

Luke 4:9-12

Sermon: **Jesus' third temptation**

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INTRODUCTION

1. We are still in the account of Jesus' temptations. According to the chronological order given by Luke, we now arrive at the third temptation. As I mentioned earlier in this sermon – Jesus was the only witness to these temptations, which means that he personally retold these events to his disciples. When we read about Jesus' temptations, we notice that the Gospel writers present these events in a simple and straightforward way. We do not see a detailed account of the psychological and emotional struggle Jesus faced in these temptations. Why is that? I would offer this proposal: the Gospel writers wanted each reader to dig deeply into the text, in order to understand – why is it with these very words that Jesus rejects the temptations? Why does he use passages from Deuteronomy? What did Jesus understand Moses to be telling Israel? What "idea" lies behind Moses' sermon to his people?

1.1. To understand Jesus' temptations, we need to try to place ourselves in his mind: *"I am the promised Messiah, the Father has told me that I am his Beloved Son."* We need to try to step into his current situation – where he was possibly on the brink of death from starvation – and connect that with the cunningly wise, outwardly pious but inwardly false temptations of Satan. Only then do we gain a model – a psychological and emotional approach – of our Lord Jesus Christ: how to deal with temptations when they come our way. The writers of this event want us, the readers – those who hunger and thirst for truth – to study this account passionately and patiently, without giving up. Why? Because this is one of the most important events in Jesus' life, which also makes it one of the most important for all who call themselves God's children. Understanding these events (Jesus' temptations) is of crucial importance for our existence. This understanding brings us light and wisdom – for how to deal with the life that has been given to us. This model gives answers to the hardest questions ever raised in human history: Why suffering? Why evil? Who are we? Why are we here? Who is the God of the Bible? What is his plan for this reality? And so on.

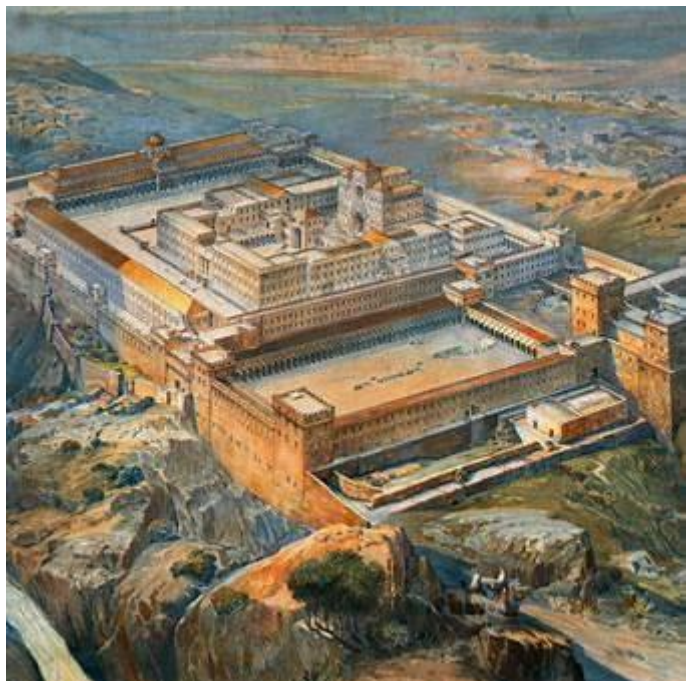
THE KIDRON VALLEY

Now we turn to the third temptation of Jesus. (Luke 4:9): “Then he took 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...’”

2.1. Who is the one who took Jesus to Jerusalem? From the text, we see that it is Satan. The question that arises is: how did Satan take Jesus to Jerusalem? Why would Jesus follow Satan? Let’s imagine the scene: Satan approaches Jesus and says: “*I am Satan, the greatest enemy of the God you serve, come with me to Jerusalem!*” What kind of power does Satan actually possess? Can he plant ideas or desires into our hearts? I don’t know the full answer to that question. I am inclined to believe that he cannot. But perhaps Satan has greater authority than I am willing to admit. If I must give my view, I would say he can plant seeds: of doubt, envy, jealousy, hatred... but it is we who decide whether we will act on those seeds or not. However it happened – Satan led him to Jerusalem.

2.2. “Set him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to him.” Instead of the word pinnacle, a better translation would be the wing of the temple. Let’s try to visualize the stage where this scene took place.

