

Temptations of Jesus--Jumping Off the Temple

By Kent Crockett www.makinglifecount.net

Matt. 4:1-7 Matthew and Luke both record the temptations, but they list them in a different order. Both gospels record the first temptation as the appeal to turn stones into bread, but Luke puts the temptation to jump off the temple as the third temptation instead of the second. This isn't a contradiction, but simply two different ways the authors wrote down the events. Events can be recorded either chronologically or non-chronologically.

[Matthew lists them chronologically, while Luke simply records the events as facts in a non-chronological way.](#) Matthew recorded the temptations in chronological order because he says, "then the devil took Him" (v.5) and "again the devil took Him" (v. 8), indicating a sequential order of the temptations. Luke, on the other hand, records the events as facts in a non-chronological way and doesn't use the word "then" as Matthew does.

Remember, out of the temptations that Satan could have chosen to attack Jesus, he hand-picked three because he thought they would deceive Jesus enough where He would sin. Temptation #1 was to not trust God for provision, but for Jesus to provide for Himself. In that temptation, the devil told Him, "Don't trust God."

Now he changes tactics. The 1st temptation was to not trust the Father (unbelief). But he goes to the other extreme now and says, "Yes, trust the Father. Jump off the temple and you can trust Him to protect you" (presumption).

Matt. 4:5-6 Then the devil took Him into the holy city; and he had Him stand on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God throw Yourself down; for it is written, 'He will give His angels charge concerning You'; and 'On their hands they will bear You up, lest You strike Your foot against a stone.'"

The devil took Jesus to the perfect place to tempt Him, which was the temple in Jerusalem. Did you know that Satan likes to lead people to certain places where they can be tempted? An alcoholic can be tempted much easier if he's inside a bar. A teenager can be tempted much easier if he or she is in the wrong place with the wrong people. When Adam and Eve went to look at the forbidden fruit, Satan was already there waiting for them. How did the devil know to be there? He knew that was the place where they could be tempted because that's where the forbidden fruit was. He knows the best places where we can be tempted as well.

It's like the guy who broke his arm and went to the doctor. He said, "Doc, I broke my arm in two places." The doctor said, "You need to stay out of those places!" We can be tempted (and hurt) when we're in the wrong places.

There are two theories on where the pinnacle of the temple was located.

Some people believe the devil took Jesus to the high wall that surrounded the temple area that overlooked the Kidron Valley. From the top of that wall the bottom of the valley was about 500 feet. The historian Josephus records that it was so high that people would get dizzy looking down to the bottom.

The other theory was the pinnacle of the temple was the top of the Temple itself, and I believe this is where it was. Here's why: **Malachi 3:1** says, "Behold, I am going to send My messenger, and he will clear the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple; and the messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight, behold, He is coming," says the Lord of hosts. Malachi 3:1 was a Messianic prophecy. It was a common belief at that time that the Messiah would suddenly appear in the sky and come down to His temple.

That's why the devil took Him to the pinnacle of the temple and why this was such a temptation—because it seemed to be a fulfillment of a Messianic prophecy. The crowds of people in the temple courts would all be witnesses. If Jesus would jump off and float down from the sky, He would instantly gain credibility and everyone would worship Him as the Messiah.

Then the devil quoted the perfect verse to tempt Him.

Jesus had quoted a Scripture to the devil and said, "It is written." So the devil quotes a Scripture back to Jesus saying, "It is written." It's appalling that God's Holy Word would come out of the mouth of a lying, unholy devil! The devil indirectly appeals to Malachi 3:1 (a Messianic verse), and he now quotes from Psalm 91, which is a Psalm of protection. If you wanted someone to jump off a temple, this would be the verse to quote—out of context.

In **Matthew 4:6** the devil says, "For it is written, 'He will give His angels charge concerning You'; and 'On their hands they will bear You up, lest You strike Your foot against a stone.'" In the 1st temptation, Satan tempted Jesus with a rock. In the 2nd temptation, Satan tempts Jesus with Scripture. Who would have thought that *the very words of God* could be used to tempt someone? But it's true—the Bible, taken out of context, tempts a lot of people. If you compare what Satan quoted with Psalm 91, you will find that he left out part of the verse.

