



Matthew 4:5–7

5 Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. 6 “If you are the Son of God,” he said, “throw yourself down. For it is written:

“He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.””

7 Jesus answered him, “It is also written: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’”

The battle lines are drawn. The prince of peace Jesus, and the prince of this world Satan, are doing battle out in the desert of Judea. It's their first skirmish in a battle that will last for the next three years, right up to the cross. And the battle lines are drawn. Satan has come at Jesus when he is at his lowest, after fasting for forty days and nights, and his line of attack has been 'If you are the Son of God' then... Jesus, the Word become flesh, the Word incarnate responds exclusively with Scripture. Jesus defends himself, and defeats Satan's attacks with God's word.

Satan's first attack was focussed on Jesus' relationship with his Father. God said the he loved

him, said that he was his son, and yet led him into the desert to almost starve. Satan very reasonably encouraged him to make bread, but to do this would have been against God's will for his son and his plans for the world. So Satan's first attack was designed to drive a wedge between Father and Son. It was focussed on their relationship.

Satan's second attack in our passage today is an attack on Jesus' national responsibility. He's the king of the Jews, he's the champion of Israel, Israel reduced to one, he's come to realise all God's great promises to the Jewish nation; he's come to save God's people. And so Satan takes him to the highest point of the temple in Jerusalem, the centre of the Jewish world, and aims his attack at Jesus' national responsibility.

Just as an aside here we can see the devil's supernatural powers. In a moment he's transported Jesus from the Judean wilderness to the southeast corner of the temple area in Jerusalem, which loomed about 150 metres over the Kidron Valley. The enemy is not only extremely cunning he's also powerful.

Satan starts again with the same refrain, 'If you are the Son of God,' but this time, after having been defeated the first time with Scripture, Satan cunningly shifts his attack and uses Scripture to try and tempt Jesus. 'If he's so confident in Scripture well maybe I can use that to my advantage,' he thinks. And so Satan quotes Psalm 91. Or should I say misquotes, bends and distorts Psalm 91 as he tries to manipulate Jesus. And you know this has been happening ever since. People claiming to be Christians, wolves in sheep's clothing, taking

Scripture out of its context, twisting its meaning, and causing great harm to innocent and naïve people. That's why it's so important to know God's word really well. Usually when someone twists Scripture they do it by taking it out of context – so if in doubt, check out the context of the verse, the chapter around it, the movement of the book, and if necessary where it fits into the wider movement of the whole bible. That's what Jesus does in today's passage as we'll see in a moment.

In today's passage Satan has taken Psalm 91 and twisted it to try and manipulate Jesus. Psalm 91's about the way God will protect and care for Israel when they are faithful to him. It doesn't imply that God will send help in every harmful situation and certainly doesn't imply that if you jump off a building you will be saved by angels on the way down! So Jesus defeats

twisted Scripture with a quote from Scripture that shines the light on how Satan's verse has been distorted. Jesus quotes Deuteronomy 4 which sets a wider context in which to understand Psalm 91 and in doing so he shows that Psalm 91 cannot possibly mean what the devil is saying.

But it's important to appreciate the true evil genius of what Satan is doing here. He knows his use of Scripture is thin, but behind it, well imagine if Jesus did throw himself off the temple. Jesus could command angels to save him, he says as much just before he's arrested in Gethsemane, and after Jesus' third temptation angels are going to come to help him. Can you imagine the scene it would cause if Jesus did jump and commanded angels to see him land safely? All those devout Jews down there bustling in and out of the temple. What

an entrance for God's Messiah into the world! Instead of starving out in the desert, coming down out of the sky, surrounded by angels in front of the temple in Jerusalem. Surely this is a better plan than God's one for starting his ministry here on earth?

But Jesus trusts his Father and his Father's words and he's having none of it. Nothing will drive a wedge between him and his Father. Nothing will stop him from fulfilling his Father's plans. God has great plans for the few that remain faithful amongst the Jewish nation and Jesus will stay true to those plans. And so Satan's second attempt is thwarted. Jesus chooses to believe God's words over Satan's words, and uses God's word to defeat Satan's lies.

Perhaps you're going out to do battle today.

It might a situation at work or in your family life where you feel under attack. Or perhaps you're being attacked by some strong temptation. Can I encourage you to do what Jesus did? Arm yourself with Scripture, defend yourself with Scripture, act according to Scripture. Whatever your situation is consider it in light of Scripture. Bring Jesus into that conflict, don't give in to that temptation.

Right now is a good time to think about today's passage. You might think over the way Jesus recalls bible verses when he's being tempted. Have you tried this? A great verse to remember when you feel so tempted that you think it's impossible not to give in is 1 Cor 10:13 'God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so you can endure it.' What words of com-

fort in those dark moments! There's always a way out. See how powerful the right verse of Scripture can be in the right moment! And this means the more familiar we are with the bible the better equipped we are for all life throws at us. So there's plenty to think about now and then to pray about after.

So make sure you do, and in our next passage we'll see Satan's third and greatest temptation of Jesus. I'm looking forward to it so I hope you can join me then.