

The Church of the Servant King

Thursday Night Bible Study

The Gospel of Matthew

(Thurs_Chapter 4A_The Start of Jesus' Public Ministry)

In this chapter, Jesus is tempted by Satan. An understanding of God's greater purpose in human history is vital to understanding all that transpires in not only chapter 4, but in the remainder of Matthew and all of Scripture. Therefore, we will review some highlights of God's purpose in human history as it relates to Satan's activities in human history. I call this panoramic backdrop or stage on which the events of human history are played – "The Appeal Trial of Satan – the Biblical Basis for a Philosophy of Human History."¹

War has been declared. The great, governing cherub had become the malignant enemy. Our God was neither surprised nor astonished, for, of course, He knew before it happened that it would happen, and He had His perfect plan ready to be put into effect. Although the Lord had the power to destroy Satan with a breath, He did not do so. It was as though an edict had been proclaimed in heaven: "We shall give this rebellion a thorough trial. We shall permit it to run its full course. The universe shall see what a creature, though he be the highest creature ever to spring from God's Word, can do apart from Him. We shall watch this experiment, and permit the universe of creatures to watch it, during this brief interlude between eternity past and eternity future called time. In it the spirit of independence shall be allowed to expand to the utmost. And the wreck and ruin which shall result will demonstrate to the universe, and forever, that there is no life, no joy, no peace apart from a complete dependence upon the Most High God, Possessor of heaven and earth."²

Why Satan is thus allowed to continue his reign is perhaps but partly revealed. The real Church which is the Bride of Christ, is to sit with Him upon His throne (Rev. 3:21; 1 Cor. 6:2, 3; Matt. 19:28), and the present age [the Church Age] must continue until that glorious heavenly people are gathered out from the world [Rapture of Church Age believers to rule and reign with Christ during the Millennial Kingdom]. Again, it seems the course of God's purpose to make a sufficient and final trial of every claim of His adversaries; and when this age, with all its developments, shall have passed by, every mouth will be stopped, and the whole world and Satan will know their own failure and sin before God. They will stand self-condemned, and nothing could accomplish this but the testing, by actual trial, of all the self-sufficient claims of Satan and man.³ [Italics and bold are mine]

The terminology of United States jurisprudence provides analogies for the appeal trial of Satan. The structure of a trial can be superimposed upon the structure of human history. A trial has three phases. First,

¹ For a more detailed analysis of this topic, see the "Special Studies" link on the website for our church – www.cotsk.org

² Donald Grey Barnhouse, *The Invisible War* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1965), 51.

³ Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Satan: His Motives and Methods* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregel Publications, 1919 republished 1990), 24.

there is the formal presentation of the case: the prosecution presents its case, followed by the defense. Next is the rebuttal phase: the rebuttal arguments of the prosecution followed by the rebuttal arguments of the defense. Finally, comes the closing argument and summary: by the prosecution and then by the defense. The formal trial in Satan's appeal trial corresponds to Old Testament history. God created man as a rational creature lower than angels, duplicating at a reduced scale the conditions of the prehistoric angelic conflict. The courtroom is planet Earth. The human race provides evidence, arguments, and precedents in the appeal trial. God entered His evidence by creating man just as the angels were created: innocent (or perfect) with the potential to become imperfect by wrong decisions. Human history provides the same circumstances and options which belonged to angelic history before man's creation. Satan had been created in perfect innocence; Adam was created in perfect innocence. The angels have free will; man has free will. Adam freely and deliberately chose to follow the pattern of arrogance which characterized Satan's original revolution. The fall of Adam duplicates the fall of Satan. The rebellion of Satan in the Garden of God resulted in the fall of angelic creatures (Rev. 12:4a); the disobedience of Adam in the Garden of Eden resulted in the fall of mankind (Rom. 5:12a). In angelic history God had provided a decision-making process by which angels could express nonmeritorious positive volition. Likewise, God provided salvation for all mankind so that man can express nonmeritorious positive volition through faith in Christ (John 3:16). Through the exercise of free will, angelic creatures are divided into two categories: elect and fallen (Heb. 2:2; Rev. 12:7). Through free will mankind is divided into believers and unbelievers (John 3:36). With the fall of Adam, Satan became ruler of the world. After usurping Adam's rule over the earth, Satan presented his case in his many attempts to establish control over his kingdom so that he might create perfect environment on earth. Just as in the prehistorical angelic conflict, his purpose in the historical extension of the angelic conflict is to prove himself equal with God, to be "like the Most High" (Isa. 14:14). Satan wishes to demonstrate that arrogance is not arrogance but a viable alternative to God's plan. However, Satan lacks the ability, brilliant though he is, to produce the utopia he wishes to establish. The formal phase of the appeal trial includes angelic observation, participation, and interference in the affairs of mankind (Gen. 6:1-4; Job 1:1-3). These angelic activities continue throughout all phases of the trial.⁴