We know that Jerusalem was built on Mount Zion, the very same mountain where Moses received God’s commandments. The city itself is surrounded by valleys, and one of these valleys is the Kidron Valley. It is located on the southeastern side of Mount Zion. The temple was built along the edge of the eastern slope of Mount Zion. The southeastern wall of the temple (the wing) looked directly down into the abyss of the Kidron Valley. The drop was approximately 200–250 meters deep.



2.3. Next – was this a public event? When Jesus stood on the wing of the temple, were people present to witness it? I don’t think so. All who were passing along the paths of the Kidron Valley were travelers making their way to the opposite side of Mount Zion, where the city gates into Jerusalem were located. That is why I don’t believe this was a public event. This was a private encounter between Jesus, Satan, and God the Father.

JUMP

3. (Luke 4:10–11) “If you are truly the Son of God, throw yourself down from here; for it is written: He will command his angels concerning you to guard you; and: They will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.”

3.1. “If you are truly the Son of God, throw yourself down from here.”

I’ve spoken about this before, but let me repeat. I believe that Satan does not doubt the fact that Jesus is the Son of God. He is not saying: *“If you really are the Son of God — I don’t actually believe it, but prove it to me and I’ll believe you!”* No, that’s not Satan’s strategy. His earlier tactic was to use that very truth for his own evil purpose. How? *“Jesus, of all people in this world, at least you deserve better treatment from your Father. You, who are surely the Son of God — I don’t doubt that — should be taken care of by Him. If your God won’t feed you, then who will?”* The main satanic strategy here was to push Jesus to doubt the goodness of God.

3.2. In this temptation, Satan shifts his approach: *“If you are truly the Son of God, throw yourself down from here.”* He seeks to persuade Jesus to jump. To understand why and how Satan frames this temptation, we must return to Psalm 91, which he quotes in the text. After reading Psalm 91, the question arises: who is the subject of this psalm? Who is David writing about? I believe there are two possible readings:

1. The author is King David; we know David was anointed as king, and in Jewish tradition he carries messianic symbolism. If we read it this way, Satan’s implication toward Jesus makes sense: *“Look, Jesus, even King David (who in tradition carries a messianic role) wrote in the Psalm: if you are the Son of God, He will protect you from every danger.”* That’s one way of seeing it.
2. The other possibility is that the psalm refers to every individual who “dwells in the shelter of the Most High¹.” Who dwells in that shelter? Every child of God, every chosen one. Personally, I think this second reading is the primary sense, and it is the one we’ll use when interpreting the “idea” of this psalm.

3.2. So Psalm 91 can be read in two main ways:

- a) If we understand and “believe” in God the way many do — expecting that obedience and righteous living will make us immune to every hardship — then the psalm promises we need not fear any evil: if we remain in perfect communion with God, nothing bad will touch us. Many believers and commentators read Psalm 91 this way; and I think Satan is often ready to exploit that kind of reading in his temptation.
- b) The second, and to me more faithful reading: Psalm 91 teaches that nothing in this reality can override or cancel out the sovereign reign of the Most High. To dwell in His shelter means that God holds everything in His hands and that His works and promises stand regardless of present suffering. This does not mean that we will never experience hardship. On the

¹ Psalm 91:1

contrary: the psalm encourages us that when we fall into trouble, we must not think that God has lost control or that the enemy has won. God is the Alpha and Omega; He reigns over all. Our safety is not in the avoidance of pain but in the trust that God knows, God leads, and that everything that happens in His hands has a purpose aimed at the fulfillment of His plan.

3.3. In other words: the psalm encourages us that, while we long for God's protection and guidance, we should not read it as a guarantee of a painless life. It is a call to trust in the God who orders reality, knows the end of the story, and comforts us in the middle of the storm.

3.4. But if we believe that God is evil — simply because we are enduring suffering — then even this richer interpretation of the psalm makes no sense to us. And Satan counts on that insecurity: he wants to push a person, faced with hardship, to doubt God and so accept his "offer" which promises a quick escape and false safety.

