

EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS ON THE GOSPELS.

FOR FAMILY AND PRIVATE USE.

WITH THE TEXT COMPLETE,

And Many Explanatory Notes.

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LUKE IV. 1–13.

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| <p>1. And Jesus being full of the Holy Ghost returned from Jordan, and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness.</p> <p>2. Being forty days tempted of the devil. And in those days he did eat nothing: and when they were ended, he afterward hungered.</p> <p>3. And the devil said unto him, If thou be the Son of God, command this stone that it be made bread.</p> <p>4. And Jesus answered him, saying, It is written, that man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God.</p> <p>5. And the devil, taking him up into an high mountain, showed unto him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time.</p> <p>6. And the devil said unto him, All this power will I give thee, and the glory of them: for that is delivered unto me: and to whomsoever I will I give it.</p> <p>7. If thou therefore wilt worship me, all</p> | <p>shall be thine.</p> <p>8. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Get thee behind me, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.</p> <p>9. And he brought him to Jerusalem, and set him on a pinnacle of the temple, and said unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down from hence:</p> <p>10. For it is written, He shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee:</p> <p>11. And in <i>their</i> hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone.</p> <p>12. And Jesus answering said unto him, It is said, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.</p> <p>13. And when the devil had ended all the temptation, he departed from him for a season.</p> |
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THE first event recorded in our Lord’s history, after His baptism, is His temptation by the devil. From a season of honour and glory He passed immediately to a season of conflict and suffering. First came the testimony of God the Father, “Thou art my beloved Son.” Then came the sneering suggestion of Satan, “If Thou be the Son of God.” The portion of Christ will often prove the portion of Christians. From great privilege to great trial there will often be but a step.

Let us first mark in this passage, *the power and unwearied malice of the devil.*

That old serpent who tempted Adam to sin in Paradise was not afraid to assault the second Adam, the Son of God. Whether he understood that Jesus was “God manifest in the flesh” may perhaps be doubted. But that he saw in Jesus One who had come into the world to overthrow his kingdom, is clear and plain. He had seen what happened at our Lord’s baptism. He had heard the marvellous words from heaven. He felt that the great Friend of man was come, and that his own dominion was in peril. The Redeemer had come. The prison door was about to be thrown open. The lawful captives were about to be set free. All this, we need not doubt, Satan saw, and resolved to fight for his own. The prince of this world would not give way to the Prince of peace without a mighty struggle. He had overcome the first Adam in the garden of Eden; why should he not overcome the second Adam in the wilderness? He had spoiled man once of Paradise; why should he not spoil him of the kingdom of God.

Let it never surprise us if we are tempted by the devil. Let us rather expect it, as a matter of course, if we are living members of Christ. The Master’s

lot will be the lot of His disciples. That mighty spirit who did not fear to attack Jesus himself, is still going about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. That murderer and liar who vexed Job, and overthrew David and Peter, still lives, and is not yet bound. If he cannot rob us of heaven, he will at any rate make our journey thither painful. If he cannot destroy our souls, he will at least bruise our heels. (Gen. iii. 15.) Let us beware of despising him, or thinking lightly of his power. Let us rather put on the whole armour of God, and cry to the strong for strength. “Resist the devil and he will flee from you. “(James iv. 7.)

Let us mark, secondly, *our Lord Jesus Christ's ability to sympathize with those that are tempted*. This is a truth that stands out prominently in this passage. Jesus has been really and literally tempted Himself.

It was meet that He who came “to destroy the works of the devil,” should begin His own work by a special conflict with Satan. It was meet that the great Shepherd and bishop of souls should be fitted for His earthly ministry by strong temptation, as well as by the Word of God and prayer. But, above all, it was meet that the great High Priest and advocate of sinners should be one who has had personal experience of conflict, and has known what it is to be in the fire. And this was the case with Jesus. It is written that He “suffered being tempted.” (Heb. ii. 18.) How much He suffered, we cannot tell. But that His pure and spotless nature did suffer intensely, we may be sure.

Let all true Christians take comfort in the thought that they have a Friend in heaven who can be touched with the feeling of their infirmities. (Heb. iv. 15.) When they pour out their hearts before the throne of grace, and groan under the burden that daily harasses them, there is One making intercession, who knows their sorrows. Let us take courage. The Lord Jesus is not an “austere man.” He knows what we mean when we complain of temptation, and is both able and willing to give us help.