We know from Scripture that Satan fell in eternity past from his position of prominence in spiritual service to God as the highest of created being (Ezek 28:11-19; Isa 14:12-17). We also know the following points:

- The sentence upon Satan was pronounced at a point in time in eternity past; however, its execution has yet to be carried out.
- The restoration of the earth in Genesis 1 and the creation of man are vitally linked to the resolution of the conflict between Satan and God.
- A sizeable number of angels transferred their allegiance from the kingdom of God to the kingdom of Satan in association with Satan's fall in eternity past (Rev 12:7-9).
- When man fell in the Garden of Eden, man as the administrator of the earthly province of the kingdom of God and the earth itself fell with him under the dominion of Satan's rule. Satan is

⁴ R.B. Thieme, Jr., *Christian Suffering* (Houston, Texas: R.B. Thieme, Jr. Bible Ministries, 1987), 143, 145.

the ruler of this world under the permissive will of God. See John 8:44; 12:31; 14:30; 16:11; Rom 8:19-22; Eph 2:1-2 as examples of passages which support this.

- Satan established a foothold on earth (with the fall of Adam) for his own kingdom in his attempt to fulfill his declaration in Isa 14:12-14 and Ezek 28:11-17 that he would be like the most High God. He would receive the worship of his minions.
- As time passed and human history moved forward through the Ages of Conscience and Human Government, man failed in his designated authority from God. Romans 1 describes the breakdown of conscience and the Tower of Babel epitomized the failure of man to govern over dispersed portions of the earth in accord with God's command in Gen 9:1 to Noah to replenish the earth. Instead, under the leadership of Nimrod, a temple/tower at Babylon was constructed in order for man to exalt himself.
- God created a nation of His own to be the repository of His revelation to man, i.e. Israel through the lineage of Abraham.
- God's covenant with Abraham and his descendants (the Jews) and its subsequent amplifications which are commonly expressed as the Palestinian, Davidic, and New Covenants were all made in anticipation of the establishment of God's theocratic kingdom on earth.
 - Abraham – Genesis 12:1-4; 13:14-17; 15:1-7; 17:1-8
 - Palestinian (or Land) – Deuteronomy 30:1-10
 - Davidic – 2 Samuel 7:1-17
 - New – Jeremiah 31:31-34
- The establishment of God's theocratic kingdom on earth in fulfillment of the covenants to Abraham and Israel is vitally related to the resolution of the Angelic Conflict.
- God's theocratic kingdom on earth in the dispensation known as the Millennium is God's closing argument in Satan's appeal trial. Through Christ's reign, the administration of the earth is returned to man as God's rightfully appointed governor/administrator.
- Satan is the ruler of this world under the permissive and sovereign will of God.
- Satan's plan for this world is vitally connected to the attitude he possessed at his fall in eternity past.

