to the *first* temptation rested on God's gracious provision of *food* for the children of Israel – and it did (the manna) – His response to the *second* rests on God's gracious provision of *water* for them.⁵¹ For it had been when Israel were without water that they had tempted God at Massah/Rephidim by, in effect, insisting upon some tangible and miraculous evidence of His preserving care – which God graciously gave to them, bringing water for them out of the rock.

And I learn from the second temptation that it was not *the knowledge* of scripture which distinguished our Lord from our foe. For Satan could also say, 'It is written', and quote the biblical text *very* accurately. The fundamental difference between Jesus and the devil lay in that our Lord not only *knew* Scripture—*He obeyed it!* His victory didn't consist in *knowing* that the Law forbade tempting God; His victory consisted in submitting to that Law, and in refusing to tempt Him.

Again, I learn how important it is that I apply the teaching of scripture personally. For I note that, in one sense, our Lord misquoted – deliberately misquoted – the text from Deuteronomy 6. For in its original form the verb 'tempt' was in *the plural* – shown clearly by the King James Version rendering, 'ye shall not tempt the Lord your God'. But the Lord Jesus quoted it in *the singular*, 'Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God'. For He knew that whatever was addressed to all *collectively* was addressed to each and every one *individually* – and was therefore addressed to Him!

And so the One who, at the *first* temptation, refused to *doubt* God and His word, at the *second*, refused to *presume* on God and His word either!

But the second temptation was also more directly related to His Messiahship than had been the first. For I understand that the first great event of the Temple day was the offering of the morning sacrifice – which took place as the first streaks of sunlight appeared. From the top of a high tower in the Temple, several hundred feet above the Kidron Valley below, a priest would sound the blast of a trumpet when the sun first came into sight, as a signal for the service to begin in the Temple court.⁵² At that moment, the court would be thronged with a multitude of expectant worshippers, all with their eyes pinned on the top of the tower as they awaited the signal.

And, although I have no way of being sure, I should not be surprised if it was at such a moment that the devil suggested to our Lord that He should cast Himself down – in full view of the captive audience.⁵³ And had not the prophet Malachi foretold some 400 years before that 'the Lord' would 'suddenly come to His Temple'?⁵⁴ Surely, nobody in the Temple court that day could possibly mistake so obvious – and so sensational – a fulfilment.

So, in tempting Jesus to throw himself down from the Temple, the devil may well have been suggesting that He make a public display of His Messiahship. Indeed, one ancient Jewish commentary on Isaiah says, 'Our Rabbis give this tradition: In the hour when King Messiah comes, *He stands upon the roof of the Sanctuary*, and proclaims to Israel, saying ... the time of your redemption draws near'.⁵⁵

Without doubt then, following such a miraculous descent, Jesus would have been instantly acclaimed as the Messiah, rather than as a carpenter – which is all He had been to date – and would have secured a great following for Himself. And then, if it had proved necessary, they would have 'come to take Him by force to make Him king' – which, according to John 6, happened some time later after He miraculously fed a multitude of 5,000 men.⁵⁶

And I was interested to read that, during excavations in Jerusalem following the Six Day War of 1967 – when Israel regained control of some of old Jerusalem – one archaeologist, by name Benjamin Mazar, found a block from the parapet of the south-western corner of the Temple, which carried the inscription, 'the place of the blowing (of the trumpet, that is)'.⁵⁷

But no - our Lord had no intention of dazzling the worshippers at Jerusalem into following Him. Indeed, as you know, He always refused to perform any miracle simply for show.

Which brings us to Satan's third and final temptation, when he transported the Lord Jesus up into 'an exceedingly high mountain'⁵⁸ – each temptation, I note, being staged at a higher elevation than the one before. First, our Lord had been 'led up' from the Jordan into the wilderness.⁵⁹ He had then been 'set' on the wing of the temple⁶⁰ – several hundred feet above the valley below. Now He was transported to 'an exceedingly high mountain'.⁶¹

Although, according to Matthew 4 verse 1, the Lord had been '*led up* of ('by') the Spirit into the wilderness, it was, Luke tells us, the devil who '*led* Him '*up*' into the high mountain, where 'he showed Him all the kingdoms of the inhabited earth in a moment of time'.⁶²

This expression, 'in a moment of time', suggests that, using some of his mysterious occult powers, the Overlord of evil presented the Lord Jesus with some kind of image of kingdoms not even present then. ... 'There ... do you see them? And *all* this authority will I give you, and the glory of them: for that is delivered to me; and to whomever I will I give it. If you therefore worship before me, all shall be yours' – as Luke records the devil's words.⁶³

And I note that, in this, the very last of his temptations, the devil discards his mask entirely. Whereas previously he had (as in the Garden of Eden) very cleverly avoided all reference to himself, now, in one daring bid, he openly draws attention to himself with his repeated 'I' (three times) and 'me' (twice). But then I guess that for the tempter, having been utterly foiled and frustrated up to this point, it was now or never.