GOD'S PROTECTION

4. I mentioned earlier that Satan interprets this Psalm literally, namely: if you are God's chosen one, then you have the right to expect His protection from every trouble. You have the right to believe, on the basis of Psalm 91, that God will take care of you in every way. And precisely because of this, Satan says to Jesus: *"We clearly see in Psalm 91 what God promises His chosen ones. Show the strong faith you have in your Father. Jump! He wants to see if you truly trust Him all the way, if you believe His promise that He will protect you, that your feet will not strike the rocks at the base of the Kidron Valley. He will surely protect you and carry you on the wings of angels before you fall on the stones. That is what He promises you in Psalm 91. Do this, and your Father will be proud of you, because He will see how strong and great your faith is toward Him."*

4.1. Incredibly cunning, and perfectly presented temptation from Satan. Jesus, while standing on the southeastern wing of the Temple, was literally looking down at the foot of the Kidron Valley, mostly covered with rocks. Satan exploits that very situation, pulling a "verse" from Scripture that fits perfectly with the setting in which Jesus stood.

4.2. **(Luke 4:12)** *"Jesus answered him: 'It is said: Do not put the Lord your God to the test!'"*

4.3. "Jesus answered him." As I said in previous sermons, this is not a debate between Jesus and Satan. Jesus is primarily speaking to Himself. He preaches to Himself, reminding Himself of the true reality and wisdom of God. Through Scripture He searches for light on how to deal with the temptation before Him. When He concludes what must be done, Jesus realizes how wrong it would be to listen to Satan. He sees that it would actually be an act of unbelief on His part. Finally, Jesus quotes from Deuteronomy: *"It is said: Do not test the Lord your God²!"*

4.4. Let us read the text from Deuteronomy 6:1–19. We know from previous sermons that here Moses is giving his final sermon to the people before they enter the promised land the Lord is giving them. Before they enter, Moses reminds them not to do what they did in Exodus 17:1–7, where they

² Deuteronomy 6:16

tested the Lord their God. We see that in Deuteronomy 6:16 he reminds them of this: *"Do not test the Lord your God as you did at Massah."*

4.5. To understand what Moses is speaking about here, we must go to Exodus 17:1–7 and read what happened. We see that the Israelites set out, at the Lord's command, from the wilderness of Sin. What had happened in their lives up to that point? In short: the Lord, through wonders and plagues poured out on Egypt, had delivered them from the hands of their enemies. During the Passover, the Jews had to smear the blood of a lamb on the doorframes of their houses. Why? Because the Lord had decided to strike down every firstborn in Egyptian families. When death passed by and came to a house marked with blood, it did not enter.

4.6. Why did the Lord do this? After many chances and warnings which Pharaoh rejected, hardening his heart and denying the Lord's power, he refused to let the people go with their God. Therefore, the Lord struck down every firstborn in Egypt, including Pharaoh's son. After that, the Egyptians, in panic, gave the Israelites their treasures and begged them to leave.

4.7. But once the Israelites had left, Pharaoh changed his mind and, in fury, decided to pursue them with his entire army — one of the strongest in that age. The Israelites, trapped against the Red Sea, had nowhere to escape. At that moment, the Lord miraculously divided the sea and provided them a path of salvation. When they crossed, and the Egyptians went after them, the Lord closed the sea and drowned the entire army.

4.8. The conclusion? There should have been no doubt — at least not in the hearts of the Israelites — that the Lord was for them. They had witnessed miracles with their own eyes, wonders that the Lord had done just to show His faithfulness and His resolve to fulfill the promises He had made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

4.9. Most of us today have never seen a supernatural miracle. But the Israelites of that time could not say the same — they had seen them and had personally participated in them.

THEY TESTED THE LORD

5. Yet in Exodus 17:1–7 we see that the people began to quarrel with Moses; the text even says they wanted to stone him in anger. Moses said to them: *"Why do you put the Lord to the test?"* What did Moses see at that moment? Why did he say they were testing God? I believe he saw unbelief in their hearts. Even though they had witnessed miracles, they still doubted God's goodness and care. So quickly and easily they distrusted Him.

5.1. Moses recognized it: their problem was the heart. A hard heart, for which no amount of evidence is ever enough. The problem was not a lack of evidence — they had plenty — but a heart that rebelled and refused to believe: *"I choose not to believe; I do not want to believe!"*

5.2. If they had had soft and faithful hearts, this event would have looked different. They would have said: *"Is God not for us? Of course He is! Look at all He has already done. Therefore, we can trust that He will also give us water."* But no, their attitude was: *"You, Moses, and your God, you brought us here to die! That was your plan all along!"* They believed that God was evil.

