

SECTION 2: THE TEMPTATION

Immediately, the Spirit drove him out into the wilderness.
And he was there in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan.
Mark 1:12–13a

No One Knew God's Purpose

To say, as Paul did, that Jesus was born under the law (Gal. 4:4) is to say that when Jesus was born, the law of Moses was still in effect. Three decades later, at the time of Jesus' baptism (Lk. 3:23), nothing had changed with the law. Nothing with Satan had changed, either. He was still one of the sons of God who stood in God's presence, he was still a fierce Prosecutor of the law in heaven's court, and he still did not know that God saw him as evil. And he certainly did not know that God, through Jesus, would soon redeem mankind from sin.

In the event called the Temptation, Satan was on a mission from God, and he did his duty in the wilderness with Jesus as diligently as he had done it with Job, and as he had always done his duty. God could have chosen any of His heavenly servants to tempt Jesus in the wilderness, but as always, He chose the one with the qualifications and disposition fitted to the task, and Satan was perfectly equipped for this one. He had the wisdom, the power, and the ambition fitting to the assignment.

All that Satan and the angels could have known was that God had sent Satan to earth on another important mission, this one dealing with the long-awaited Messiah. No human knew even that much. While Jesus was being tempted, everyone on earth went about life as usual in fields and in towns, unaware of the extraordinary event taking place in the Judean wilderness. Yet, the Temptation was a monumental event in salvation history, one deserving close examination, not only to show its importance, but also to dispel wrong ideas about it.

The Bible provides no evidence that anyone on earth knew that the wilderness Temptation took place until after God shared His kind of life with men on the day of Pentecost. More significantly, however, not an iota of scriptural evidence suggests that anyone in heaven, including Satan, knew that God's purpose for sending Satan to earth was to tempt Jesus. God did not reveal His purposes to Satan; He revealed them only later, and only to those He blessed with His kind of life. It is a tribute to God's fathomless wisdom that Satan thought he was tempting Job when he was not and that he did not know he was tempting Jesus when he was.

When God sent Satan from heaven to the Judean wilderness, Satan could only have known what God told him about his mission, and God would not have explained to Satan that he was sending him to earth to meet with a new kind of man or that through that man, a new and eternal covenant would be established. To explain those things, God would have had to reveal the existence of His Son, and it was not time for that. Satan and the angels knew more about spiritual things than humans knew because humans were created "a little lower" than they (Ps. 8:5; Heb. 2:7),¹ but they did not know the Son of God, who was created a little lower than no one except the Father who created him.

Only if we keep in mind the universal spiritual darkness of the time can we see Jesus' Temptation as the mysterious, astonishing event that it was. Otherwise, the Temptation is reduced in our minds to nothing but an attack by the bad guy, Satan, on the good guy, Jesus. But it was not an attack at all.

¹ Literally, Psalm 8:5 says that man was created "a little lower than the gods". I assume that "the gods" refers to all the heavenly beings God created, not just angels, including Satan, the "anointed cherub".

Designed by God

Satan did not trick God's Son into going into the wilderness; nor did he ambush him once he was there. Instead, "Jesus was led up into the wilderness by the Spirit to be tempted by the Accuser" (Mt. 4:1; cf. Lk. 4:1–2). Or as Mark, in typically blunt fashion, said it, "The Spirit drove him out into the wilderness" (Mk. 1:12). So, God sent His Son out into the wilderness to meet Satan, and He sent Satan to the wilderness to meet His Son. God was in command of them both. They both were servants of God who had come down from heaven, and both were sent into the wilderness. Each was obeying the command of God, but only one of them was good. The other was cursed and did not know it.

God determined everything about the Temptation, including when it would take place. When Mary's son came to the Jordan to be baptized by John, he was about thirty years old, and at no time during those thirty years had God sent Jesus anywhere to meet with Satan, and with good reason. If Mary's son had gone out to meet Satan in the wilderness before God's Son came into his temple, he would have been overcome, for human nature is powerless to resist such mighty temptations, and a human nature is all that Mary's son had. The Temptation took place when it did because the Temptation was for *God's* Son, not Mary's, and God's Son had just arrived on earth. Moreover, the Temptation took place when it did because the first order of business for the Son, once he was here, was to bring into subjection the body of flesh in which he now dwelt. With the Temptation, the Father was providing the Son the opportunity to become master over his newly acquired body of flesh.

Nothing bad was happening to God's Son in the Temptation. God is good, and His purposes are "holy, and just, and good", regardless of whom He uses to accomplish them. As my wise father often pointed out, God used both righteous Moses and wicked Pharaoh to get the Israelites out of Egypt, one to pull and the other to push. God chose that particular Pharaoh and raised him up to accomplish His good purpose (Ex. 9:16), and Pharaoh's wickedness did not make God's purpose evil. Just so, the fact that God used wicked Satan to tempt holy Jesus does not mean that something evil was taking place. When did God ever use Satan for a wicked purpose? On the contrary, Jesus' Temptation was a holy event designed by God for His Son, who at that time was the only creature living in a fleshly body who possessed the kind of life that could subdue it.

Again, I am not saying that Satan was not evil. He most certainly was, and still is. I am merely saying that Satan had not yet been exposed as evil, that he was still doing God service, and that he did not understand God's purpose for sending him to meet Jesus in the wilderness.

When Satan saw Jesus walking out into the wilderness, all he saw was the man who had come from Nazareth to be baptized by John. Satan met him in the wilderness; he spoke with him; he even picked Jesus up and carried him places (to the pinnacle of the temple and onto a high mountain); but Satan did not know this new man because, first of all, he was ignorant of the Son of God, and secondly, he could not see past the flesh, where the Son now dwelt. When Satan looked into Jesus' eyes in the wilderness, he had no idea who was now looking back at him. Seeing nobody but Mary's son, he thought he was dealing with nobody but Mary's son. Satan was confident he knew God and His truth, but he was never farther from God's truth than that day in the wilderness when he was looking at Truth himself, in the face of Jesus Christ.