His claim that the authority over the world's kingdoms had been 'delivered' to him was certainly stretching the point.

And yet, for all that, it was a genuine offer. For, in Revelation 13, we read concerning Satan's 'Superman' of the end times – the beast which came up out of the sea⁶⁴ and out of the abyss⁶⁵ – that 'the dragon gave him his power, and his throne, and great authority', and then that 'all the earth ... worshipped the dragon, because he gave the authority to the beast'.⁶⁶

'At your baptism, God *did* say, "You are my Son", didn't He?⁶⁷ And you know where those words came from, don't you? Yes, from the second Psalm – verse 7 to be precise. And what does God say in the *very* next verse? "Ask of me, and I will give you the heathen for your inheritance", Psa. 2. 8. Yes ... but, as you well know, a whole lot of water is to pass under the bridge before *that* happens – for, between now and then, you will have to face the cross – pardon the word – with all its shame and suffering. How very distressing for you!

'But it doesn't *have* to be that way. Frankly, I can offer you a short-cut. For if God says, '*I will give you the heathen for your inheritance*' – some day! ... I say, '*all these things I will give you*', Matt. 4. 9 – and will give you now! You really don't have to wait for God to 'set' you – as His king, 'upon' His 'holy hill of Zion'. *This* mountain will do very nicely.

'So, if I cannot persuade you to *look* down at the stones'⁶⁸ ... if I cannot persuade you to *cast yourself* down from the temple's wing⁶⁹ ... can I not persuade you to *fall* down before me?⁷⁰ What about it? Go on, worship me!

And, when I hear Satan's offer, 'All these things I will give you, if you will *fall down and worship* me',⁷¹ I am reminded of the wise men from the East, of whom it is said back in chapter 2, that 'when they had come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary His mother, and *fell down and worshipped* Him'.⁷² What irony – that the One who Himself is worthy *to be worshipped* is invited *to worship* someone else.

Thus Satan offered the Lord Jesus all the kingdoms of the world ... destined to be given to Him by God – although only in God's time, and only following the suffering of the cross – in exchange for His homage.

Can you imagine it? The usurper offering to sell the kingdom to its rightful heir. But the devil knew that, if Jesus accepted the offer, though He might have the kingdom, the devil would have Him.

But, as Satan had now dropped his mask, in His reply Jesus named him, and rebuffed him with the words of Deuteronomy 6. 13, 'Go ... For it is written, You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve'.⁷³

Over the centuries, Satan has successfully baited millions of men with earthly ambition – but his golden hook utterly failed with Jesus. As Mr. Darby once said during a lecture on Hebrews 11, 'Moses refused the treasures in Egypt; Christ refused the whole world'.⁷⁴

Our Lord didn't need to be told that, in God's purpose, Golgotha lay between Him and the dominion of the earth. He knew well that God's way was certainly the more costly route, but it was the way He would go – in undeviating obedience to His Father's will.

Luke points out at this point that the devil had 'ended all the temptation' – literally, 'had finished every temptation'.⁷⁵ Satan had exhausted all his ammunition. He had pulled out all the stops. He had held back *nothing*, and it had availed him *nothing*.⁷⁶ For, truly, as our Lord claimed in John 14, the 'ruler of this world' had *nothing* in Him⁷⁷ – an idiom⁷⁸ meaning that Satan had no legal claim on Him – that there was nothing the devil could claim as belonging to his domain and kingdom – nothing which fell under his power.

And Luke also notes that, having 'finished every temptation', Satan left our Lord 'for a time' – 'for a season'⁷⁹ – with the ominous implication that it was *not* all over – that he would be coming back!⁸⁰

And it is difficult not to associate this, in part at least, with the words our Lord addressed to those who came to arrest Him in the Garden of Gethsemane, 'This is your hour, and *the power of darkness*'.⁸¹

Nor is it difficult to see a connection between our Lord's wilderness temptations and His prayers in Gethsemane. For, in the wilderness, the one common thread which ran through each of the three temptations was the issue of whose *will* Jesus would do—God's will or His own. Would He wait on His Father's time and good pleasure regarding His food? Would He, in the most spectacular manner, 'suddenly come to his temple', Mal. 3. 1, and constrain Israel to receive Him then – or would He meekly await His Father's will and purpose for Him? Would He seek to obtain the kingdoms of the world by improper means – or would He pursue His road to the glory via the cross in obedience to His Father's command?⁸²

