

Reflections on the Incarnation III

Incarnation and Temptation (Heb 2:17-18, 4:14-16)

Introduction – Immanuel. God with us. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son. I am the Good Shepherd. Come to Me, all who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest. The Incarnation is a gift to us in countless ways. For instance, we learn about our temptations from the Word made flesh Who dwelt among us. Not only do we learn about them, we learn how to battle them – and win.

Jesus was Tempted (Heb 2:17-18, 4:14-16) – In the Incarnation, Jesus took on flesh so that, as a real man, He could be our mediator and true High Priest. Because He was a man, Jesus was tempted as every man is. It was real temptation, and because He did not fall, He is able to provide aid to all who are tempted. Some try to argue that Jesus could not have sinned because He was God; and that is true as far as it goes. But that does not mean that Jesus could not actually have been tempted and experience all that we experience when we were tempted. Scripture clearly teaches that He was “*in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.*” And so, when we learn from Jesus about temptation, we are learning from a Master who does sympathize with us all the way to the point of actual sin. When we do sin, He does not sympathize with us; but as the perfect sacrifice and propitiator, He has done something far better and far more effective (1 John 1:9).

Adam was Tempted – Remember, Adam and Eve were tempted before the Fall. This shows us something we often forget: temptation is not a sin and temptation is not a result of the Fall. We want to learn how to stop acting like the first Adam and start acting like the second Adam when we experience temptations. And the Incarnation provides that gift.

Trials and Temptations (James 1:2-4, 12-15) – The word “*trials*” in v2 and “*temptation*” in v12 is the exact same word in Greek, *peirasmos*, and this helps us to understand what is going on. Adam and Eve were tested by God and tempted by the serpent. The test by God was not to entice them to sin; the temptation was. A good teacher gives challenging tests or assignments in order to give the student an opportunity to succeed in the midst of difficulties, bringing greater maturity. The tempter entices to fail.

Walking with Jesus through Temptations (Luke 4:1-13) – Adam was tempted in a garden; Jesus is led out into a wilderness by God in order to be tempted by the devil. Jesus, a descendant of Adam (3:38), not only faced what Adam faced, but now under the powers that had been unleashed through human rebellion and sin. There are echoes of the garden story with the serpent whispering plausible lies about God; and there are echoes of Israel’s journey in the wilderness (40years/days, hungry for bread).

Command These Stones – All three temptations are temptations to do something. God has led Jesus into forty days of fasting and has not provided supernatural food for Him, so He is hungry. The devil tempts Jesus to use His power to serve His own ends, doubting the Father’s lovingkindness in the midst of the trial. This test will ultimately happen again on the cross. Jesus rebuts with scripture (Deut 8:3). And so, if God has ordained to keep bread from Jesus for a time, then *not eating* is His food at that moment; it is God’s providence for Him now. We fight temptation by seeking all of life by every Word of God and never apart from trusting the Father.

Command All Kingdoms – The world had been taken from Adam by the serpent in the Fall and now is being offered to the second Adam with one little caveat – “*worship before me...*” The temptation is to seize something good without using the ordained way of getting it. Jesus wanted the kingdoms and they had been promised to Him (Psalm 2:7-8, Luke 3:21-22), but He would not receive them through compromise, not through trusting sub-princes. Again, the Word is used (Deut 6:13) to fight off the subtle lies. We fight temptation by seeking all God has for us but only in His ways and in His time and never by becoming a vassal in some dirty compromise.

Command God – The devil uses Scripture to tempt Jesus but of course Jesus knows Scripture-twisting when He hears it. The temptation is along the line of trusting God for a miraculous event while you do something knowingly stupid or to show off. And so, even towards God, there is a difference between “*testing*” Him (taking Him at His Word and walking by faith) and “*tempting*” Him (demanding a spectacular demonstration, treating Him like a genie-in-a-bottle, or twisting Scripture to make it look like a good God would never allow suffering). We fight temptation by carefully understanding Who God is according to Scripture well-studied.

Jesus, the Man Who Did Not Fall – Here is a gift of the Incarnation. We have an Adam who did not fall like the rest of us. This is Jesus and He is Immanuel, God with us. He is so by His Spirit now – and just as Jesus, filled with the Holy Spirit, used the Word of God, so we are able to fight and beat temptation as well. There is no temptation but such as is common to man, including Jesus (1 Cor 10:12-13). But we do have to avail ourselves of that Spirit (Gal 5:16) and take up that Word as a sword (Eph 6:17), “*praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit*” (Eph 6:18, Matt 6:13) as though this were a real war. Because it is. At the same time, it is a great test, for which we can give thanks (James 1:2-4).