

1046 The genealogy and the temptations of Jesus, and controversial issues - The image of Jesus (1)

(Verses refer to those in NASB unless otherwise specified, and by Whirlwind.)

First, we mention in preface that our goal is to be conformed to the image of Jesus. What then is such an image? Secondly, there are two Gospels talking about the genealogy of Jesus. We point out their differences and the controversial issues surrounding them. Thirdly, we discuss the time of the temptations of Jesus, what the order means here, and the associated controversy. We also discuss our temptations encountered. Fourthly, although Satan chose the time that Jesus was hungry to tempt Him to tell a stone to become bread, He said clearly that man shall not live on bread alone. Fifthly, in terms of the temptation of showing Him all the kingdoms of the world, He responded clearly, "You shall worship the Lord your God and serve Him only." Jesus wasn't tempted by worldly things. Sixthly, we discuss the temptation of throwing Yourself down from the pinnacle of the temple. Although Satan correctly quotes the verses and accidentally showed that he was familiar with the Bible. Jesus told him clearly, "You shall not put the Lord your God to the test." Associated with that, we give one example in the Old Testament to show that once God tells us to do something, even though we think it is impossible, it no longer counts as a test but obedience is more important. We also discuss a related controversy raised by the prophecy of the virgin bearing a child.

1. Preface: The image of Jesus

We need to be conformed to the image of Jesus as said in Romans 8:29, "For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren." The whole Bible talks about Jesus. It is impossible for us to talk about the image of Jesus clearly since God is infinite and we are finite. Furthermore, God has the absolute authority and we can only understand the parts that the Holy Spirit reveals to us. Therefore, this is a series of sharing, which is limited by what we know about the image of Jesus.

Regarding the image of Jesus, the four Gospels state relatively clearly. We choose our sharing primarily based upon the Gospel of Luke and secondarily and on other Three Gospels since the Book of Luke says clearly that it is based on order as said in Luke 1:1-4, "Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, it seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write it out for you in consecutive order, most excellent Theophilus; so that you may know the exact truth about the things you have been taught."

2. The genealogy of Jesus

We have shared some events about Jesus before. Let's start with this fact now stated in Luke 3:23, "When He began His ministry, Jesus Himself was about thirty years of age, being, as was supposed, the son of Joseph, the son of Eli." We know that Jesus is conceived by the Holy Spirit, thus He is only supposed to be the son of Joseph in the aspect of human. The genealogy in Luke 3:23-38 and those in Matthew 1:1-17 are very different. In Luke 3:32, it says that David is "the son of Jesse, ..." Before that, both Gospels are basically the same except the Gospel of Matthew states upward the fact to "...Adam, the son of God." (Luke 3:38) After David, the names are different in these two Gospels. This is because the Gospel of Matthew talks about the genealogy from the father and the Gospel of Luke is that from the mother. Of course, they are different and thus not contradictory. This is what prophesied in 2 Samuel 7:16, "Your (David's) house and your kingdom shall endure before Me forever; your throne shall be established forever." No matter if we see the genealogy from the mother or from the father, Jesus is the offspring of David and His kingdom is indeed forever.

The genealogy from the father in the Gospel of Matthew means that the father of Jesus is supposed to be Joseph, and the father of Joseph is Jacob, and so on till Abram. The genealogy in the Gospel of Luke is from the mother, which should be counted from Mary. Does this create a problem since the genealogy of the Gospel of Luke never mentions the name Mary? And in Luke 3:23-24, it seems clearly stated, "...being, as was supposed, the son of Joseph, the son of Eli, the son of Matthat, the son of Levi, ..." Isn't the father of Joseph Eli? If we want to make it consistent with what described in the Gospel of Matthew 1:16, "Jacob was the father of Joseph...", isn't Jacob called Eli either? If we trace the genealogy upward, then we can see that this is wrong. It is impossible to make them consistent this way. The number of generations are quite different. Then, how do we explain this seemingly apparent contradiction? Here, we have to look at the historical background. At that time, the system of Jews was based upon the male, and the father represents the whole family. This point can be seen clearly in the genealogy of the Old Testament, which basically talks about males. In other words, Joseph described in Luke 3:23 represents the Mary's whole family. In other words, Mary's father is Eli, Eli's father is Matthat, etc. Notice that whenever a genealogy mentions the names of females, we need to be aware of what they did.