In summary, would He rest in dependence on God's will, or choose His own? And it was, of course, that very issue which later resurfaced – with a vengeance – in Gethsemane – when once more, according to Matthew's account, three times He chose to do His Father's will in preference to His own, saying, 'not as I will, but as you will'.⁸³

Both Matthew and Mark connect their accounts of our Lord's temptations directly with their accounts of His baptism. But Luke inserts our Lord's genealogy – which stretches right back to Adam – in between these events, suggesting I suspect a contrast between the first man, Adam, and 'the second man', our Lord Jesus. And, indeed, I think we can easily spot several fairly obvious contrasts between the temptation of our Saviour and that of the woman and the man in Genesis 3.⁸⁴

For example, our first parents fell as a result of loosening their grip on God's spoken word – namely, 'you shall not surely die'. Whereas, as we have seen, our Lord steadfastly refused to budge from what God had said.

Then, Adam and Eve fell in the *best* and most congenial of circumstances – a beautiful garden, surrounded by placid creatures, and with absolutely no need ever to feel one pang of hunger.⁸⁵ Whereas, our Lord met the tempter in the *worst* and most adverse of circumstances – a dreary and desolate desert, among wild beasts,⁸⁶ and having eaten nothing for almost six weeks.

After Adam and Eve fell to Satan's wiles, *heavenly beings* ('cherubim') were sent and set by God to prevent them from eating – from eating of the tree of life, that is.⁸⁷ Whereas, after our Lord Jesus had overcome the tempter, *heavenly beings* – angels – came 'and ministered to Him' – in all likelihood providing Him with something to eat⁸⁸ – much as, according to 1 Kings 19, an angel twice provided for Elijah.⁸⁹

And, speaking of Elijah, he was, of course, one of two men who would one day stand with the Lord Jesus on the so-called Mount of Transfiguration. And we know that all three had, at some time, gone without anything to eat for forty days and forty nights.⁹⁰ But, for his part, he, Elijah, failed *before* his forty days' fast, and, for his part, Moses failed *after* his (first⁹¹) forty days' fast. But our Lord Jesus *never* failed – not *before* His fast (for at His baptism God declared Himself to be well pleased in Him) – not *during* His forty days fast, throughout which, as we have seen, He was 'tempted of the devil' – nor *after* His forty days' fast, when He faced – and overcame – Satan's three crowning temptations.⁹²

And if, *at His baptism in the Jordan*, it had been – as He explained to John the Baptist – fitting for Him to fulfil 'all' the righteous requirements of God's will,⁹³ *at His temptation in the wilderness*, He had successfully resisted 'all' the enemy's attempts to deflect Him from that will.⁹⁴ Not one of Satan's 'fiery (flaming) darts', Eph. 6. 16⁹⁵, had found *any* combustible material to ignite. Glorious Saviour!

We leave the last word with the writer to the Hebrews: He, our Lord Jesus, 'was in all points tempted like as we are, *yet without sin*'.⁹⁶

Endnotes

¹ One feature sets this narrative apart from most others in the gospels. Because there were no witnesses, it could have only come from either the Lord Jesus Himself or the Holy Spirit – as is true also of our Lord's intercession in Gethsemane.

² In all three Synoptic Gospels the importance of the account of the temptation of Jesus is seen from its position: after His baptism and immediately prior to and introducing His public ministry.

³ The Lord Jesus, we are told, being 'full of the Holy Spirit', Luke 4. 1. There is great emphasis in Luke's gospel upon the Holy Spirit. Between being anointed with the Holy Spirit (Luke 3. 22; 4. 18; Acts 10. 38) and Jesus returning to Galilee in His power (Luke 4. 14), He was full of the Spirit when led by the Spirit in the wilderness, Luke 4. 1. And our Lord's first recorded words after are "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me", Luke 4. 18.

⁴ And each of these terms stands in contrast to the expressions around them. So that, for example, Matthew's expression, 'Jesus was *led up* by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil', Matt. 4. 1, is sandwiched between his statements that 'Jesus *came* from Galilee to John at the Jordan', Matt. 3. 13, and 'when Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, He *departed* to Galilee', Matt. 4. 12. Matthew and Luke use 'led'; Mark speaks of Him being 'driven'. But Mark is often more vivid and graphic. Compare Matt. 3. 16 and Luke 3. 21 use 'open', whereas Mark uses 'rent', Mark 1. 10.

