

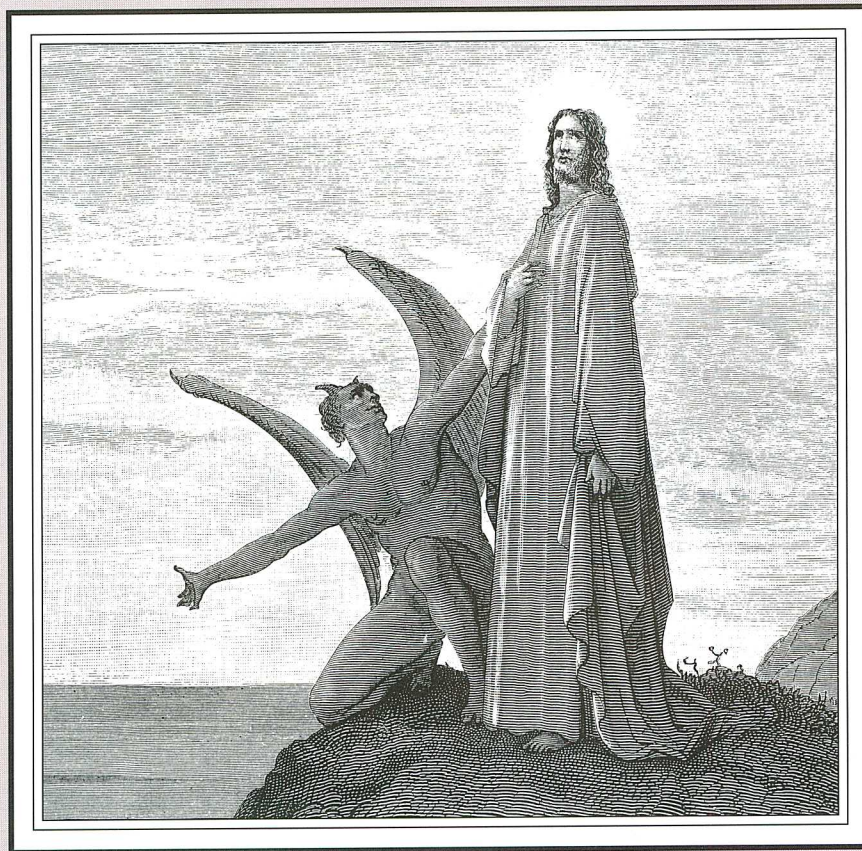
# God with Us

## Christ in all the Gospels

### THE CRISES OF CHRIST: HIS TEMPTATION

by Desmond Ford

*The temptation of Christ teaches us that  
Christ's total victory over the devil is ours by faith.  
Christ's victory is also what empowers us in our own struggles.*



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ow we are going to look at the temptation of Christ.

(We will also be keeping our eyes open for, 1) Lessons on the nature of sin, 2) Lessons on the nature of Christ, and 3) Lessons on the nature of atonement.)

The Holy Spirit led Jesus into the desert, so that the devil could test him. After Jesus went without eating for forty days and nights, he

was very hungry. Then the devil came to him and said, "If you are God's Son, tell these stones to turn to bread."

Jesus answered, "The Scriptures say: 'No one can live only on food. People need every word that God has spoken.'"

Next, the devil took Jesus to the holy city and had him stand on the highest part of the temple. The devil said, "If you are God's Son, jump off. The

Scriptures say:

'God will give his angels orders about you.

They will catch you in their arms, and you will not hurt your feet on the stones.'"

Jesus answered, "The Scriptures also say, 'Don't try to test the Lord your God!'"

Finally, the devil took Jesus up



# *In Other Words*

by *A. H. Tick*

## *Ether?*

In the 1880s, high in the mountains above Los Angeles, scientists conducted an experiment. They were attempting to prove the widely held theory of their day regarding how light propagates through space. Needless to say, the famous Michelson-Morley experiment failed.

Yet, because the "ether theory" was so widely held as fact, it took decades for scientists to accept the conclusion being forced upon them: Light does not propagate through an ether.

In the 1980s, high in the mountains above Denver, scholars conducted another experiment. This time they were hoping to prove how light propagates through the Book of Daniel. Needless to say, the Glacier View experi-

ment also failed. And we have been just as slow to face the conclusions being forced upon us. Fourteen years, seven official volumes, and more than 2,300 pages later, our "proof" is as ethereal as ever.