Still God's Servant

Matthew and Luke give us details of the Temptation, and they agree that Satan suggested two things to Jesus and made one unheard-of offer. The following is Matthew's version. Remember as you read

the conversation that at this time, the term “Son of God” was used in reference to the mighty Messiah that Israel expected, not to the hidden Son of God:

Matthew 4 (Lk. 4:3–13)

3. The Tempter came to him and said, “Since you are the Son of God,² command these stones to become loaves of bread.”
4. But he answered and said, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes out of the mouth of God.’”
5. Then the Accuser carried him to the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple,
6. and he said to him, “Since you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written, ‘He will command His angels concerning you, and they will bear you up with their hands, lest you strike your foot against a stone.’”
7. Jesus told him, “It is also written, ‘You shall not put the LORD your God to the test.’”
8. Again, the Accuser carried 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 will I give you if you fall down and worship me.”
10. Then Jesus told him, “Get behind me, Satan!³ For it is written, ‘The LORD your God shall you worship, and Him only shall you serve.’”
11. Then the Accuser left him, and behold, angels came and ministered to him.

If Satan had known the Son, he could not possibly have said and done to him what he did in the wilderness, for had he known the Son, he would have known that the Son was the one through whom God created the universe (Heb. 1:2), and if Satan had known that, he would not have been so foolish as to make any suggestions whatsoever to the Son, much less offer to make him ruler over one of the worlds that he had created. That would have been like trying to bribe the owner of a lumberyard by offering him a toothpick. It is most certain that if Satan had known that he was talking to the one through whom God created the “things in the heavens and things on earth, things visible and things invisible” (Col. 1:16), Satan would not have invited him to bow at his feet. In short, the Temptation, as it is commonly understood, would not have taken place if Satan had known with whom he was dealing. Satan was being used by God, as God had used him throughout history. He was still God’s servant, speaking only what God gave him to speak, and what God gave Satan to say during the Temptation was supremely cunning. It could only have come from God.

The World that Jesus Conquered: “All That Is in the World”

If any trial could have overwhelmed God’s Son, the wilderness Temptation would have, for by God’s design, it appealed in an unprecedented manner to the three basic components of human nature, the nature of the flesh with which the Son now found himself covered. John told us what these three components are:

1John 2

16. All that is in the world – the desire of the flesh, and the desire of the eyes, and the pride of life – is not of the Father, but is of the world.

² The word “the” is absent here and in verse 6. Satan may have only been saying, “since you are a son of God.”

³ Unless Satan expected the Messiah to have super-human knowledge, it may have surprised him that Jesus knew his name.

- the desire of the flesh
- the desire of the eyes
- the pride of life

That is every man's "world"; every sin that man commits falls into one of those three categories. At the time of the Temptation, Satan did not understand this; only God did.⁴ The Son of God, now the man Jesus Christ, resisted the inclinations of the nature of his newly-acquired fleshly body, and by doing so, in just forty days, he overcame his entire world. Thus it was that there in the wilderness, for the first time since the foundation of the world, God's kind of righteousness was given open expression by someone who possessed it. And Satan, the ultimate fool, was chosen to be the first one to witness it. Of course, God's kind of righteousness was strange to Satan, and he misunderstood it and hated Jesus for it. Afterward, when Jesus left the wilderness and began preaching, it was strange to humans, too, and many in Israel also misunderstood it and hated him for it. A number of Jews even concluded that Jesus was cursed by God to say and to do the things he did (cf. Isa. 53:4).

In the garden of Eden, Eve gave in to the same "world" of human nature which Jesus overcame in the Temptation:

Genesis 3

6. When the woman saw that the tree was good for food [desire of the flesh], and that it was a delight to the eyes [desire of the eyes], and a tree to be desired to make one wise⁵ [pride of life], she took some of its fruit and ate it. Then she also gave some to her husband with her, and he ate.

The Serpent may have led Eve astray in the garden of Eden, but in the wilderness, Satan was not dealing with Eve. He was dealing with the Son of God.

The World that Jesus Conquered, #1: "The Desire of the Flesh"

"The Tempter came to him and said, 'Since you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.'"

No one in heaven or on earth would have seen unrighteousness in anything Satan said or did during the Temptation. After all, if the Almighty sent Satan to do what he did, how could anyone have seen it as evil? On the contrary, as in the case of Job, David, and others, the sons of God in heaven would have considered it evil for Satan *not* to do it! But even without knowing that God sent him, and even if one did not know beforehand that Satan is evil, he would not have seen any evil in what Satan said and did in the Temptation.

Where was the evil in encouraging Jesus to eat if he was hungry? In a deserted place, with a Messiah who had the power to do so, even the most righteous people on earth would have thought it was good for Jesus to make himself some food from the material at hand: stones. Both Satan and Jesus knew that God once told the Israelites that they were free to eat what they wanted to eat when they were

⁴ It is possible, of course, that the Son also understood this. However, the Son went through a learning process after taking on a human body (Jn. 5:20; Heb. 5:8), and we are not told when the Son learned what.

⁵ The Hebrew word translated here as "wise" implies a worldly kind of wisdom. It could be translated, "successful". Satan thought that the wisdom to be successful in this world was God's kind of wisdom and that those who possessed it, as he did (cf. Ezek. 27), were like God. That is what tempted Eve. Satan thought that he himself was like God, and he expected the wisdom he had to bring him great success in the future (cf. Isa. 14:13-14).

hungry (Dt. 12:15). Besides that, one might have thought, what kind of God would want the Messiah to starve?

To rightly understand the event called the Temptation, it is imperative that we be honest with ourselves and admit that without the knowledge of God, we would see no evil Satan in suggesting to Jesus that he make himself some food. Confessing that is part of speaking the truth in our heart, which David said we must do if we hope to see God (Ps. 15:1–2).

Satan did not know that the Son was waiting for his Father to let him know it was time to eat. That is God's kind of righteousness: being led by the Spirit instead of by the desire of the flesh. The Son refused to be led by his flesh's craving for food, and in choosing to do the Father's will concerning food, even after long days without food, the Son overcame the temptation to give in to the desire of the flesh.

The World that Jesus Conquered, #2: "The Pride of Life"

“Since you are the Son of God, throw yourself down,
for it is written, ‘He will command His angels concerning you,
and they will bear you up with their hands, lest you strike your foot against a stone.’”