Regarding the genealogy, there are some other questions. For example, why do we trace up to David and not stop at Zerubbabel, whose name is mentioned in both Gospels? If you trace several generations back, you'll find out that they are not the same person but the same name. It is the custom of Jews to choose the same name for different persons. For example, we mentioned previously in Luke 3:24, "...Matthat, the son of Levi, ...," who is not the same Levi among the twelve sons of James. The other question often discussed is why several kings are not mentioned in the genealogy in the Gospel of Matthew. They are Ahaziah in 2 Kings 8:24, Jehoash in 2 Kings 12:1, Amaziah in 2 Kings 12:21, and Jehoiakim in 2 Kings 23:34. The Bible doesn't say clearly why, and we can never get a unique conclusion.

3. The time of the temptation of Jesus and its order

The temptation of Jesus is mentioned in the first three Gospels (except in the Book of John), which are called synoptic Gospels because there are some events mentioned in two or three of them and can be used to check each other. The temptation of Jesus happened after He was baptized, which is only briefly mentioned in the Gospel of Luke. In the chapter 4 of the Gospel of Luke, three temptations are particularly mentioned in the order of: (1) Telling a stone to become bread; (2) Showing Him all the kingdoms of the world; (3) Throwing Yourself down from the pinnacle of the temple. In the Gospel of Matthew, their order is different, (1)(3)(2). Someone may ask, 'Is the Bible wrong?' No, absolutely not. The Bible is inspired by God, and we should ask what He wants to tell us when He puts this seemingly apparent error here? First, the Gospel of Luke is indeed written according to the order of events, not issues. The event of the temptation of Jesus happened after He was baptized. Secondly, the temptation involves more than three issues as said in Luke 4:13, "When the devil had finished every temptation, he left Him until an opportune time."

Remember that Satan could not let Jesus go, but failed, as clearly stated in Hebrews 4:15, "For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin." We are tempted very often too, because "Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted."(2 Timothy 3:12) Christians have tribulations for sure. At least till now, we don't have tribulations like what happens in mainland China. God sometimes responds according to our reactions, and His responses often look very slow in the eyes of humans. But good work often results from working slowly. For example, Moses spent forty years in the wilderness before God called him, and Paul got his revelation in about three years. You must know that the verses quoted below are very true. "These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world."(John 16:33) And it says in 1 Corinthians 10:13, "No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it." Every man will die for sure. Before that time, our temptations are just like what this verse says, that there is always a way to escape. Furthermore, there is always the way of repentance in the era of the New Testament as is said in 1 John 1:9, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." If someone says that he never encountered temptation. The person must reflect on himself. Either he encountered temptations but didn't know, or he was not worthy of any temptation even in the eyes of the servants of Satan!

4. Telling a stone to become bread

In Luke 4:1-4, it says, "Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led around by the Spirit in the wilderness for forty days, being tempted by the devil. And He ate nothing during those days, and when they had ended, He became hungry. And the devil said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread." And Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'Man shall not live on bread alone.'""

Here, someone may ask, "Isn't the Holy Spirit in cooperation with Satan?" Absolutely not, the Holy Spirit is one of the Holy Trinity and is omniscient. He knows ahead of time that Satan will not let go of Jesus. The temptations will start sooner or later, and it may start right now in His chosen time. Satan can choose the right time for maximum damage too. When Jesus became hungry, Satan then started this temptation. But Jesus didn't take the hook, because He knew that He is indeed the Son of God. And He also knows that man lives depending on food, but shall not live on bread alone. Christians must abide in Jesus as said in John 15:5, "I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing."

5. Showing Him all the kingdoms of the world

It is said in Luke 4:5-8, "And he led Him up and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil said to Him, "I will give You all this domain and its glory; for it has been handed over to me, and I give it to whomever I wish. Therefore if You worship before me, it shall all be Yours." Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God and serve Him only.'""