⁵ The Greek verb for 'tempt' can be used in a positive sense, as when Jesus tests His disciples, John 6. 6, as well as in a negative sense, as when the Pharisees try to entangle Jesus in His words, Matt. 22. 15-22. In Acts 15. 10 and 1 Cor. 10. 9 it is used of challenging the Lord. The word is best known for its use of the devil tempting in order to cause sin; so that the devil can be called 'the tempter', Matt. 4.3; 1 Thess. 3. 5. The noun 'temptation' is used of trials sent by God or encountered while serving Him, Luke 22. 28; Acts 20. 9. It is also used of trials or tests that do or can lead to sin, Matt. 6. 13//Luke 11. 4; Matt. 26. 41//Mark 14. 38; Luke 22. 40. The word is also used to describe a trial or test which causes a follower of Jesus to fall away or apostatise, Luke 8. 13.

⁶ H. C. Hewlett, *The Glories of our Lord*, page 68.

⁷ Matt. 6. 13; Luke 11. 4.

⁸ Mark 1. 13.

⁹ The imperfect tense.

¹⁰ Luke 4. 1 literally.

¹¹ Matt. 4. 3; cf. 1 Thess. 3. 5.

¹² See too Matt. 8. 29; Luke 4. 41.

¹³ Luke 2. 49.

¹⁴ Matt. 3. 17.

¹⁵ With the meaning, 'since'. (Note the different word translated 'if' in Matt. 4. 9.) Satan does not aim to cast doubt on our Lord's sonship – it had recently been asserted both by the Lord Jesus, Luke 2. 49, and by God Himself, Luke 3. 22 – but to use it as a springboard for his first two temptations. The clause, 'If you are the Son of God,' assumes that such was the case. Our Lord's Sonship is the presupposition of the temptations. Satan did not tempt Jesus to *doubt* His divine Sonship, but to *presume* on it. They were temptations, not to question His status as Son, but to abuse it. They did not call in question whether He was the Messiah, but the kind of Messiah He should be.

¹⁶ Matt. 3. 17. Following His baptism, Jesus was 'immediately' driven into the wilderness by the Spirit, Mark 1. 12, where He had spent the last 40 days, Matt. 4. 2; Luke 4. 2.

¹⁷ Matt. 3. 9.

¹⁸ It would have been no temptation for anyone else to turn stones to bread.

¹⁹ See Luke 16. 19.

²⁰ Matt. 7. 9.

²¹ 2 Kings 6. 25-29.

²² Matt. 21. 18.

²³ Similarly Israel's rebellion in the wilderness was related to her demand for food, Psa. 78. 17-20.

²⁴ Our Lord reversed the order in which these texts appeared in the Law.

The devil had raised the issues of food, trust and worship. In one sense, this followed the order of (a) the body, (b) the soul (see Psa. 57. 1), and (c) the spirit (see John 4. 23). God's order is spirit, soul and body, 1 Thess. 5. 23.

²⁵ The Lord made His appeal – His only appeal – to scripture ... not to His own authority (as He often did later when speaking to men, with His distinctive, 'I say to you' - about sixty times in Matthew's gospel alone) ... nor to His divine power (to banish the devil from His presence, but which would have been no help or encouragement to us when we are tempted from that quarter).

'I am told that Emperor Napoleon once went to a very skilful workman, and inquired of him if he could make a bullet-proof jacket or under garment, one that he himself would feel safe to wear as a protection against bullets. The workman assured him he could make just such a garment; one he would feel entirely safe to wear himself. The Emperor engaged him to make the article, requesting him to take time, and see that it was bullet-proof. The workman took much time and pains in its construction. The jacket was finished, and the Emperor notified that it was ready for him. Napoleon, after carefully examining it, asked the maker if he still felt sure a bullet could not pierce it. The workman said he was sure no bullet could penetrate it; that he himself would feel entirely safe with it on in a shower of bullets. The Emperor asked him to put it on, that he might examine it more fully. The maker put the jacket

on himself, that the Emperor might see how finely it fitted and protected the body. After a careful examination of its make-up and apparent safety, Napoleon stepped back a few feet, and drew his pistol on the man, who cried out: Don't try it on me! But the Emperor said: You told me it was perfectly safe, and fired. The armour proved itself bullet-proof. So Christ has made an armour that renders its wearer perfectly safe against all the fiery darts that may be hurled against it. Christ has tried it on. He was led out into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. For forty days and nights Satan tried to pierce this armour, but broke all his arrows on it. It could not be penetrated. It was thoroughly tested on Christ, that all who put it on might feel safe. Christ was tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin. Let me say, then, to all who feel a little timid about the Christians armour, that it has been tested by our Captain and thousands of his soldiers, and has never yet been pierced by our enemy's bullets', A. B. Earle, *From: Incidents Used... In His Meetings, published in 1888.*

²⁶ Gen. 45. 9-46. 7; cf. Matt. 2. 18-15a.