Point worthy of contemplation – If Satan could tempt the Son of God to accept a shortcut to ruling over the kingdoms of this earth without going to the Cross first, then Satan would have succeeded in the establishment of a kingdom of his own just as he claimed he could do in his challenge to God in eternity past. God would have been proven incapable of saving mankind from the eternal condemnation of sin and God would not have been able to exert His sovereignty over a portion of His creation. Man would have been at the mercy of Satan and his plan for the cosmos. Man would have continued to procreate perhaps for thousands of years in perpetuation of a realm over which Satan could rule, yet Satan would have had no plan and no concern for the eternal state of man after his physical death. Only a God of absolute love could provide a means of deliverance. Only the God/Man could accomplish the plan. Satan's evident challenge to God in eternity past would be answered by the very attribute that he questioned to exist when his sentence was pronounced. That attribute was love.

THE TEMPTATION OF JESUS (4:1-11)

1 Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. 2 And after He had fasted forty days and forty nights, He then became hungry. 3 And the tempter came and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread." 4 But He answered and said, "It is written, 'MAN SHALL NOT LIVE ON BREAD ALONE, BUT ON EVERY WORD THAT PROCEEDS OUT OF THE MOUTH OF GOD.'" 5 Then the devil took Him into the holy city and had Him stand on the pinnacle of the temple, 6 and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down; for it is written,

'HE WILL COMMAND HIS ANGELS CONCERNING YOU'; and
'ON their HANDS THEY WILL BEAR YOU UP,
SO THAT YOU WILL NOT STRIKE YOUR FOOT AGAINST A STONE.'

7 Jesus said to him, "On the other hand, it is written, 'YOU SHALL NOT PUT THE LORD YOUR GOD TO THE TEST.'" 8 Again, the devil took Him to a very high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory; 9 and he said to Him, "All these things I will give You, if You fall down and worship me." 10 Then Jesus said to him, "Go, Satan! For it is written, 'YOU SHALL WORSHIP THE LORD YOUR GOD, AND SERVE HIM ONLY.'" 11 Then the devil left Him; and behold, angels came and began to minister to Him.

Matthew 4:1-4

- Note that Jesus was led to the temptation by the Holy Spirit, not by Satan.
- The temptation took place shortly after Jesus' baptism.
- Jesus' responses to the temptations all come from Deuteronomy 6-8 – a part of the Mosaic Law designed to govern Israel as a theocratic nation.
- In Scripture, the wilderness is not only a place of demonic activity (Isa 13:21; 34:14; Matt 12:43; Rev 18:2), but it was the place of the nation Israel's great testing.
- Moses and Elijah, two of God's most significant servants in the Old Testament, likewise fasted for 40 days and nights (Exod. 34:28; Deut. 9:9; 1 Kings 19:8).

28 So he was there with the LORD forty days and forty nights; he did not eat bread or drink water and he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments. (Exod 34:28)

9"When I went up to the mountain to receive the tablets of stone, the tablets of the covenant which the LORD had made with you, then I remained on the mountain forty days and nights; I neither ate bread nor drank water. (Deut 9:9)

8So he arose and ate and drank, and went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb, the mountain of God. (1 Kin 19:8)

- Jesus' fast would have connected Him with these servants of the Lord in the minds of Matthew's Jewish readers, as it does in ours.
- Israel failed and spent 40 years wandering there; Jesus spent 40 days and 40 nights there and was victorious.
- Israel was tempted immediately after a victory and period of exaltation in the world (i.e. the parting of the Red Sea).
- Jesus was tempted after public acknowledgment (i.e. John's baptism).
- In Jesus' temptations, God clearly purposed to test Him just as Israel was tested and Jesus' responses from the Old Testament clearly indicated that He understood.
- The purpose of Jesus' testing was to prove His character – to demonstrate the obedience of God's Son in contrast to the disobedience of God's other son, Israel (Matt 2:15; Exod 4:22; Deut 8:3, 5).