Psalm 91:11-12 "For He will give His angels charge concerning you, to guard you in all Your ways. They will bear you up in their hands, lest you strike your foot against a stone." Satan left out part of the verse. He omitted, "To guard you in all Your ways." It's talking about God's ways. God protects us when we follow His ways, not our ways. The Father didn't tell Him to jump off, so Jesus would not have had protection from angels. If Jesus had jumped off, He would have obeyed Satan's instructions, not God's. This was an incredibly cunning temptation.

You have to think that maybe for a split-second Jesus considered doing it. After all, it was a temptation. And if He had jumped, it would have concluded His life. He would have been jumping to a conclusion.

Lots of people get in trouble by jumping to conclusions. They put two and two together and get 500. They come to the wrong conclusion because Satan gets them to jump to conclusions.

You can just see the devil saying to Jesus, “Hurry up! Don’t take too long to think about this. If you really have faith—you’ll jump. The angels will catch you because God’s Word guarantees it.” The devil loves for us to make decisions on impulse rather than taking time to think it through.

I read about a man on an airplane who saw the red handle on the emergency door. On impulse, he jumped up and pulled the handle. The door was pulled out of the plane, which made passengers panic. Fortunately, the passengers had their seat belts fastened, the plane was flying at a low altitude, and they were able to safely land. Many people act on an impulse, like this man.

Notice that Satan didn’t push Jesus off. He was just trying to get Him to act on an impulse. The devil likes to tempt us to jump off temples by getting us to decide without thinking.

Satan was tempting Jesus with the sin of presumption. **Presumption means to put God to the test.** That’s why Jesus answered in v. 7, “You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.” That was a quote from Deuteronomy 6:16. Presumption tries to force God’s hand to work. Presumption is counterfeit faith. It looks so much like faith, but it isn’t genuine faith, and puts God to the test.

I know of a couple of guys who purposely went into a restaurant without any money, trusting God to provide the money for their meal. They ordered their food, ate it, and got their bill. They waited for God to provide the money, but no one helped them. I don’t remember how they got out of there, but I suspect they either washed dishes or had to call someone to bring them money. That’s presumption. Some people will keep charging things on their credit cards and trust God to bring in the money. That’s presumption.

There are two extremes of faith. One extreme is **unbelief**—which has no faith in God. The 1st temptation was “God will never provide for you, so you’ve got to provide for yourself.” The other extreme is **presumption**—a false faith in God. The 2nd temptation was “God will always protect you” no matter what you do. It’s taking Scripture too far.

How Can We Identify Presumption?

1. Presumption makes the Scriptures say what we want rather than what God intended. It’s easy for us to hand-pick certain verses and make them say what we want them to say. We need to let God’s Word say what it means, and not twist it to make it mean something else. God never intended for Psalm 91 to be used to get people to jump off high buildings. Satan was trying to make the Scriptures say something that God didn’t intend.

2. Presumption magnifies one verse and ignores other verses. Remember that the Bible is a unit, so let Scripture interpret Scripture. In Luke 6:30, Jesus said, “Give to everyone who asks of you.” But in Matt. 7:6 He also said, “Do not give what is holy to dogs, and do not throw your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces.” In other words, use discernment when people ask you to give them something.

Satan tried to isolate and elevate Psalm 91 above other Scriptures. That’s why Jesus quoted Deut. 6:16, “You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.” Psalm 91 can’t contradict Deuteronomy 6. Man shall live by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God, not selective words.

3. Presumption stretches the meaning of Scripture.

Satan left out several words in Psalm 91 to stretch the meaning.

I once had a shoe that was a little too small, so I took it to the shoe repair shop to stretch it. People do that with Scripture. If it doesn’t fit, they stretch it to make it fit. By the way, that shoe never did fit right after that—because it wasn’t made to be stretched. The Scriptures aren’t intended to be stretched either.

4. Presumption demands that God obey us rather than us obey God. Faith is obeying what God tells us to do. Presumption is trying to make God obey what we tell Him to do. One extreme is unbelief—and we don’t want that. Another extreme is presumption—and we don’t want that. What God wants us is for us to believe His Word in context, and to live with a balanced faith.

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