5.4. Despite their hardness, God gave them water. Once again He “passed the test” they set for Him. A test in which they demanded: *“Show us that you are for us and not against us. Show us that you are a good God; give us water.”* But they did it out of unbelief. Their hearts, despite all the miracles, still believed that God was evil. That is why Moses reminds them in Deuteronomy 6:16: *“Do not test the Lord your God as you did at Massah.”*

5.5. Why does he say this? Because now they are about to enter the promised land. And Moses warns them: *“You are going into the land the Lord is giving you, a land from which He will drive out the Canaanites. A land filled with vineyards, olive groves, springs of water, houses you did not build. A land flowing with milk and honey. Never forget that the Lord has given you all this. Never think that some other god did it. Never in your hearts believe that the Canaanites and their gods gave you these blessings. Only the Lord is your Benefactor.”*

MESSAGE FOR US

6. In today's language, Moses would say to us:

“Do not forget that every blessing you have received comes from God. Do not, after some time, say: ‘I achieved this. All the blessings I have are the result of my own effort.’”

6.1. The Jews of that time would not have said it in quite that way. They were much more religious than we are today, living in a completely different worldview. But the application is the same. Just like us, they forgot that every blessing they had received came from God. They said it came from other gods, while we, in our modern worldview, say it comes from ourselves — from our abilities, efforts, or intelligence.

6.2. Sadly, as we study the Bible, we clearly see that this is exactly what the Israelites did. When they entered the promised land, after some time they began to worship other gods. They forgot the Lord their God.

6.3. The question arises: did their history negate the fact that the Lord had done all this for them? No! Their history was full of evidence that it was the Lord who had delivered them, given them the land, the blessing, and life. And yet they still forgot Him.

6.4. Moses' final sermon to his people — though so strong, clearly spoken, and grounded in history — had no effect. Why? Because their hearts were hardened toward the Lord.

A SOFT HEART

7. Everything I have said above is connected to Jesus' third temptation. Satan says to Jesus: *“Jesus, without a doubt you have shown yourself, your God, and me that you are a righteous and faithful Son of God. You rejected my suggestion to turn stone into bread, you rejected my offer to hand you all the kingdoms of the world. You are truly a unique man; your faith in God is unshakable — there is no doubt about that. And you yourself said that man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord. Jesus, wouldn't it be wonderful if you now proved how deeply you trust your God? God's Word in (Psalm 91:11–12) says: ‘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.' Your Father, in whom you trust, has given this promise — hasn't He? That is what it says. And you have already shown that you believe every word that comes from your Father's mouth. Therefore, I suggest you now show, in action, how strongly you believe your Father. It would be a dramatic and powerful display of your faith. He wants to see whether you truly trust Him completely. Jump, Jesus, and you will see: the angels will not allow you to strike the rocks of the Kidron Valley. If you do this, your Father will be proud of you — your leap of faith will show Him that you fully believe the promises He gave to King David in (Psalm 91)."

7.1. Thank God, Jesus recognized the cunning trap Satan was setting for Him. He understood how such an act would actually be evil — an act of unbelief, not of faith. Jesus thinks: *"Just a few days ago, my Father personally said to me: 'You are my beloved Son.' I know who my God is and what He asks of me. I know He is good. I do not need to jump to make my Father prove His goodness. I do not want to be like my people Israel, who, though overwhelmed with proof of God's goodness, still time and again tested Him."*

7.2. From the beginning, Satan has wanted to portray God as not good. By suggesting Jesus jump, and claiming that this would prove His faith, Satan was really pushing Him to doubt the Father's goodness. If Jesus had thought: *"Yes, Psalm 91 really does say this, Satan is right — I must jump to prove my faith,"* behind such a thought would actually be doubt: *"I don't trust my God; I want Him to prove He is good."* Jumping would mean demanding proof from the Father, testing Him — just as Israel often did in their unbelief.

7.3. Jesus sees the trap: if He believed that lie even for a moment, it would mean He did not trust the goodness of His Father. He knows that His Father personally testified to Him: *"You are my Son, my Beloved."* For Him to jump after all that would mean He was no different than His hard-hearted people who constantly tested the Lord.