## *In other words ...*

Fundamental changes in our understanding of truth never come easy. Especially in matters of religion. It took over 500 years before the Catholic church officially accepted the Copernican model of a sun-centered solar system. It still hasn't accepted Luther's model of a Son-centered gospel.

I wonder how long it will take before the Adventist church will accept a Son-centered model of the judgment, instead of its man-centered one?

*Harry*

on a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms on earth and their power. The devil said to him, "I will give all this to you, if you will bow down and worship me."

Jesus answered, "Go away Satan!

The Scriptures say:

'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.'"

Then the devil left Jesus, and angels came to help him." (Matthew 4:1-11 CEV)

You remember Oscar Wilde said, "I can resist everything except temptation." We have to do better than Oscar.

God had one Son without sin, but he hasn't even had one son or daughter without temptation.

## **Temptation Not Sin**

It's very important to know the difference between temptation and sin. There are times when all genuine Christians feel terrible, soiled, besmirched, guilty, because they have fought a battle with sin. Even though they said, "No!" they feel bad about being tempted.

Friends, there is no condemnation in being tempted. There is only condemnation in saying, "Yes!"

You may be tempted to lose your temper, to do something drastic, do something impure. That's temptation, not sin.

Temptation is our daily companion. To a sensitive, alive, alert person, temptation is a constant associate. With most of us it's not the temptation to do something drastic. (We're too selfish. We don't want to go to prison.) Our temptations are much more minor. Our temptations are things we can get away with.

That's temptation. To do things we can get away with, that others will not know about. To do things we can get away with, that no one will seek revenge for.

Most of us don't have what it takes to be murderers or big-time thieves. We can only get away with the little murders, the small unkindnesses.

The younger of two brothers was famous, largely because of the older one. The younger brother never appreciated that fact. Finally, the older brother said, "I'm retiring."

The famous younger brother was angry. "Didn't you have a good time when you were with me? Didn't I pay you well? Why are you leaving?"

"You could have been more kind," an-

swered the older brother.

That's what every heart is craving. Every heart craves kindness. That's because we believe in the love of God, and we best learn about the love of God from the kindness of people.

The whole world aches for kindness. But you and I are so self-centered by nature that we are tempted repeatedly to be selfish and unkind when we can get away with it.

### **Temptation of Christ Unique**

Christ's temptation is not our temptation. The devil tempts Jesus about our Lord's mission. We are never tempted to turn stones into bread, to jump down from temple pinnacles, to receive the kingdoms of the world. We are not saviors of the world.

The First Adam was challenged by the devil. The Last Adam challenged the devil. (Jesus, you'll remember, was driven into the desert by the Holy Spirit.)

When the First Adam lost out, he involved the whole world in his ruin. When the Last Adam won, he involved the whole world in his victory. We don't have to surrender to temptation. By believing in Christ, we can be the victor over every conscious temptation that comes to us. As we exercise faith, the victory is already ours!

We are all made differently. Some things that tempt me may not tempt you. Some things that tempt you, may not tempt me. The devil knows our weaknesses. He wriggles into the crannies between the gaps in our armor. He knows we are weak. He'll get us!

It's wonderful to know Christ has defeated the devil. Looking to Christ we can be victors over every conscious temptation.

### **Conscious Temptation**

I emphasize **conscious**. I often find myself doing things wrong without even **thinking** about it. Many times I've said something casually, and someone, perhaps a member of the family, will say, "Hey, Des (or 'Hey, Dad'), why did you say that? Don't you know that person is ...." And they explain something about that person's circumstances. I've blown it again!

The work of justification is done in a second. Sanctification, however, is a lifetime process. It will never end in this life. We always must fight our sinful nature.

My sinful nature is just as alive and well now as when I became a Christian 50 years ago. It doesn't dominate my life now

as it did then, but it's still there.

If I release it, it will do the same sort of thing it did years ago. There is far more trouble from within than without.

Dwight Moody was correct. "I have far more trouble with myself than any other man I ever met." We like to blame other people, but it's usually ourselves that's the problem. We're more responsible for the wrong things that happen than anyone around us. We just use others as excuses.

Excuses are worse than lies. Excuses are just trying to get away with a lie. I can't count the number of excuses I've made.

### **Jesus Disadvantaged**

Our Lord replays Adam's temptation. Yet while Jesus involves the whole human race in his victory, he does not enter that test in the robust glow of perfect health.