Those who loved God and Jesus, without knowing them, would have thought that the goal of Satan's next suggestion was especially good. Only those who hated Jesus would have disapproved of it, for Satan told Jesus how he might prove to Israel that he was the Messiah. He suggested that Jesus hurl himself from the pinnacle of the temple in Jerusalem so that God's people would see him be rescued by angels and, so, believe in him. Satan reminded Jesus of God's promise to appoint angels to watch over him and to hold him up if he so much as tripped (Ps. 91:12), and if the angels would catch Jesus if he tripped, they would certainly catch him if he was falling from a tall building. Such a public, miraculous escape from death would certainly convince the Jews that Jesus was their Messiah, who would not want that for Israel — and for Jesus? Hadn't God's prophets foretold of the great joy of Israel when their Messiah came and blessed them?

Isaiah 25

9. It will be said on that day, “Behold, this is our God! We have waited for Him, and He has saved us. This is the LORD! We have waited for Him! Let us rejoice and be glad in His salvation!”

Jeremiah 31

12a. They will come forth and shout for joy on the height of Zion.

13. The virgin, together with young and old men, will rejoice in the dance, for I will have turned their mourning into joy, and I will comfort them and give them joy for their sorrow.

14. And I will satisfy the soul of the priests with abundance, and my people will be sated with my goodness, says the LORD.”

But the Spirit within Jesus would not yield to his flesh's desire for recognition, nor yield to Satan's suggestion that he seek it. Jesus chose again to wait for his Father's direction, this time concerning when and how to make himself known. That, again, is the righteousness of God. It chooses the will of God over all things, the good as well as the bad.⁶

⁶ Jesus faced a similar temptation while on the cross. There, everything in his flesh was screaming for relief from the awful pain when the chief priests, scribes, and elders (Satan's sons) promised to believe in him if he would do the miraculous and come down from the cross (Mt. 27:41–42; Mk. 15:31–32).

To rightly understand the event called the Temptation, we must acknowledge that what our fleshly nature wants is often the same as what Satan wants for us. Satan's suggestion to Jesus was not merely a suggestion from outside of him; it connected with what Jesus' fleshly nature wanted. It was a good idea, and there were many scriptures that could be used to justify it. It was the sort of suggestion that David's men made to him when they encouraged him to kill King Saul, referring to the prophecies of David becoming Israel's king (1Sam. 24:4). And wasn't that what God and David both wanted? Wouldn't it be good for Israel if David was king?

Jesus indicated the harmony of human nature with Satan on the day he rebuked Peter for wanting to save Jesus from the suffering which God had appointed for him:

Matthew 16

21. From that time, Jesus started showing his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day, be raised up.
22. Then Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "God forbid, Master! This shall never happen to you!"
23. But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You're a stumbling block to me! Your mind isn't on the things of God, but the things of men."

A New Kind of Warfare

Satan was no challenge for Jesus; but then, he did not come to the wilderness to be a challenge to Jesus; in his mind, Satan came to guide Jesus into the fulfillment of wonderful promises. In short, Satan came to the wilderness to bless Jesus, not to attack him, and everything Satan suggested to Jesus in the wilderness, Jesus wanted. Contrary to how the Temptation is usually depicted, there was no contest, no battle in the wilderness between Jesus and Satan, and neither of them looked at their meeting that way. By God's design, and completely unknown to Satan, the battle was entirely within Jesus himself. It was the battle Paul described as the flesh desiring what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit desiring what is contrary to the flesh (Gal. 5:17).

According to Jesus, all of man's sins come from the heart (Mk. 7:18–23). James agreed, saying that if anyone goes astray, it is only that he has been drawn away by his own desire (Jas. 1:14). A man can sit in his chair at home and overcome the whole world, or he can sit in his chair and commit every sin that exists. Both righteousness and wickedness are altogether a matter of the heart. Jesus declared that new standard for righteousness, though only later did anyone really understand him:

Matthew 5

21. You've heard that it was said to those of ancient time, "You shall not murder," and "Whoever commits murder will be liable to the judgment."
- 22a. But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother without cause will be liable to the Judgment.
- ...
27. You have heard that it was said, "You shall not commit adultery."
28. But I say to you that every man who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

God's purpose for His Son was not that he overcome Satan or anything else outside his body, but that he overcome the "world" of his sinful human nature. Nothing outside the Son's fleshly body was

ever a challenge for him. Nor is anything outside our bodies a challenge for us. Paul confirmed this when he said that we struggle “not with blood and flesh, but with the authorities, the powers, the dark world-rulers of this age, and with the evil spirits among heavenly beings” (Eph. 6:12). Our enemy is not other human beings (“flesh and blood”); rather, it is the appeal of unclean spirits to the desires of our flesh, as Satan appealed to Jesus’ fleshly desires in the wilderness. Yet, as with Jesus, if we choose God’s will over our own, we have won the battle with our fleshly nature and have overcome the only world that matters. A man who brings himself to submission to the will of God is master of his entire world. Jesus did this first, and he did it in the wilderness by following God’s Spirit instead of his flesh.

It can hardly be overemphasized that Jesus is our example *because he overcame the world by being led by the Spirit* — the same Spirit he made available to us. If Jesus overcame the world because he had access to spiritual power which is not available to us, or if Jesus overcame the world by virtue of *who* he was rather than by the power of the life God gave him, then he is no example for anybody. If Jesus overcame the world because he is the Father himself (“Oneness” doctrine) or because he was part of a triune God (Trinitarianism), then he is no example for us. But if he overcame “all that is in the world” by being filled with God’s kind of life and walking in it, then when Jesus made God’s life available to us, he made the same righteousness available to us that he and the Father have. Paul strongly emphasized the need and the benefit of living in the strength of God’s kind of life:

Galatians 5

16. Walk in the Spirit and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.

Romans 8

2. The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death!

The World that Jesus Conquered, #3: “The Desire of the Eyes”

“The Accuser carried him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world, and their glory.”