Let us mark, thirdly, *the exceeding subtlety of our great spiritual enemy, the devil*. Three times we see him assaulting our Lord, and trying to draw Him into sin. Each assault showed the hand of a master in the art of temptation. Each assault was the work of one acquainted by long experience with every weak point in human nature. Each deserves an attentive study.

Satan’s first device was to persuade our Lord to distrust His Father’s providential care. He comes to Him, when weak and exhausted with forty days hunger, and suggests to Him to work a miracle, in order to gratify a carnal appetite. Why should He wait any longer? Why should the Son of God sit still and starve? Why not “command this stone to become bread”?

Satan’s second device was to persuade our Lord to grasp at worldly power by unlawful means. He takes Him to the top of a mountain and shows Him “all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time.” All these he promises to give Him, if He will but “fall down and worship him.” The concession

was small. The promise was large. Why not by a little momentary act, obtain an enormous gain?

Satan's last device was to persuade our Lord to an act of presumption. He takes Him to a pinnacle of the temple and suggests to Him to "cast Himself down." By so doing He would give public proof that He was one sent by God. In so doing He might even depend on being kept from harm. Was there not a text of Scripture which specially applied to the Son of God, in such a position? Was it not written that "angels should bear Him up"?

On each of these three temptations it would be easy to write much. Let it be sufficient to remind ourselves that we see in them the three favourite weapons of the devil. Unbelief, worldliness, and presumption are three grand engines which he is ever working against the soul of man, and by which he is ever enticing him to do what God forbids, and to run into sin. Let us remember this and be on our guard. The acts that Satan suggests to us to do are often in appearance trifling and unimportant; but the principle involved in each of these little acts, we may be sure, is nothing short of rebellion against God. Let us not be ignorant of Satan's devices.

Let us mark, lastly, *the manner in which our Lord resisted Satan's temptations*. Three times we see Him foiling and baffling the great enemy who assaulted Him. He does not yield a hair's breadth to him. He does not give him a moment's advantage. Three times we see Him using the same weapon, in reply to his temptations: "the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God." (Ephes. vi. 17.) He who was "full of the Holy Ghost," was yet not ashamed to make the Holy Scripture His weapon of defence and His rule of action.

Let us learn from this single fact, if we learn nothing else from this wondrous history, the high authority of the Bible, and the immense value of a knowledge of its contents. Let us read it, search into it, pray over it diligently, perseveringly, unweariedly. Let us strive to be so thoroughly acquainted with its pages that its texts may abide in our memories, and stand ready at our right hand in the day of need. Let us be able to appeal from every perversion and false interpretation of its meaning, to those thousand plain passages which are written as it were with a sunbeam. The Bible is indeed a sword, but we must take heed that we know it well, if we would use it with effect.

NOTES. LUKE IV. 1-33.

- 1.—[*Led by the Spirit.*] The word translated "led," is the same that we find in Rom. viii. 14, Gal. v. 18, applied to the influence of the Holy Ghost on the hearts of believers. Our Lord, be it noted, did not seek conflict with the devil, but was "led" to it.

[*The wilderness.*] We are not told where this wilderness was. Some have conjectured that it was the wilderness near Sinai, through which Israel journeyed. There seems no foundation for this idea. It is more probable that it was that uninhabited part of Judæa

where John the Baptist's ministry began.

- 2.—[*Forty days tempted of the devil.*] This part of our Lord's temptation, we may suppose, was mental and spiritual. The length of time mentioned is the same as that recorded in the history of the fast of Moses and Elijah.
- 3.—[*The devil said.*] It is plain that Satan now appeared to our Lord in a visible form. In what form we are not told. Some have supposed that he appeared as an angel of light; some that he came as an aged hermit, or as a Scribe or Pharisee. All this is mere conjecture. We need not doubt that he, who appeared to Eve in the form of a serpent, chose that form which was most likely to serve his purpose in appearing to our Lord.

The question has often been asked, whether the whole temptation of our Lord was a real thing or only a vision. That it was a real temptation appears clear from every expression in the history of it. Curious speculations have been raised as to the manner in which our Lord was taken to "the top of a mountain," and brought to "the pinnacle of the temple." These are matters which we cannot explain. Let it suffice us to believe that the circumstances related, really, literally, and actually took place.

[*That it may be made bread.*] Let it be noted that the first temptation contained an appeal to a fleshly appetite, like the temptation in Eden. Adam and Eve were tempted to eat unlawfully, and so also was our Lord.