²⁷ Exod. 1. 22; 12. 29; Exod. 4. 22-23; Hos. 11. 1; cf. Matt. 2. 15-17.

²⁸ 1 Cor. 10. 2; cf. Matt. 3. 13. The Lord's baptism in the Jordan stands as the counterpart of Israel's crossing of the Red Sea. Just as God led Israel out of Egypt and through the waters and into the desert, so does the Spirit of God lead Jesus into the desert after he is baptized.

²⁹ Deut. 8. 2; cf. Matt. 4. 1-2. 'Led ... in the wilderness' in Luke 4. 1 translates the exact same Greek expression as is used in the Septuagint of Deut. 8. 2.

³⁰ Deut. 8. 2-3; Matt. 4. 1-2. God adopted the policy of 'proving' Israel in the wilderness, but they responded by an attempt to 'prove' God Himself in Exodus 17 ('Massah' means 'Tempting' or 'Proving').

³¹ He, the Lord Jesus, was the true, the ideal Israel – the perfect fulfilment of all that Israel should have been. If Jesus was the representative and Messiah of His people He must be shown to have shared their experiences – and in particular to have had His wilderness journey and have endured the temptations to which they fell – without sin.

³² Which had been given by Moses at the time of Israel's second opportunity to gain possession of the Promised Land, having failed through unbelief some 38 years previously, Num. 13-14.

³³ We can compare John 5. 19, 30, 36 and John 12. 49.

³⁴ Matt. 14. 13-21; 15. 29-39.

³⁵ 'There was not one act in all Christ's life done to serve or to please Himself', JND, '*The Accepted Man*'. The devil tempted Jesus to assert His independence from God by performing a miracle for his own benefit, rather than, as a Son, trusting God to meet all his needs; cf. Deut 28. 1–14; Psa. 33. 18–19; Psa. 34. 10. The Lord Jesus rejected the devil's temptation, and remained obedient to his Father, being satisfied with his Father's care. He could not be persuaded to *dis*please God by being a disobedient Son; contrast Matt. 3. 17.

³⁶ The order of the three temptations in Matthew 4 seem to follow the sequence of events in Exodus: the provision of manna in the wilderness, chapter 16, the testing at Massah, chapter 17, and the worship of the golden calf, chapter 32. There is also a progression upwards from the wilderness to the Temple pinnacle to the 'exceedingly high mountain. And, again, Matthew has a tidy reverse order of the quotation of Scripture from Deuteronomy (Deut. 8. 3; 6. 16 and 6. 13. Also the two temptations which refer explicitly to our Lord's Sonship come together in Matthew. Luke's interest in Jerusalem and the Temple (Luke 2. 22, 25, 38, 41-45; 9. 31, 51-53; 13. 22, 34; 17.11; 18. 31; 19. 11, 18; 24. 49; Acts 1. 4; 3. 1; 6. 8–7. 60; 21. 17–22. 21) may suggest that he wanted to reach a climax there. See also Endnote 18 to 'Satan defeated at the cross'.

³⁷ At the first, Satan approaches Jesus with a temptation which relied on the situation in which he (the devil) then found Him – namely, in the wilderness – rather than, as do the later temptations, upon situations of the devil's own making. The devil didn't arrange and organise the initial event – although he took full advantage of his opportunity and, with the last two temptations, 'took' – transported – the Lord Jesus to places – the temple at Jerusalem and the high mountain – where He was to be further tempted, Matt. 4. 5, 8.

³⁸ Here he changes his tack.

³⁹ Which the Rabbis taught was a Messianic Psalm.

⁴⁰ 'If you will not prove it by a miracle of your own, prove it by impelling God to one', J. A. T. Robinson, '*The Temptations*' in '*Twelve New Testament Studies*', page 56.

⁴¹ 'He brought Him to Jerusalem, set Him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, If you are the Son of God, *throw yourself down* from here', Luke 4. 9; cf. 'all those in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath, and rose up and thrust Him out of the city; and they led Him to the brow of the hill on which their city was built, that *they might throw Him down* over the cliff', v. 29 (a different Greek word).

⁴² 'But what is this I see? Satan himself with a Bible under his arm, with a text in his mouth', Bishop Joseph Hall of Norwich, Chaplain to James the First, '*Contemplations on the Historical Passages of the New Testament*', Book II, Contemplation III (page 431).