To complete the mission on which God had sent him, Satan made an offer to Jesus that appealed powerfully to the last of the three components of human nature. He took Jesus to a very high mountain, showed him the spectacular glories of the world’s kingdoms, and then offered it all to him. And again, we should ask, where was the evil in offering to make Jesus ruler of the world? Had not the prophets repeatedly proclaimed that God would give the Messiah rule over the nations (Ps. 72:11; Isa. 2:2; Jer. 3:17)?⁷ Later, at one point during Jesus’ ministry, a multitude in Galilee, wanting what Satan wanted for Jesus, decided to take Jesus by force and make him king (Jn. 6:14–15). And even after his resurrection, before Jesus ascended back to his Father, Jesus’ disciples were excited at the prospects of him leading a rebellion against their Roman overlords and restoring Israel’s past glory (Acts 1:6). But God had not sent His Son “to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mt. 20:28), and that was he was determined to do.

The disciples and the multitude would have deemed Satan’s offer to make Jesus king of the world to be an exceptionally good one, fulfilling the promises of God to Israel. They would not have been able to conceive of a reason for Jesus to refuse Satan’s amazing offer. But Jesus did, for he was being led by his Father’s Spirit, and the Spirit was not leading him that way.

⁷ The prophets also said that the Messiah would rule very harshly (Ps. 2:8–9; cf. Rev. 19:11–15) – just the sort of ruler that would suit Satan.

Jesus Won the Battle

When the Son of God overcame the will of his flesh, he had overcome “all that is in the world” – the desires of his flesh, the desire of his eyes, and the pride that dwelt in his newly acquired human body. Several years after the Temptation, when Jesus told his disciples that he had overcome the world (Jn. 16:33b), that was the world he was talking about. Moreover, Jesus warned all seven of the pastors to whom he spoke in Revelation that eternal life will be given only to those who overcome the world as he did (Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 26–28; 3:5, 12, 21).

In his wilderness trial, Jesus was “tempted in every way that we are,” and yet, he did not sin (Heb. 4:15). He exited the wilderness as conqueror of the whole world because he had mastered himself; he had won the battle between his holy nature and the carnal nature of the body in which he now lived. Jesus Christ was the first person ever to engage in this kind of warfare, the warfare of a fleshly body against the Spirit of God within it, and he won the battle by following the Spirit. And having done that, he “returned in the power of the Spirit” to finish his work of redeeming mankind (Lk. 4:14).

Paul called the nature of our flesh the “old man” (Rom. 6:6; Eph. 4:22), and he warned us that our “old man” cannot please God (Rom. 8:7–8). He also exhorted us to “put on the new man, who in God’s likeness is created in true righteousness and holiness” (Eph. 4:24). Only death will put an end to the warfare between the old man and the new man, for the flesh can never be other than what it is, and neither can the Spirit of God.

Crucified, But Not Yet Dead

I remember struggling against the flesh when I was young in the Lord, feeling ashamed because it was such the struggle. One day, as I was on my knees praying, with my Bible in a chair in front of me, I opened my Bible and began reading in Galatians, praying as I read. Then, I came to this verse: “They who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh, along with its passions and its desires” (Gal. 5:24). In despair, knowing that my flesh’s “passions and desires” were still there, I slumped down in despair and cried, “Then, Jesus, I just don’t belong to you.” But the Lord mercifully let me see the truth of the matter.

What Jesus showed me is that to be crucified does not mean to be dead. Crucifixion will always cause death if allowed to run its course; still, it is not death itself. Jesus was crucified six hours before he died. Crucifixion was a relatively quick process; dying took some time, as long as three days in some cases. The Roman soldiers were surprised at how quickly Jesus died after being crucified (XX). In ancient literature, there were even accounts of crucified persons being taken down from a cross before they finished dying, and being nurtured back to health.⁸

Spiritual crucifixion takes place instantaneously when a person receives the Spirit of God. At that moment, one’s human nature is crucified; the death blow has been given, and that “old man” will certainly die if he is not rescued and revived. Our old man will squirm and struggle and do its best to stay alive, and Jesus helped me see that such was the death struggle I was experiencing. My old man had been crucified; he just wasn’t dead yet. It may be that I was unknowingly feeding him while he was on the cross and keeping him alive by continuing in an old habit; I do not know. But that happens a lot. An old preacher once told me, “The problem with many of God’s people is that they don’t kill the old man; they just bring him to prayer meetings and get him beat up. The rest of the time, they work on patching up his wounds.” It is a dangerous thing to drink just enough of the Spirit to make the “old man” sick.

⁸ <http://thebriefing.com.au/2013/05/crucifixion-historicity/>. Accessed July 22, 2024.

Those who are established in the faith obey Paul's exhortation to stay in the Spirit and let the old man die, every day (1Cor. 15:31; Gal. 2:19–20). Paul explained to the saints why it is essential that we do that: "If you live after the flesh, you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live" (Rom: 8:13).

Jesus' human nature was spiritually crucified when he was baptized with the Spirit as he came up out of the Jordan River, and through the Temptation, that old man died. In receiving God's Spirit and then holding fast to His righteousness, Jesus escaped the domination of human nature over his will. And he suffered to make that same strength available to us. What a precious opportunity is ours in Christ, to partake of God's nature and to overcome the world as Jesus did, that we might walk with God and His Son in their kind of life!

Satan's Offer to Jesus: The World

If what Jesus was tempted with was not real, or if Jesus did not desire what Satan offered him, then there was no real Temptation. Jesus really wanted to, and could have, turned stones into food; he really wanted to do something that would make Israel acknowledge him as their Messiah; and Jesus really wanted the prophecies about him ruling the earth to come true. The Temptation really was a temptation to Jesus.

An understanding of Satan's offer to make Jesus the King of the world, and Jesus' refusal of that extraordinary offer is critical to a right perspective of Jesus' ministry, suffering, and resurrection, for his victory in that element of the Temptation in particular set the stage for what followed in his life.

