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## Jeff Cavins - Temptations of Christ by Jeff Cavins



Some people give in when confronted with temptation in their lives. Some just do the best they can. In this week's Gospel reading [the first Sunday in Lent] we have an inside look at how Jesus overcame temptation with God's word.

When Jesus came on the scene in Israel 2,000 years ago, the Romans were occupying the land and Israel was feeling the weight of that oppressive government. The Jews were expecting the Messiah to come at anytime to liberate them. After all, great kings of Israel's past had all demonstrated their leadership by confronting the enemy and bringing about a great victory. David defeated Goliath, Hezekiah kept the Assyrian army at bay, and Judas Maccabees led a revolt against the evil Seleucid dynasty. There was speculation that Jesus would lead a revolt against Rome and return Israel to her glory days.

But was Rome the root cause of Israel's situation? How many times do we find ourselves in trouble, only to blame our situation on the wrong root cause? The root cause of Israel's dilemma was that she was still in spiritual exile as a result of years of sin and refusing to serve the one true God. Yes, sin is our problem.

The first thing Jesus did in his public ministry was to confront the real enemy of Israel, the devil. In this week's Gospel reading Jesus was led out into the wilderness where after 40 days he would withstand three temptations. In order to understand why Jesus faced these three particular temptations we need to understand that Jesus' entire life was in essence a reliving of the history of Israel in the Old Testament.

After escaping the bondage of Egypt, the children of Israel, during their 40 years in the wilderness, failed at three major temptations. Their first failure was refusing to trust God for their daily bread. They grumbled and blamed Moses for bringing them out from the "comfort" of their bondage in Egypt (Exodus 16). Their second

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failing involved their lack of trust to provide water for them (Exodus 17), and lastly the children of Israel broke their faith in God with the worship of the golden calf (Exodus 32). The story of these events are recapped in the book of Deuteronomy, the very book that Jesus quotes to the devil during his temptation in the wilderness.

Jesus, after 40 days and nights of fasting, was tempted by the devil to trust in himself rather than in his father in heaven. Instead of falling, like the children of Israel had, Jesus would be triumphant, pre-enacting what he would do for the world on the cross: conquer sin and defeat the enemy.

Jesus' first temptation was in the area of life's necessities — food — the same area in which the children of Israel showed their lack of trust. The enemy tests Jesus' identity by saying, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." Jesus responded, "It is written, 'Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.'" Notice that the enemy focuses on Jesus' identity and relationship with God the Father by saying, "If you are the Son of God." Often our temptations will test our identity as sons and daughters of God. How often we think to ourselves, "If God really loved me, then I wouldn't be in this situation."

In the second temptation, the devil tries to trip up Jesus by getting him to tempt God by throwing himself off the pinnacle of the temple. Psalm 91 says, "He will give his angels charge of you, and on their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone." If Jesus would have jumped off of the temple, it would have been for the purpose of seeing if Psalm 91 were true. Jesus didn't have to jump to prove his trust in the Father; he demonstrated it by trusting in God's word. Jesus quotes Deuteronomy 6:16, "You shall not tempt the Lord your God."

How many times do we test the Lord by saying, "Lord if you do so and so for me then I'll know that you love me."

In the third temptation the devil pulls out all stops to get Jesus to worship him. This corresponds to when Israel worshipped the golden calf in Exodus 32. Once again Jesus answers from Deuteronomy 6:13-14: "It is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.'"

In the end, Jesus is triumphant over these three temptations and the devil flees. Contained in this week's Gospel reading is the secret to overcoming the various temptations we face. Knowing our identity as sons and daughters of God, we trust in him for all we need and rely on his word as assurance.

#### ACTIVITIES

- Think about the areas of your life in which you experience temptation and commit those areas to Christ.

• Combat the vices in your life by praying for and developing virtue. The list below will help you as a guide.

	VICE	VIRTUE
1.	Pride	Humility
2.	Avarice	Generosity
3.	Envy	Charity
4.	Wrath	Meekness
5.	Lust	Chastity
6.	Gluttony	Temperance
7.	Sloth	Diligence

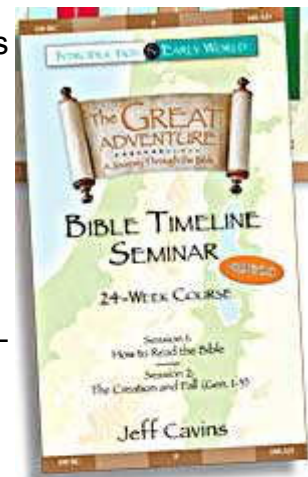
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