I suspect that Adam had many times the physical vitality of our Lord Jesus. Jesus suffered from the results of humanity's separation from the Tree of Life. Jesus is not as tall, as wide, as big as Adam. Jesus took all the **effects** of sin without being **affected** by sin. He knew no sin. In him was no sin. The Scriptures call him "that holy thing" (Lk 1:35 KJV). That's not true of us.

We know sin. We've got sin. We are very spotty and very blemished.

The devil began his attack with Jesus' physical condition. Jesus fasted for 40 days to bring himself down, physically, where you and I start from.

Let's think about that a little more. Jesus fasts for 40 days to bring himself down to where you and I start. Christ obeyed natural law all his life. You and I haven't. I'm naturally intemperate. I have the personality of a hyperthyroid squirrel. We've all violated natural law. Christ never did. He had to fast to come down to our level.

Jesus came to earth with a deteriorated human nature but not a sinful human nature.

Think of milk. Whole milk from a cow, that's like Adam. Milk with poison in it, that's like you and me. Milk with water in it, that's like Jesus. Weakened by the deterioration of human nature, but without the poison of sin.

### **Weapons of Victory**

Though in the same weakened condition as you and me (though without sin) Jesus fights temptation using only weapons available to you and me. He does not use divine power to fight temptation.

He uses, "It is written," "It is written," "It is written." Three times he quotes, "It is written," from Deuteronomy. Jesus depends on the sword of the Spirit, the written word of God.

Jesus depends on faith in God. I love this verse, "Take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one" (Eph 6:16 NIV).

I sometimes think, "Well, I can beat this temptation, and that one." But one of them gets through, oftentimes. The Scriptures say, "**all** the fiery darts of the wicked" (KJV) are extinguished by faith and the sword of the Spirit.

The devil whispers to Jesus as he encounters him in the lonely desert, "Look, I hear there's an angel cast down from heaven. You look like that angel to me. You claim to be the Son of God? Don't look like it to me. You're so pale, anemic, rundown. You need B-12 shots."

The devil is trying to throw Jesus off-balance. He's suggesting, "You don't look like the Son of God to me. Prove you are by turning these stones into bread."

Will Christ trust God's providence? Yes. "Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?" (Jn 18:11 NIV).

### **Outside in or Inside out?**

The devil begins to tempt Jesus with the physical approach. The devil works from the outside in. It is God who works from the inside out.

God begins with the heart. "My child, give me your heart" (Prov 23:26 NRSV). "Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things" (Php 4:8 NIV).

The devil works from outside in. He approaches through the flesh, through the eyes. The temptation of Jesus in the wilderness is so much like a replay of the temptation in the Garden of Eden.

"When the woman [Eve] saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food" (Gen 3:6)—there's the first temptation, the physical. "And pleasing to the eye,"—the second temptation, the eyes, or the mental. "And also desirable for gaining wisdom"—the third, spiritual. "She took some and ate it."

John pinpoints everything that's in the world. "The lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life" (1 Jn 2:16 KJV). All temptations come from that.

When Scripture says, Jesus "has been

tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin” (Heb 4:15 NIV) it means he was tempted in all the major areas. Body, mind, and spirit.

Jesus was not tempted as a woman is tempted. He came as a male. Jesus was not tempted as an elderly man is tempted, for Jesus died as a young man. But Jesus was tempted as we are all tempted: body, mind, and spirit.

### Physical Temptation of West

The devil comes to the twentieth century West largely with physical temptations. Let me give an example:

At least 80 percent of disease in the West is triggered by the unwise use of appetite. (I say ‘triggered’ because much depends on your heredity. We all differ. Therefore, we can never judge people because they are sick. We don’t know the whole story. Only God knows.)

If people don’t smoke, they wipe out by 30 percent their chance of getting cancer. That’s significant. You wipe out a third of your chance of getting cancer simply by not smoking.

If you do not eat largely of animal fat, you wipe out more than a third. If you don’t drink alcohol, you wipe out another eight percent. The devil knew what he was doing when he started his temptations with the physical.

### Temptation and Trust

When the devil first tempts Christ, it is as tempting God. “If you are the Son of God,” the devil says. Jesus answers as a human. “Man does not live on bread alone.”

“All right,” says the devil, “if you are so intent on trusting God, show it. Throw yourself down from the temple pinnacle.”