15He remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: "OUT OF EGYPT I CALLED MY SON."
(Matt 2:15)

22"Then you shall say to Pharaoh, 'Thus says the LORD, "Israel is My son, My firstborn. (Exod 4:22)

3"He humbled you and let you be hungry, and fed you with manna which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that He might make you understand that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the LORD. 4"Your clothing did not wear out on you, nor did your foot swell these forty years. 5"Thus you are to know in your heart that the LORD your God was disciplining you just as a man disciplines his son. (Deut 8:3-5)

- The testing was necessary to prove worthiness to execute God's appointed mission.
- Satan tempted Jesus to act independently of the Father's will for Him.

Does God test people? Scripture consistently teaches that God does not test anyone (James 1:13). Nevertheless, He does allow people to experience testing that comes from the world, the flesh, and the devil (1 Jn 2:15-17; Rom 7:18-24; 1 Pet 5:8).

15 Do not love the world nor the things in the world If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. 17 The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever. (1 Jn 2:15-17)

18For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not. 19 For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want. 20 But if I am doing the very thing I do not want, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. 21 I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good. 22 For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man, 23 but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members. 24 Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? (Rom 7:18-24)

8 Be of sober spirit, be on the alert Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. (1 Pet 5:8)

Could Jesus sin? Most theologians believe that Jesus could not have sinned because He was God; however, I disagree. I believe that Jesus was able to sin because he was human and had a volition just like Adam; however, he exercised His volition in a way that He was able not to sin.⁵

Matthew 4:5-7

5 Then the devil took Him into the holy city and had Him stand on the pinnacle of the temple, 6 and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down; for it is written,

'HE WILL COMMAND HIS ANGELS CONCERNING YOU'; and
'ON their HANDS THEY WILL BEAR YOU UP,
SO THAT YOU WILL NOT STRIKE YOUR FOOT AGAINST A STONE.'"

⁵ For a discussion on this point, see Joseph G. Sahl, "The Impeccability of Jesus Christ," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 140:557 (January-March 1983):11-20.

7 Jesus said to him, "On the other hand, it is written, 'YOU SHALL NOT PUT THE LORD YOUR GOD TO THE TEST.'"

- Satan tempts Jesus to gain public attention through a spectacle rather than through His righteous life and message.
- Satan's temptation related to a common perception from Mal 3:1 that the Messiah would suddenly appear in the sky and come down to His temple.

1 "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. (Mal 3:1)

- In effect Satan was saying, "Why don't you just become the Messiah that the people are expecting?"
- Satan omitted the words from Psa 91:11 & 12 of "to keep you in all your ways."

11 For He will give His angels charge concerning you,
To guard you in all your ways.
12 They will bear you up in their hands,
That you do not strike your foot against a stone. (Psa 91:11-12)

Matthew 4:8-11

8 Again, the devil took Him to a very high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory; 9 and he said to Him, "All these things I will give You, if You fall down and worship me." 10 Then Jesus said to him, "Go, Satan! For it is written, 'YOU SHALL WORSHIP THE LORD YOUR GOD, AND SERVE HIM ONLY.'" 11 Then the devil left Him; and behold, angels came and began to minister to Him. (Matt 4:8-11)

- Satan is presently the "god of this age" according to 2 Corinthians 4:4 and the "prince of this world" according to John 12:31; cf. Ephesians 2:2.

4 in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. (2 Cor 4:4)

31 "Now judgment is upon this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out. (Jn 12:31)

2 in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. (Eph 2:2)

- Satan's temptation was a legitimate offer.

Note: Satan's temptations correspond to those of Eve in the Garden of Eden:

- They appealed to the physical appetite (Gen. 3:1-3; Matt 4:3)
- They appealed to the desire for personal gain (Gen 3:4-5; Matt 4:6)
- They appealed to an easy path to power or glory (Gen 3:5-6; Matt 4:8-9)
- In each case, Satan altered God's word (Gen 3:4; Matt 4:6)