⁴³ 'The omission itself does not prove he handled the Scriptures deceitfully, since the quotation is well within the range of common NT citation patterns ... For both Israel and Jesus, demanding miraculous protection as proof of God's care was wrong', Don Carson, '*Expositors' Bible Commentary*'. Warren Wiersbe claims, 'Satan very cleverly omitted the phrase "in all Thy ways" when he quoted from Psalm 91. When the child of God is in the will of God, the Father will protect him. He watches over those who are "in His ways"', on Matthew 4. 1-11. But this nonsense! Note Mr Wiersbe's (erroneous) use of capitals. The 'ways' are not God's – but the believer's!

⁴⁴ John 17. 17. Note the reference to 'the evil one' in verse 15.

⁴⁵ See the footnote to J. N. Darby's New Translation of Psa. 91. 13.

- ⁴⁶ Psalm 91. 10 makes it clear that God's angelic protection is for events that befall His people, not an excuse to seek out such dangers.
- ⁴⁷ Following the Septuagint of Deut. 6. 16, this is the intensive form of *πειράζω*; that is, 'to tempt thoroughly'.
- ⁴⁸ In the context, immediately the second generation of the nation.
- ⁴⁹ 'Massah' (meaning 'temptation') was also called 'Meribah' (meaning 'contention'), Exod. 17. 7. The quotation comes from Moses' warning for the Israelites not to repeat their sin at Massah, when they demanded water from the rock, Exod. 17. 1-7. And, if it was wrong for Israel the 'son of God' to demand miraculous confirmation of God's care, so it would be for Jesus the Son of God to demand the same.
- ⁵⁰ 'Harden not your hearts', Psalm 95. 8 says, 'as on the day at Massah in the wilderness, when your fathers tempted me' – referring back to the words of Exodus 17. 7. Compare 'Moses said to them ... Why do you tempt the Lord?', Exod. 17. 2.
- ⁵¹ 'What happened at Massah was that Moses produced water from the rock. And Satan's suggestion to Jesus was to produce bread from 'this stone', J. A. T. Robinson, 'The Temptations' in 'Twelve New Testament Studies', page 55.
- ⁵² 'The priests ... blew three blasts on their silver trumpets, (i) summoning the Levites, (ii) and the 'representatives' of the people (the so-called 'stationary men') to their duties, (iii) and announcing to the city that the morning sacrifice was about to be offered', A. Edersheim, 'The Temple: Its Ministry and Services', Chapter 8, 'The Second Lot'.
- ⁵³ 'Jesus stands on the lofty pinnacle of the Tower, or of the Temple-porch, presumably that on which every day a Priest was stationed to watch, as the pale morning light passed over the hills of Judaea far off to Hebron, to announce it as the signal for offering the morning sacrifice. If we might indulge our imagination, the moment chosen would be just as the Priest had quitted that station', A. Edersheim, 'The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah', Book III, chapter I, page 303.
- ⁵⁴ Mal. 3. 1.
- ⁵⁵ Among the Jews, 'the placing of Messiah on the pinnacle of the Temple, so far from being of Satanic temptation, is said to mark the hour of deliverance, of Messianic proclamation, and of Gentile voluntary submission. "Our Rabbis give this tradition: In the hour when King Messiah comes, He stands upon the roof of the Sanctuary, and proclaims to Israel, saying, You poor suffering, the time of your redemption draws nigh. And if you believe, rejoice in my light, which is risen upon you ... Isa. 60. 1 ... upon you only ... Isa. 60. 2 ... In that hour will the Holy One, blessed be His name, make the Light of the Messiah and of Israel to shine forth; and all shall come to the Light of the King Messiah and of Israel, as it is written ... Isa. 60. 3_... And they shall come and lick the dust from under the feet of the King Messiah, as it is written, Isa. 49. 23 ... And all shall come and fall on their faces before Messiah and before Israel, and say, We will be servants to Him and to Israel". A. Edersheim, 'The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah', Book III, chapter I, page 293. Edersheim is quoting from 'Yalkut', a 13th century haggadic compilation on the books of the Old Testament. His quote is from Isaiah 60:499. See <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/view.jsp?artid=13&letter=Y>. Although we cannot be certain that this saying reflects expectations of Jesus' time.
- ⁵⁶ John 6. 15.
- ⁵⁷ 'Mazar found a block from the parapet of the south-western corner with the inscription, "for the place of the blowing (of the trumpet)", E. Yamauchi, 'Archaeology and the Bible', page 70. (Excavations during 1968-77 at Jerusalem.)
- ⁵⁸ Matt. 4. 8.
- ⁵⁹ Matt. 4. 1.
- ⁶⁰ Matt. 4. 5.
- ⁶¹ Matt. 4. 8. This might have been Mount Tabor – which was less than five miles from Nazareth and 'from whose summit Jesus may well have looked on the world and its roads when He was a boy', William Barclay, 'The Mind of Jesus', pages 43-44.
- ⁶² Luke 4. 5.
- ⁶³ Luke 4. 6. Note the repeated 'I' and 'me' – because previously he had been careful to keep himself very much in the background.
- ⁶⁴ Rev. 13. 1.
- ⁶⁵ Rev. 17. 8.
- ⁶⁶ Rev. 13. 2-4.
- ⁶⁷ This temptation appears to break the pattern of the narrative in that Satan does not mention Jesus' Sonship. But the echo of Psalm 2 verse 7 continues the theme.
- ⁶⁸ Matt. 4. 3.
- ⁶⁹ Matt. 4. 6.
- ⁷⁰ Matt. 4. 9.
- ⁷¹ Matt. 4. 9.
- ⁷² Matt. 2. 11.
- ⁷³ Luke 4. 5-8.
- ⁷⁴ J. N. Darby, 'Notes from Lectures on the Epistle to the Hebrews', Collected Writings, volume 27, page 359.
- ⁷⁵ Luke 4. 13. He had covered the whole range of his temptations.