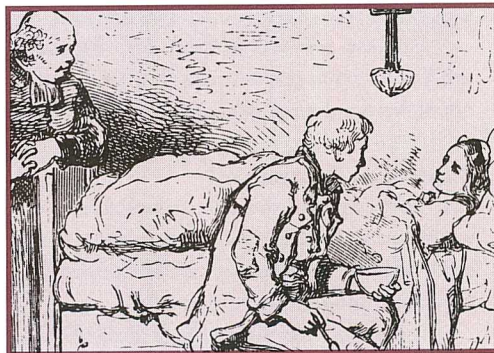
The devil tempts us in opposite ways, coming and going. He tempts us not to trust. If we do trust, he tempts us to presume.

Do you know that many Christians are tempted to commit suicide? An expert psychiatrist will tell you that just about everyone who reaches mid-life has been tempted to commit suicide at least once. If you’ve had the temptation don’t feel strange. People around you have probably been tempted the same way—perhaps, more often.

A young woman in Sydney said to me, “You mentioned something about suicide. You said, ‘Don’t assume that everyone who commits suicide is lost simply because we say suicide is a sin.’ My father committed

suicide.”

I replied, “I knew your father. He was my roommate at college. I know he was a good man. He loved Christ. If he committed suicide, it was because he was not in his rational mind at the time. Our dear Lord understands that better than any physician. Because of Christ, I expect to see your father in the kingdom.”



The young lady went away at peace. It was peace and happiness based on fact. That fact is, most people who commit suicide do so when not of sound mind.

God knows how to reckon that. God knows how to count.

There are many Christians in terrible body pain. They can’t think straight. Dear friends, as a rule, if your body isn’t functioning properly, neither is your mind. Remember that.

Conversely, if your mind is all eaten up with envy, greed, lust, and anger, your body won’t function properly.

Some Christians are so ambitious to make money, to have a bigger and better house, a better car, a bigger this and a bigger that, they commit suicide gradually by overwork.

Where we can make a decision, we must decide against anything suicidal. We must learn to care for our physical self, the temple of God (1 Cor 6:19). Because of Christ, your body is sacred. Don’t cast yourself down. Don’t let yourself get run-down in mind, body, or spirit. Don’t destroy yourself.

### Value of Christ

Look at the third temptation. “All this I will give you, if you bow down and worship me” (Mt 4:9 NIV).

Think of the value Satan must put on Christ to be able to bring that temptation. I don’t stop just anybody on a street corner and say, “Listen, if you call me Prince Des, or King Des, I’ll give you my house, my car,

my library.” (When I’ve given away my library, that’s like cutting my hand off.)

Would I say that to a stranger on a street corner? Of course not.

What makes the devil say to Jesus, “I’ll give you everything if you honor me?” Obviously, he sees Jesus’ true value. It was more important to the devil to get Jesus to sin than for the devil to think he owned the whole world!

We catch a glimpse of how great Christ is. Christ answers the devil, “Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only” (Mt 4:10).

We are all born idolaters. Every one of us. Whenever we give anything more value than it has in God’s estimate, we are idolaters. The law of God says we are to serve only God. We need not be idolatrous.

### Christ’s Victory Is Ours!

In conclusion, we’ve looked at something that reveals our own hearts, our own lives. That’s the temptation of Christ by the devil in the desert.

The good news is that when the devil was overcome by Christ, Christ did it for you and me. Christ’s victory is our victory!

When the devil comes to us, we don’t have to fight him in our own strength. We can laugh and say, “You’re a defeated foe!”

That proud spirit, the devil, does not like being laughed at. Try laughing at him. Don’t tremble. Laugh.

Say, “You’ve been defeated. Besides, you’re knocking at the door of a dead person. When Jesus died, I died. When I was baptized, I died. Don’t knock here. The old man moved out!”

The devil is a defeated foe. Idiot, really. He’s knocking at the door of someone not even alive.

The good news of the story of Christ’s temptation is that Christ won the victory—for us! By faith, that victory can be ours in every arena of temptation. ❁

Next time we continue our study on “The Crises of Christ.” We learn gospel lessons from the Transfiguration, Gethsemane, and Calvary. The articles will again be taken from Dr. Ford’s lectures at the May 1993 Bible School, “God with Us: Christ in all the Gospels.” Be sure to attend the fourth Bible school in Auburn, California, May 6-8, 1994. The topic is, “Christ’s Passion Week: The most fateful seven days in history.”