7.4. What was Satan's true goal in this scheme? I believe Satan wanted to kill Jesus. If he could not portray Him as unrighteous, he would try to persuade Him to commit suicide. Just as Jesus' first temptation (turning stone into bread) was impossible without the will of the Father and the Holy Spirit, so too, I believe, if Jesus had jumped, He would not have seen angelic rescue. The Father would not have sent angels to lift Him from the stones — most likely Jesus would have fallen on the rocks of the Kidron Valley and died. Satan was counting on this: if he could not discredit Jesus, he would attempt to remove Him physically from history.

THE GREATEST MIRACLE

8. Satan's proposal to Jesus is deeply attractive — and it is just as tempting to us. I am certain that all of us have, many times, been tempted in the same way — whether by our own sinful nature or by Satan himself. Many times in my life I have failed this same test, so similar to the temptation of my Lord here. For the last eight years I have carried an illness, and often I have done certain things — believing that God wanted me to do them, and that in return He would heal me, that He would reward me with healing. And every time, through such attempts, I placed myself in serious, life-threatening situations. Unlike Jesus, I did jump from the Temple's pinnacle. Believing that my healing was what mattered most to God, I was in fact doubting His goodness. I believed God could only be a good God if He healed me. Today, from this perspective, I know that God has shown me in countless

ways that He is good, even though He has not healed me. But to realize that, I had to change my worldview. I had to stop pitying myself.

8.1. I watched a documentary about a well-known American preacher who, in his thirties, was struck with an incurable disease — some form of paralysis. Because of this condition, he began attending events hosted by so-called healers — “God’s messengers” — who supposedly healed many people through God’s grace. After some time, he realized how carefully staged, cunningly organized, and deceptive the whole system was, proclaiming lies as truth. He saw that their main motive was not to help people but to gain fame and wealth. So he decided to expose them publicly as frauds who did everything for selfish goals. How did they operate? They preyed on human weakness, convincing people of the impossible, and when nothing happened, they told them they didn’t have enough faith.

8.2. That same preacher shared a story that shook both him and me. It was about a mother who had a seriously ill child. The child needed weekly hospital treatments just to survive. At one of these events, in front of thousands of people, one of these false “messengers of God” called the mother and child up onto the stage. He asked her in front of everyone: *“Do you have faith in God that He will heal your child?”* She answered yes. At that moment, with loud, emotional music and thousands of people clapping and shouting praise, the false teacher declared that the child was healed. The mother, overwhelmed and convinced, wept with joy and praised God. Afterward, believing her child had been healed, she stopped taking him to the hospital for treatment. A few weeks later, the child ended up in the hospital on the verge of death. In desperation, the mother contacted one of the “healers” and told him what had happened. His reply? *“Your faith wasn’t strong enough.”* In other words: you didn’t believe God in the way you should have. Horrifying. I cannot imagine how that mother felt at that moment. But the deeper truth is this: the mother chose to “jump from the Temple” — and by doing so, she endangered the life of her own child.

8.3. In the end, Satan will always use the circumstances we are in — our suffering and pain — to try to destroy our faith that God is good. Jesus, who was on the brink of death from starvation, still believed that God was a good God. He did not demand that God constantly prove His goodness. He knew who God was, and that nothing could break the promises of His Father. And that was enough for Him. - Jesus leaned on the promise that pointed to the future, not on the circumstance He was going through at that moment. - He understood that the suffering of this life was nothing compared to the glory awaiting Him with the Father. And we, like our Lord, must not in moments of suffering give in to the cunning, perfectly crafted temptations that Satan serves us.

8.4. I want to underline something very important in closing: to believe that God is good, and not evil — especially in the moments when life is hardest — is in itself a miracle. I personally believe this is a greater miracle than any of the public miracles God performed in human history: the plagues in Egypt, the parting of the Red Sea, manna falling daily from heaven, the mute speaking, the blind seeing, water turned into wine, five thousand fed by Jesus... All of these are supernatural and astonishing works of God in history. But left to ourselves, without God’s grace, when facing suffering and hardship, we would surely curse and hate God, believing He is evil. Yet if, despite everything, we believe that God is good — this can mean only one thing: God has chosen us, and His grace is leading us to salvation. That is why I believe this miracle surpasses all others. Of course, this is my personal view. I wonder: would Jesus and the apostles agree with me? Perhaps they would.