⁷⁶ The apostle Peter once summarised our Lord's public ministry in the words, He 'went about doing good, and *healing all that were oppressed of the devil*; for God was with Him', Acts 10. 38. Underline that, 'healing all that were oppressed of the devil'. And I note that our Lord's second specifically recorded miracle of healing was the cure of a man possessed by an unclean spirit, recorded for us in Mark 1. 23-26.⁷⁶

I suggest that the key to His casting out demons is to be found in the Wilderness Temptations which we considered last evening. And my reason for thinking this lies in our Lord's teaching in Matthew 12, Mark 3 and Luke 11, concerning the 'overcoming'⁷⁶ and the 'binding'⁷⁶ of the one He described there as 'the strong man'.

In his account, Matthew paints the background for us, recording that 'one was brought to Him (the saviour) who was demon-possessed, blind and mute; and He (the Lord Jesus) healed him, so that the blind and mute man both spoke and saw ...when the Pharisees heard it, Matthew adds, they said, This man does not cast out demons except by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons. But Jesus knew their thoughts, and said to them: Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself will not stand. And if Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand? ... But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.'⁷⁶ Or (that is, 'or to look at it another way') how can one enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds (Luke uses the word 'overcomes') the strong man? And then he will plunder his house', Matt. 12. 22-29.⁷⁶

Clearly, when speaking of the one who overcame and bound the strong man, and took spoil from his house, Jesus was referring metaphorically to Himself and to Satan respectively. As I understand it, 'the binding of the strong man' took place in the wilderness, and that our Lord was saying that, having first bound the 'strong man' there, He had then proceeded to rob 'the strong man's' house as it were – expelling the devil's agents and minions with His word – for which, no doubt, people such as Legion and Mary Magdalene were *exceedingly* grateful.⁷⁶

⁷⁷ John 14. 30.

⁷⁸ A Hebrew idiom.

⁷⁹ Translate 'for a time', James Barr, '*Biblical Words for Time*', pages 54-55. The phrase 'ἄχρι καιροῦ' occurs elsewhere only in Acts 13. 11, also from the pen of Luke, and clearly means 'for a time', with no suggestion of 'until' anything. There is no suggestion of 'an opportune time'. Note the use of the two words for 'time' together in Acts 3. 19, 21. 'It might be urged that 'tempora et opportunitates' would fulfil all necessary conditions. Augustine has anticipated this suggestion, but only to demonstrate its insufficiency, on the ground that 'opportunitas' (= 'opportunum tempus') is a convenient, favourable season (εὐκαιρία); while the καιρός may be the most inconvenient, most unfavourable of all, the essential notion of it being that it is the critical nick of time; but whether, as such, to make or to mar, effectually to help or effectually to hinder, the word determines not at all', R. C. Trench, '*Synonyms of the New Testament*', lvii.

⁸⁰ In the third Gospel the adversary's next explicitly recorded assault is in chapter 22. Satan is mentioned in connection with the trial of the apostles, Luke 22. 31, and Luke also reports in that chapter the saying of Jesus in Gethsemane concerning 'the power of darkness', Luke 22. 53, with its rather sinister overtones. Compare the words of the prophet to Ahab in 1 Kings 20. 22.