Princes over the Nations

Daniel, living as an exile in Persia, once prayed and sought God three weeks before he receiving an answer. When the answer came, it came by the hand of a resplendent heavenly messenger that I assume was an angel. The angel told Daniel that when Daniel had first begun praying, his prayer had been heard, but, he said, a spirit which he identified as "the prince of the kingdom of Persia" had delayed his arrival,⁹ adding that he was able to complete his journey only because the archangel Michael had come to his aid. This is the Bible's first mention of Michael, and it revealed to Daniel that Michael was "one of the chief princes" among the angels. Here is the story:

Daniel 10

2. In those days, I, Daniel, was mourning three full weeks.
3. I ate no delicacies, nor did flesh or wine come into my mouth, nor did I anoint myself at all until three full weeks were completed.
4. And on the twenty-fourth day of the first month, I was on the bank of the great river, that is, the Hiddekel.
5. And I lifted up my eyes and looked, and there was a man wearing linen clothes! And his loins were girded with gold of Uphaz,
6. his body was like beryl, and his face had the appearance of lightning, and his eyes were like flaming torches, and his arms and his feet were like burnished bronze, and the sound of his words was like the sound of a multitude.

...

⁹ The fact that the "prince of Persia" opposed Daniel's visitor did not reveal to anyone that this prince was evil. Jacob wrestled with an angel all night to prevent the angel from going where he wanted to go (Gen. 32:24–29), but no one considered Jacob evil for doing so.

12. Then he said to me, “Do not be afraid, Daniel. For from the first day you set your heart to understand and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard. And I am come because of your words.
13. But the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me for twenty-one days, but, behold, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, for I was left there, beside the kings of Persia.”

We all know that the nations of earth have governments, but the government of nations includes more than meets the eye, for there are invisible powers over them directing their course. No human prince could have delayed a divine messenger from coming to Daniel as did the “prince of the kingdom of Persia”. That prince was a powerful spiritual being who had been set over the Persian Empire by Satan, the god of this world. The spiritual prince over Persia obviously had the authority to refuse admission into his realm, where Daniel was at that time, and he used it in the case of Daniel’s heavenly visitor. Later in that chapter, the angel informed Daniel that he was leaving to do battle again with the prince of Persia, perhaps fight his way out of that prince’s territory and return to his place. He also informed Daniel that when he was gone, “the prince of Greece” would come (Dan. 10:20b).¹⁰ And lastly, he revealed to Daniel that Michael was one appointed as prince over the Jewish nation (Dan. 10:21).¹¹

Levels of Authority

In the Temptation, Jesus did not dispute Satan’s claim to have the power to appoint over the nations whomever he would because Jesus knew that God had appointed Satan to be god over this world. Jesus referred to Satan three times as ruler of the entire world (Jn. 12:31; 14:30; 16:11). He also said that Satan had angels under him (Mt. 25:41), which are the “authorities, powers, and dark world-rulers” mentioned by Paul in Ephesians 6:12. Under Satan, archangels over nations would have angels under them ruling over smaller areas, such as regions, states, counties, and towns. Jesus revealed the truth about this invisible government when he said that Satan’s kingdom was organized (Mt. 12:25–26).¹² So, there are levels of authority throughout creation, among heavenly beings as well as men; even some animal groups are known to have societal order.¹³

It is by the influence of their spirit that angels direct the course of nations, including its cities (cf. Ezek. 9:1). Influence is a reality in every sphere, and the influence of a spiritual being who has authority over area of the earth is significant and pervasive in that region. We all know by experience that our behavior can be influenced, either for good and for evil, by the spirits around us, and those spirits may be human or otherwise. The reality of influence moved Solomon to warn his son that “he who walks

¹⁰ The Greeks under Alexander the Great would later come and conquer the Persian Empire.

¹¹ Michael was an archangel, that is, he ruled over other angels within the territory assigned to him. The prince of Persia would also have had angels under him within his territory.

¹² Conflicts arise among the nations within Satan’s well-organized kingdom because mankind is rebellious and self-willed. Humans do not by nature submit to any authority, be it good or evil.

¹³ There are dukes and bishops, with archdukes and archbishops over them. Just so, there are angels with archangels over them. Moreover, rulers in a higher group have authority over all the groups below them. In an archangel’s domain, he rules over humans and animals as well as other angels, and in their domain, high-ranking humans rule over animals and plants as well as other humans. It is never the other way around. Even the highest of animals do not rule over the lowest of men, and even the highest of humans do not rule over the lowest of angels.

with wise men will also be wise, but a companion of fools will be destroyed” (Prov. 13:20). It is the same with nations. The character of a ruling angel influences the area of the earth over which he rules.

Michael Stands Alone in Satan’s Realm

At the end of Daniel’s visitation, mentioned above, the angel said, “I will tell you what is inscribed in the writing of truth, and there is not one who holds with me in these things except Michael, your prince” (Dan. 10:21). That none of the spiritual princes were standing for the truth except Michael makes perfect biblical sense. Israel has always stood alone in a world of Gentiles, and so, as the angel told Daniel, Michael stands alone for the truth in a realm of “dark world-rulers of this age, evil spirits among heavenly beings” (Eph. 6:12). In Revelation, John saw that at the close of this age, all of Satan’s spiritual princes will move their nations to unite behind Satan’s greatest servant in history in order to destroy Michael’s nation (Rev. 16:13–16; Zech. 14:2). But God will reward Michael for his faithfulness by giving him and his angels a major role in end-time events, acting, as the angel told Daniel, as “the great prince who is appointed over the children of your people” (Dan. 12:1).

We are not told many details concerning the working relationship of Michael and Satan, the god of this world under whom Michael served. We can say, however, that every other spiritual prince, many of them princes over nations far larger and more powerful than Michael’s tiny Israel, has followed Satan’s lead. But the angel who came to Daniel let him know that Michael, alone among all the world’s spiritual princes, stands firm for Israel and what is true. It seems that along the way, there must have been some situations which caused Satan to be displeased with Michael, and vice-versa, but after God gave Michael a leading role in casting Satan out of heaven, it is certain that Satan came to hate him bitterly:

Revelation 12

7. There was war in heaven, Michael and his angels warring against the Dragon, and the Dragon waging war, and his angels,
8. but the Dragon did not prevail; neither was there place found for him in heaven any longer.
9. And the great Dragon was cast out, the ancient serpent who is called the Accuser, and Satan, who deceives the whole world. He was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.

