



OVERCOMING THE OPPONENT

1. Last time we talked about Jesus' baptism and genealogy. Today we turn to His temptations. The first thing I want to emphasize is this: in this event between Jesus and Satan, there was no third witness. Apart from Satan, the only witness was Jesus Himself. That means He must have later, during His ministry, retold this event to His disciples.

1.1. In the Gospel of Matthew the order of the temptations is not the same as in the Gospel of Luke. Why? I believe the order is not what's crucial. I assume that even the Gospel writers themselves had a similar view: what matters is to find the main thought the text carries and apply that thought to one's own life. The essence is to understand what the author wants to communicate through this event.

1.2. Luke tells us that Jesus was led by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness for forty days, where He was tempted by Satan. Let's pause on that word "tempted." The meaning includes: to test, to try, to examine, to evaluate. But at its core, it means: to put someone or something to the test.

2.1. Why do we test someone or something? There are two main reasons:

1. We want to investigate, evaluate, and gather data to confirm or disprove our expectations, or
2. We do it because we want to achieve our own goals – to overcome the opponent.

Example: on the battlefield, two generals wage war. One sends a small unit into enemy lines to probe their defenses and find the weakest point. He is testing the opponent because he wants to overcome him.

1.3. In this event with Jesus, it's exactly that second example. Satan tempts Jesus to see where His weakest points are – what His deepest desires, passions, and loyalties are. He tests Him to find a crack in His devotion to the Father. He wants to bring Him down, to break His faith and love for God.

THE WHISPERER OF EVIL THOUGHTS

2. The Bible describes Satan as the one who destroys everything God cherishes. He is “the father of lies,” “the enemy,” “the deceiver,” “the accuser,” “the murderer.” In Hebrew his name is satan – adversary, and in Greek diabolos – slanderer. Some teachers call him “the whisperer of evil thoughts.”

2.1. But the question arises: is Satan really a being, or just a way for biblical writers to personify human moral corruption? It's hard to answer. This text suggests that he is a real being. It would be difficult to interpret it merely as Jesus' inner struggle with doubt and selfish thoughts. To me, it seems Jesus literally has an encounter with Satan here. Luke even writes that Satan “departed from Him until an opportune time” – and that occasion was likely the crucifixion.

2.2. The intent of the New Testament writers was clear: Satan is real. How did he appear before Jesus? Perhaps in human form, similar to how angels appeared in the Old Testament. Let's recall Zechariah in the Holy of Holies – he too had a visible encounter with an angel. Perhaps Satan appears in this reality in the same way¹.

2.3. I must admit, it is strange to me – the fact that God allowed such a being to exist. Not only did He create humans who are weak and prone to evil, but also a being that directly opposes everything that is God's. Why? I don't know. I cannot fully understand it. But I do know one thing: the Bible teaches us that God works all things together for good. He is good. And I personally find encouragement in that truth.

2.4. As the Author of reality, God writes the story. And every story has drama. Satan, as the “villain,” gives the story depth – because only through his wickedness does God's grace shine all the brighter. It's strange that God chose to tell the story of reality this way. But the biblical writers didn't hide it. They knew – this is simply how it is. To summarize:

- Satan is the “villain” in God's story, but he is not outside God's control².
- His wickedness serves to make God's faithfulness, justice, and mercy shine even brighter³.
- The biblical writers didn't hide this tension – they portray it as part of God's plan in history⁴.

2.5. What is Satan actually trying to achieve? There are two possibilities:

¹Matthew 4:1–11; Luke 4:1–13; Genesis 18:1–3; Genesis 19:1–3; Luke 1:11–12

²Job 1:6–12; 2:1–6

³Zechariah 3:1–2; Romans 5:20–21

⁴Revelation 12:9–11

a) He wants to build his own alternative reality. He believes he can accomplish this through Jesus. If Jesus falls, God's promises collapse. And then his version of the world comes into play – completely different from God's design.

b) Or perhaps Satan has no "better plan." Maybe he is simply driven by blind hatred: *"I want to see God lose! I want to destroy everything precious to Him!"* Maybe his goal is not to rule, but simply to destroy.

2.6. I believe both options describe his nature. He is a super-intelligent being systematically constructing his alternative to God's reality, but with the ultimate goal of total destruction. His hatred blinds him so much that he would rather annihilate everything than see God win.

- His main desire is not to rule – his main desire is for God to lose. -

2.7. When I've read biographies of psychopaths and criminals throughout history who committed perverse and evil deeds, I was often struck by their intelligence, cunning, and ability to manipulate people. The evil they did was wrapped in a guise of righteousness, presenting it to the world as something good. At times, as an observer, I was almost seduced by their devious deception. Similarly, in the Sherlock Holmes stories, Holmes himself admits that he admires the intelligence of his greatest opponent – Professor James Moriarty, whom he calls the "Napoleon of crime." Although Holmes admired his mind, he knew he had to catch him, because his deeds sprang from a corrupt and evil heart. Is Satan like that, only far more intelligent? I believe he is. He presents temptation in a devious, cunning way, packaged in a form that looks justified and righteous. And while we fall into that temptation, we will be convinced we are doing what is right before God. That's how intelligent Satan is!

2.8. How much does Satan actually know about God's promises? I don't know. What we do know is that God promised to establish His kingdom through His Son, Jesus Christ. I believe Satan at least knows that much – and we see it through the temptations he presents. Does he understand the prophets of the Old Testament as deeply as Jesus and the apostles? Hard to say. But if his main purpose is to destroy, then he doesn't need perfect theological knowledge for that.

THIS IS NOT ABOUT THE DIVINITY OF JESUS

3. I used to see this event only as a clash between God-Jesus and Satan, where of course Jesus wins because He is God. But more and more I believe the emphasis here is not on Jesus' divinity, but on His humanity. Satan is not attacking His divine nature, but His human heart – His values, His commitments, His righteousness. And it is precisely as a man that Jesus remains faithful to the Father.

3.1. This leads us to a theological question many Bible teachers raise: Could Jesus have sinned? Was it possible for Him to fall into temptation? If not, then what is the purpose of this event? My answer is both "yes" and "no" – depending on the perspective we take.

3.1.2. From God's perspective – God the Father, the Author of reality, the One who had already predestined that Jesus would be His visible image, the Messiah, the King who would establish His Kingdom – the answer is: no, Jesus could not sin.

3.2. But from the perspective of Jesus' humanity, the temptations make complete sense. As a man, Jesus took on full human nature. Like any human, He could have willed to disobey the Father, to "be His own," to walk the path of selfishness. Therefore, from this angle, the answer is: yes, He could have sinned.

3.3. Because if it were metaphysically impossible for Jesus to sin, then this would not have been a real temptation. And that is the whole point of this event: temptation. The Gospel writers want us to understand that one of us – a true human being – went through temptation and remained faithful to the Father. Jesus is showing us a model of how we should respond to temptation.

3.4. Before diving into the analysis of each specific temptation, I want to say this: the more I study this passage, the more I realize that it is one of the most important texts in Scripture for our understanding. This is a profound encounter: Satan approaches with extraordinary intelligence, while Jesus responds with divine wisdom.

3.5. I know I will never fully penetrate the depth of this event. But I will do my best to present what I see – with the intention that together we might grow in the wisdom God wants us to receive through His Word.