⁸¹ Luke 22. 53.

⁸² John 10. 18; 14. 31.

⁸³ Matt. 26. 39, 42, 44. Contrast Isa. 14. 12-14 - five times Lucifer said, 'I will'.

⁸⁴ Eve and Christ (JND, Miscellaneous 1, page 209) ... 'As the beginning of Eve's sin was losing confidence in God's goodness by the guile of Satan (if God did not seek their happiness fully, they must seek it for themselves, as even now), hence will, lust, transgression; so now, God was there to give in perfect goodness a blessed ground of confidence in Himself; but, I add here, so graciously and perfectly suited to the state and need of man'.

⁸⁵ Gen. 2. 16.

⁸⁶ Mark 1. 13. Jackals, wolves and even bears were to be found in the Wilderness of Judea. Both Adam and Jesus were tempted while living at peace with the animals – but the animals were very different! In a sense, our Lord turned the wilderness back into a paradise – living peacefully with the animals, a condition found only at creation (Gen 1. 28; 2. 19–20) and expected in the millennium (Isa. 11. 6–9; 65. 17–25; Hosea 2. 18).

⁸⁷ Gen. 3. 24.

⁸⁸ Matt. 4. 11. And I note that the angels do not put in an appearance until Satan has first left.

⁸⁹ 1 Kings 19. 5-8.

⁹⁰ See Exod. 24. 18; 34. 28; Deut. 9. 11; 1 Kings 19. 8; Matt. 4. 2.

⁹¹ See Deut. 9. 18, 25; 10. 10.

⁹² 'Moses failed *after* his forty days' fast, when in indignation he cast the Tables of the Law from him; Elijah failed *before* his forty days' fast; Jesus was assailed for forty days and endured the trial', A. Edersheim, '*The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*', Book III, chapter I, page 294.

⁹³ Matt. 3. 15.

⁹⁴ As noted previously, the apostle Peter summarised our Lord's public ministry in the words, He 'went about doing good, and *healing all that were oppressed of the devil*; for God was with Him', Acts 10. 38. Note that 'healing all that were oppressed of the devil'. And I note that our Lord's second specifically recorded miracle of healing was the cure of a man possessed by an unclean spirit, Mark 1. 23-26. (For the first, see John 4. 46-54. Neither John 2. 1-12 nor Luke 5. 4-11 were healing miracles. See also Ulrich Mauser, '*Christ in the Wilderness*', page 130.)

And I suggest that the key to His casting out demons is to be found here in the Wilderness Temptations. My reason for suggesting this lies in the comments which our Lord made concerning 'overcoming', Luke 11. 22, and 'binding', Matt. 12. 29, the one He described as 'the strong man'. Our Lord's words can be found in Matthew 12, Mark 3 and Luke 11.

In his account, Matthew paints the background for us, recording that 'one was brought to Him who was demon-possessed, blind and mute; and He (the Lord Jesus) healed him, so that the blind and mute man both spoke and saw ...when the Pharisees heard it they said, This man does not cast out demons except by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons. But Jesus knew their thoughts, and said to them: Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself will not stand. And if Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand? ... But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. [The true explanation for the casting out of demons lay, not in collusion with the Overlord of evil, but in the invasion by a superior power. The Saviour was not in league with the devil; he was at war with him!] Or (that is, 'or to look at it another way') how can one enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house', Matt. 12. 22-29 (cf. Compare Mark 3. 22-27; Luke 11. 14-22).

Clearly, when speaking of the one who overcame and bound the strong man, and took spoil from his house, Jesus was referring metaphorically to Himself and to Satan respectively. And, as I understand it, He was saying that it was, as having first bound the 'strong man' in the wilderness, that He then proceeded to rob his house – expelling the devil's agents and minions with His word – for which, no doubt, such as Legion and Mary Magdalene were *very grateful*.

⁹⁵ There are no randomly fired 'darts' or arrows with the devil! Contrast 1 Kings 22. 34. And his quiver is always full.

⁹⁶ Heb. 4. 15. 'But was in all points tempted (tried, afflicted) like as we are'. In the context, with an eye to the circumstances of the readers of the letter, the writer no doubt had in mind particularly that the Lord Jesus faced the most powerful forces and influences aimed at drawing Him aside from His work and mission – from doing the will of God. It goes without saying that the Lord Jesus did not experience in detail every possible external temptation which men and women face – which temptations vary, of course, according to whether a person is married or single, is powerful or weak, is wealthy or poor, and so on. But He *did* experience the whole range of temptations and trials which pressure His people to deviate from the will of God – which pressure them to give in and to throw in the towel as Christians.