Michael still occupies his position as Israel’s prince, just as Satan, though cast out of heaven, still occupies his position as god of this world. The fact that Michael is one of the archangels ruling the nations under Satan need not cause us a theological problem. For Michael to operate within Satan’s realm does not pollute Michael any more than it pollutes God’s children to submit to human rulers, as the apostles exhorted them to do.

Peter gave the following exhortation to the saints even though, being God’s sons and daughters, they are superior to the men who rule over them in this world:

1Peter 2

13. Be subject, therefore, to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake, whether to a king, as supreme,
14. or to governors, as those sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good.
- ...
17. Honor all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king.

Paul taught the same thing:

1 Timothy 2

1. First of all, I exhort that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgiving be made for all men,
2. for kings and for all who are in authority, that we might lead a tranquil and well-ordered life in all godliness and dignity.
3. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior,

Our Dangerous Liberty

For us who belong to God, “the man, Jesus Christ” is the only mediator between us and God (1Tim. 2:5), not Satan and his angels, or men who rule the nations, for God “has delivered us from the domain of darkness and translated us into the kingdom of His beloved Son” (Col. 1:13). But the world does not understand that. So, if we do not submit ourselves to man’s government, then people without God’s life can only see us as rebels; they can think nothing else. We who are “born of God” are born as citizens of a heavenly country and are free to live according to “the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus”. We are not bound by any earthly law, but are created in Christ as sons and daughters of God, superior to every creature in heaven and earth, and whatever rules and rites they may demand. Because of Christ, even the angels that were not cast out of heaven are our servants (Heb. 1:14). Jesus said that God’s children are free even from the obligation to pay taxes to earthly governments, but, he said, for the sake of others, we should pay them:

Matthew 17

25. When Peter came into the house, Jesus anticipated him, saying, “Simon, what do you think? From whom do kings of the earth take customs or poll-tax – from their children or from others?”
26. Peter said to him, “From others.” Jesus said to him, “Well, then, the children are free.
27. But lest we be a stumbling block to them, go to the sea, cast a hook, and take the first fish that comes up, and when you’ve opened its mouth, you’ll find a stater.¹⁴ Take that and give it to them for me and you.”

Therefore, even though God’s children are superior to all human law, we are subject to the law of God, who loves mankind and does not want His family to be a stumbling-block to sinners. In Christ, we are freed to do whatever pleases God, whether to obey or disobey any law that man makes. Ours is a dangerous liberty; it can be misused. It is true that we are to “stand fast” in the extraordinary liberty we have in Christ (Gal. 5:1), but that liberty is the liberty to live so that others, seeing our lives, will speak well of our heavenly Father (Mt. 5:16). “Everything is lawful for me,” wrote Paul, “but not everything is beneficial” (1Cor. 10:23). If we abuse our liberty and live for ourselves, as some have done, we may provoke the world to speak evil of our God (cf. Rom. 2:24; 2Sam. 12:14). Paul gave this exhortation to the Galatian saints:

Galatians 5

13. You were called to liberty, brothers, only do not use that liberty as a pretext for the flesh; instead, through love, live as slaves to one another.

¹⁴ A *stater* was exactly enough to pay the temple tax for both Jesus and Peter.

14. For the entire law is summed up in one statement, namely, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

Jesus liberates us from a sinful nature so that we might love people the way God does.

No Authority but of God

Every righteous man and woman in history has submitted to the earthly authorities over them. Daniel and his three friends refused to obey Nebuchadnezzar only on rare occasions, when the king’s command contradicted God’s. They always obeyed the “higher power”, and God was highest of all. The few times they did not obey the king make for wonderful Bible stories, but Daniel and his friends did not live as rebels; they willingly bowed before the king and almost always obeyed his commands. Even Jesus acknowledged and submitted to wicked Pilate’s authority over him on this earth:

John 19

9. [Pilate] went again into the Praetorium and said to Jesus, “Where are you from?” But Jesus did not give him an answer.
10. Therefore, Pilate said to him, “You do not speak to me? Do you not understand that I have authority to crucify you, and I have authority to release you?”
- 11a. Jesus answered, “You would have no authority over me at all unless it was given to you from above.”

While on earth, Jesus, the “King of kings and Lord of lords”, submitted to earthly authorities such as Pilate because he understood that those authorities were under Satan, whom God had appointed to be god of the world. Paul was adamant that believers follow Jesus’ example and submit to earthly rulers, and he warned them that rebellion against those authorities could cost them their souls:

Romans 13

1. Let every soul be subject to the higher authorities, for there is no authority but of God; the authorities that exist are ordained by God.
2. Therefore, he who opposes the authorities is resisting the ordinance of God, and they who resist shall receive to themselves damnation.
- . . .
4. For he is the minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is a minister of God, an avenger to execute wrath upon the one who does evil.
5. Wherefore, it is necessary to be subject, not just because of wrath, but also for conscience sake.

It is important that we take to heart what Paul said about earthly authorities:

- Earthly rulers (both visible and invisible) are “higher” than God’s people as far as earthly authority is concerned.
- Earthly authorities are ordained by God.
- Whoever opposes earthly authorities opposes God, and will be damned.
- Earthly authorities are God’s ministers for the good of His people, ordained to execute His wrath on evildoers.
- One cannot have a clear conscience without submitting to earthly authorities.

Being a ruler of this earth does not make one holy, nor does it mean that a ruler belongs to God in the sense of belonging to His family. But it does mean that he is God's servant, even if he does not believe in God, for no ruling power exists except that which God has raised up. The fact that earthly rulers are sometimes very wicked does not at all negate the fact that God has ordained them to be rulers. This is seen in God's statement to Pharaoh, the wicked ruler of Egypt: "I have raised you up, to make you see my power, and so that my name is proclaimed in all the earth" (Ex. 9:16).