- 4.—[*It is written.*] This text, we should mark, as well as the two others quoted by our Lord in reply to the devil, were taken from the Pentateuch. All three texts were from one book, Deuteronomy, —and two from one chapter, the sixth.

[*By every word.*] The meaning here is not strictly "by every spoken or written word," but by every thing which God is pleased to create, or command, or appoint, for man's sustenance, just as quails were commanded to come, and manna appointed to fall from heaven to feed Israel. The Greek word translated "word," is in three places translated "thing." (Luke i. 37; ii. 15, 19.)

- 5.—[*All the kingdoms of the world.*] This expression must probably be taken with large qualifications, unless we take "the world" in the limited sense of Palestine and the adjacent countries. From no single mountain could all the kingdoms of the world be literally seen at once. If our Lord did really see them, it must have been by means of a vision made to pass before His eyes. This however seems very improbable.

[*A moment of time.*] Lightfoot quotes a Rabbinical definition of a moment. The Rabbins consider it to be "the 58,888th part of an hour."

- 6.—[*This power will I give Thee.*] Let it be noted, that as the devil promised liberally to Eve, "Ye shall be as gods," so he promised liberally to our Lord. But as his promise to Eve was a lie, so his promise to our Lord was a deception. He promised that which he had no power to give. He is undoubtedly called "prince of this world," but he has no power to give dominion over it without God's permission.
- 7.—[*Worship me.*] The marginal reading seems to give the sense of the word more fully, — "fall down before me;" that is "fall down and worship."
- 8.—[*Get thee behind me, Satan.*] These are precisely the words, let it be noted, which our Lord addressed to Simon Peter, when Peter would fain have dissuaded Him from the cross. (Matt. xvi. 23.) It may be observed, while remarking on this expression, that the temptation which St. Luke relates second, is related by St. Matthew as occurring last. It seems probable that the order of St. Matthew is that in which the several temptations occurred, and the expression of our Lord to Satan appears strong internal evidence of this.

For what reason St. Luke departs from the order observed by St. Matthew we do not know. Spanheim, in his "Dubia Evangelical," discusses the question, but throws little light

on it.

- 9.—[*Pinnacle of the temple.*] This is supposed to have been a turret, or high part of the temple building, overhanging a deep valley. Josephus describes the place, and says, that “if any looked down, his eyes would grow dizzy, not being able to reach to so vast a depth. “
- 10.—[*It is written.*] Let it be carefully noted that the devil can quote Scripture when it suits his purpose. There is no good thing which may not be abused.

[*To keep thee.*] From the earliest ages the comment has been made on these words, that Satan omitted the important expression which follows them, “In all thy ways;” and that the omission was intentional in order to favour his misapplication of the text. Perhaps more has been made of the omission than is quite warrantable. The quotations from the Old Testament in the New, even when made by holy and good men, are not always so full as we should have expected. At any rate, it is a striking fact that our Lord does not notice the misquotation, but simply quotes in reply another text.

Leighton’s remarks on this point are worth reading. “Our Saviour teaches us that our better way, either with perverse men in asserting their errors, or with Satan in his assaulting us with misalleged scripture, is not so much to subtilize about the place or words abused. It may be so cunningly done sometimes, that we cannot well find it out; but this downright sure way beats off the sophistry with another place, clearly and plainly carrying that truth which he opposes and we adhere to. Though thou canst not clear the sense of an obscure text, thou shalt always find a sufficient guard in another that is clearer.”

- 13.—[*He departed from him.*] Two things should always be remembered in reading the history of our Lord’s temptation.

For one thing, we have a clear proof of the personality of Satan. If the devil be not a person, judging from the whole history of the passage, there is no meaning in words. He “speaks,” he “takes,” he “shows,” he offers to “give,” he “brings,” he “sets,” he “departs.” These expressions can only be used about a person.

For another thing, we see the folly of labouring to make out, as some commentators do, the person who was present at each act in our Lord’s history, and supplied the four Gospel writers with the materials which they used in composing their narratives. Who, we may well ask, was present when all this temptation took place? From what source did Matthew and Luke obtain their information? —There is but one answer to these questions. They got it, like everything else which they wrote, from the inspiration of God. The theory that they were dependent on the reports of human witnesses in any part of their writings, is utterly unsatisfactory, and in the history of our Lord’s temptation, entirely breaks down.