Satan didn't lie this time, and Jesus answered clearly. Indeed, "...the whole world lies in the power of the evil one."(1 John 5:19) "And we know that the Son of God has come, and has given us understanding so that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life."(1 John 5:20)

6. Throwing Yourself down from the pinnacle of the temple

In Luke 4:9-12, it says, "And he led Him to Jerusalem and had Him stand on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down from here; for it is written, 'He will command His angels concerning You to guard You,' and, 'On their hands they will bear You up, So that You will not strike Your foot against a stone.'" And Jesus answered and said to him, "It is said, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'""

Satan accurately quote these verses in Psalms 91:9-12, "For you have made the Lord, my refuge, Even the Most High, your dwelling place. No evil will befall you, Nor will any plague come near your tent. For He will give His angels charge concerning you, To guard you in all your ways. They will bear you up in their hands, That you do not strike your foot against a stone." "And the great dragon was ...the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan, ..." (Revelation 12:9) Here, we can see that Satan is familiar with the Bible. But Satan says, "...If You are the Son of God, ..." (Luke 4:9) We said before that Jesus knew clearly that He is indeed the Son of God. This kind of temptation is doomed to be a failure.

In the verses of the Old Testament, they say verses like, "Surely all the men who have seen My glory and My signs which I performed in Egypt and in the wilderness, yet have put Me to the test these ten times and have not listened to My voice." (Numbers 14:22) We also see

in Psalms 78:41, "Again and again they tempted God, And pained the Holy One of Israel." Jesus knew in the beginning, "... You shall not put the Lord your God to the test."(Luke 4:12) We must do the same.

When God asks people to do something impossible, it is no longer a test. This point is illustrated very clearly in the Old Testament. In Isaiah 7:10-14, it says, "Then the Lord spoke again to Ahaz, saying, "Ask a sign for yourself from the Lord your God; make it deep as Sheol or high as heaven." But Ahaz said, "I will not ask, nor will I test the Lord!" Then he said, "Listen now, O house of David! Is it too slight a thing for you to try the patience of men, that you will try the patience of my God as well? Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel." Doesn't Ahaz really want to not put a test for God? From what Isaiah said, most likely Ahaz didn't believe that it was possible! But God already said, He will do it no matter what people say since He has the absolute authority. In the New Testament, this is verified as stated in Matthew 1:22-23, "Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet: "Behold, the virgin shall be with child and shall bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel," which translated means, "God with us.""

Related to these verses but having controversy are the verses in Isaiah 7:15-16, "He will eat curds and honey at the time He knows enough to refuse evil and choose good. For before the boy will know enough to refuse evil and choose good, the land whose two kings you dread will be forsaken." There are two different thoughts about the period of Ahaz being a king. One is from 736 BC to 716 BC, and the other from 735 BC to 715 BC. No matter which one, the period from Ahaz to Jesus is less than 750 years. There is nothing logically wrong since Jesus absolutely didn't know enough to refuse evil and choose good about 750 years ago. The controversy comes from the argument that Jesus has to be born in the period Ahaz being a king. The Bible doesn't say so! If we believe that the Bible is inspired by God, we'll know that prophecy normally doesn't specify the time. And sometimes it is even not consistent with what we think in the first glance.

For example, it is said in Genesis 15:13, "God said to Abram, "Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years." Originally, I thought that the Israelites were in Egypt 400 years according to the prophecy. But I wasn't aware of the key words, "will be enslaved and oppressed." When James went to Egypt, "Pharaoh said to Joseph, "See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt.""(Genesis 41:41) Therefore, they weren't enslaved and oppressed until stated in Exodus 1:8-10, "Now a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. ..." So, when Joseph was alive, they should not be enslaved and oppressed. And we know, "...Joseph was thirty years old when he stood before Pharaoh, ..." (Genesis 41:46) When James got to Egypt, "...the famine has been in the land these two years, ..." (Genesis 45:6) Adding seven abundant years, James came to Egypt is when Joseph was $30+7+2=39$ years old. And "Joseph lived one hundred and ten years." (Genesis 50:22) Therefore, they have at least $110-39=71$ good years. The actual time is stated in Exodus 12:40, "Now the time that the sons of Israel lived in Egypt was four hundred and thirty years," which is different. There are also examples in the New Testament, where the prophecy of the time of Jesus coming again is not even specified!