So then, as long as we are in this world, and as long as Satan is the god of it, we are to submit to his legitimate authority. Satan and the world-rulers under him are in their place because God put them there, and rebellion against God's order is sin. Paul plainly warned us that "for conscience sake", we must submit to the authorities who rule the earth because our God has ordained them to be in those positions. It is impossible to have fellowship with God and Christ if we do not acknowledge Satan's God-given authority and submit to it — as long as his rulers do not demand that we disobey God. For example, when the Sanhedrin commanded Peter never to preach again in Jesus' name, Peter humbly and boldly replied, "We must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:27–29; cf. 4:18–19). But then, when the Sanhedrin condemned and beat Peter, he submitted to their abuse without complaint and even rejoiced that he was counted worthy to suffer for the name of Jesus (Acts 5:40–42). Under the law of Moses, those leaders of Israel exercised secular as well as religious authority (e.g., Ex. 21:5–6, 15–17). Jesus himself acknowledged their authority, just as he did Satan's, and he told his disciples to obey them (Mt. 23:1–3), which they did, as far as the Spirit would allow them to.

To make this perfectly clear, we will add a few explanatory words to the previously read scriptures from Romans:

Romans 13

1. Let every soul [on earth] be subject to the higher authorities[, including the ones who are under Satan], for there is no authority but of God; the authorities that exist are ordained by God.
2. Therefore, he who opposes the [earthly] authority [of Satan] is resisting the ordinance of God, and they who resist will receive to themselves damnation.
- ...
4. For he [the ruler appointed by Satan] is the minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is a minister of God, an avenger to execute wrath upon the one who does evil.
5. Wherefore, it is necessary to be subject [to Satan's worldly authorities], not just because of wrath, but also for conscience sake.

According to Paul, then, when it comes to earthly governors, rebellion against them is rebellion against Satan, and rebellion against Satan's governors is rebellion against God! Peter agreed, saying that one of the ungodly qualities of foolish believers is that they "despise government" and "do not tremble when speaking evil of authorities" (2Pet. 2:10). Paul exhorted us to pray for all earthly authorities (1Tim. 2:1–2) because he knew they were ordained of God.

It is instructive to consider the archangel Michael's position. He knows that God has ordained Satan to be the god of this world, having under him angels, the spiritual princes of the nations, and he knows that God has not changed that order. Therefore, Michael still conducts his business for Israel under Satan's authority. Like wise, wise saints conduct their worldly business under the authorities God has established over the earth, obedient to them in all things — up to the point that their commands contradict the expressed will of God, of course.

Satan's Business

Saints in this covenant are not to meddle in Satan's business. They are not to "entangle" themselves in earthly political affairs or military conflicts (2Tim. 2:4). All such matters are in Satan's hands, and they were put there by God. Neither Jesus nor the apostles gave instructions to us on how to exercise earthly power because the body of Christ is not an earthly nation, as Israel was. God's Old Testament people were an earthly nation, with an earthly army, a judicial system, and other civic powers. In this covenant, however, prudent believers follow Paul's counsel to young Timothy:

2Timothy 2

3. Patiently endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.
4. No one who goes to war entangles himself in the affairs of this life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier.

Wise believers' refusal to entangle themselves in social movements or to become embroiled in political and military disputes is a major reason they are misunderstood and persecuted. Nevertheless, they do not do so because all such activity is carnal; it is "in the flesh", and it belongs not to the kingdom of God but to the kingdoms of this world. "The weapons of our warfare", said Paul, "are not fleshly. . . . For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh" (2Cor. 10:4, 3).

The Other World that Jesus Will Conquer

The world that Jesus conquered when he came the first time was the world within himself, the world of his human nature. When he returns the second time, the world that he will conquer is the world outside himself, the world that humans see, and those who in this life conquer the world of human nature will reign with Jesus over this earth for a thousand years (Rev. 20:4).

The world does not recognize God's children as the "kings and priests" they are (Rev. 5:10), but when Jesus returns to reign over this world, they be manifest, for they will reign over the world with him. I suppose that men like Paul, Daniel, and Job will be given king-like authority over large portions of the earth, for the saints will be given authority, each according to his ability (Lk. 19:12–26). Moreover, they will not only judge the world; they will also judge the angels (1Cor. 6:2–3)! May God grant us the grace to grow in the knowledge of God so that He will find us worthy to reign with Christ when that day comes!

After the thousand-year reign, God will destroy this heaven and earth (Isa. 65:17; Rev. 21:1) and provide for His children "new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells" (2Pet. 3:13). On that happy new earth, God will still ordain authorities, but it will be a government of saints reigning over other saints (Rev. 21:24), just as some saints rule over others now in the body of Christ (Heb. 13:7, 17, 24).

But for now, let's return to the Temptation.

Satan's Big Chance

Satan offered Jesus his position as god of this world, but that offer would have been made only by the will of God. Satan would never have done such a thing on his own. But what would Satan have thought God's purpose was for having him do that? To him, the only reasonable explanation would have been that the time had at last come when God would promote him to the position he had for so long desired:

Isaiah 14

13. You have said in your heart, “I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God, and I will sit on the Mountain of Assembly, on the far north side.
14. I will ascend above the heights of the clouds. I will be like the Most High.”

What other reason could there be, Satan must have thought, for God to send him to offer Jesus his position as god of this world, except that Jesus, the Messiah, was to fill a position that would soon be vacant? With that in mind, it appears that, rather than coming into the wilderness to attack Jesus, Satan came to elevate Jesus to fill Satan’s exalted position of god of this world. Satan would have been pleased to do that if Jesus’ promotion meant an even greater promotion for him. Satan would have been happy for God to exalt Jesus to take his place, so long as God exalted him to reign with Him over all creation. From that perspective, Satan is not seen as antagonistic toward Jesus during the Temptation; on the contrary, thoughts of promoting Jesus would have given him pleasure. He was, as has been mentioned, completely unaware that God was using him for the temptation of His Son.

Blind to the Father’s purpose, how proud Satan must have been to be playing a role in fulfilling the prophecies about the Messiah! How eager he must have been to see Jesus use his power to turn stones into bread, and to leap to what men would think was certain death, only to be miraculously rescued! Satan must have been very excited to show Jesus the kingdoms of earth that he was about to turn over to him. And, oh, the anticipation Satan must have felt as the moment drew near for Jesus to signify his acceptance of the position by kneeling before his new master! Satan had worked and waited a long time for this moment, and now, at last (he thought), the Dispensation of Satan was at hand!

Both God and Satan were eager to set in motion the events that were about to transpire, but for very different reasons – God, because He was about to reveal His beloved Son and to bestow upon him the greatest glory, and Satan, because of the great glory he thought God was about to bestow upon him.

Satan was thrilled. God was patient.

The Act of Bowing

Lest too much be read into Satan’s suggestion that Jesus bow to him, we should note that biblical examples abound of both righteous and unrighteous people bowing before beings other than God.¹⁵ Bowing as a sign of submission to authorities was a common cultural practice, acceptable to both God and men. So, the act of bowing before someone other than God was not in necessarily sinful. On the contrary, in many cases it would have been sinful not to bow.

It must also be remembered that Satan came to the wilderness as God’s representative, not as a sneaky rebel. Everyone involved in the Temptation — God, Jesus, and Satan — knew that in suggesting that Jesus bow to him, Satan was not expecting Jesus to bow to him *instead of God*, but to bow to him *under God* as an acknowledgment of Satan’s new position as co-regent with God. Satan would have thought that the Messiah’s stepping into the role of god of this world was the only thing lacking in God’s plan to elevate Satan to reign with Him in glory, to reign directly under God in the universal chain of

¹⁵ Some examples: Abraham bowed before angels and before some Canaanites (Gen. 18:1–2; 23:7). Both the wicked prophet Balaam and righteous Joshua bowed before angels (Num. 22:31; Josh. 5:14). Jacob and his family bowed before Esau (Gen. 33:1–7). Ruth bowed before Boaz (Ruth 2:10). David bowed before both King Saul and Saul’s son, Jonathan (1Sam. 20:41; 24:8). Mephibosheth (2Sam. 9:6–8), Joab (2Sam. 14:21–22), Absalom (2Sam. 14:33), Ahimaaz (2Sam. 18:28), and Araunah (2Sam. 24:20) bowed before David. Bathsheba bowed before her son Solomon, “and did reverence” (1Kgs. 1:16, 31), and Solomon showed respect to her by bowing to her (1Kgs. 2:19). Nathan, the great prophet, bowed to Solomon (1Kgs. 1:23), as did Solomon’s traitorous brother, Adonijah (1Kgs. 1:53).

command, for if Jesus bowed, it meant that he accepted the new position and acknowledged Satan as the higher authority. What God had in mind was different, but He was saying nothing. He was patient.

Old Testament Figures of the Son

Paul said the ancient scriptures were “written for our learning” (Rom. 15:4) and that the Old Testament provided “shadows” of New Testament events (Col. 2:16–17). One Old Testament shadow of Jesus’ refusal to bow to Satan is found in the book of Esther. Esther’s cousin and guardian, Mordecai, refused to bow before Haman, who was second to the Persian king, Ahasuerus (Esth. 3:1–5). Mordecai’s reason for refusing to bow to Haman is not given in the book of Esther, but it was a good one. He refused to bow to Haman because he knew what the Scriptures said that God thought about Haman, and since Mordecai believed what the Scriptures said God thought about Haman, Mordecai knew Haman better than Haman knew himself. Haman was an Amalekite — in the book of Esther, called an Agagite¹⁶ — and the Scriptures said that God hated the Amalekites and swore that He would fight against them in every generation until He eradicated them from the earth (Ex. 17:14–16).¹⁷ But it so provoked Haman that Mordecai would not bow to him that he determined not just to kill Mordecai, but to rid the earth of Mordecai’s whole race, the Jews:

Esther 3

5. And when Haman saw that Mordecai was not bowing or doing him obeisance, Haman was filled with wrath.
6. But it was not enough in his eyes to lay hands on Mordecai alone, (for they had denounced Mordecai’s people to him), and Haman set about to exterminate all the Jews, Mordecai’s people, throughout the whole kingdom.

For lowly Mordecai, living as a captive in far away Persia, it required great faith to believe God’s thousand-year-old promise that He would make perpetual war against the Amalekites. Yet, Mordecai had that kind of faith, and out of his faith sprang a righteous disregard for Haman which made Mordecai unwilling to bow to that very powerful, very wicked man.

The reason for the meek Son of God’s refusal to bow before Satan is not given in the Bible, but it is basically the same reason Mordecai refused to bow before Haman, that is, the Son knew what God thought about Satan. The Son, like Mordecai, was far from his homeland, yet, also like Mordecai, he had great faith in God. On the other hand, Satan, like Haman, was provoked by Jesus not bowing to him, and he, like Haman, determined exterminate all the Jews, not just Jesus (cf. Rev. 12:15–17). And so it is to this day.

It was not a rebellious spirit that kept Jesus from bowing to Satan. Twice during the Temptation, the Son of God humbled himself to allow Satan to transport him out of the wilderness to other places, just as he would later humbly allow wicked men to abuse and crucify him. Every moment, in every situation, the Son’s attention was fully given to doing his Father’s will. Jesus refused to bow before Satan for the same reason he allowed Satan to carry him places; it pleased God for him to do it. The responses of Jesus to Satan in the Temptation was foreshadowed by the faith of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, who bowed before King Nebuchadnezzar in recognition of his God-given authority, but then refused to

¹⁶ Agag was a famous king of the Amalekites (1Sam. 15:8).

¹⁷ The Amalekites were cruel and cowardly people. Every time Amalekites appear in a biblical story, they are seen abusing defenseless people (e.g., 1Sam. 30:11–13).

obey his command to bow to an idol that Nebuchadnezzar had erected (Dan. 3). Both in bowing to Nebuchadnezzar and in refusing to bow to the idol, those three young men were doing the will of God.

God used many righteous people in the Old Testament as figures of His Son, without any of them truly knowing Him. But Jesus knew God; therefore, he obeyed the powers that God had ordained over the earth. Satan, Pilate, and Israel's priests and elders had authority from God, and Jesus submitted to them all. Still, they would have been the ones bowing, had they known who Jesus was.

When Did the Son Know?

Everything the Son is, the Father was first. Everything he knows, the Father knew first. The Son freely admitted that he could do nothing without the Father (Jn. 5:19), and the concomitant to that is that the Son can *know* nothing without the Father. Everything the Son taught to men was first taught to him by God (Jn. 8:28; 12:49). Even before the Son came to earth, he confessed as much through the prophet: "My Lord, Jehovah, has given me the tongue of the learned, that I might know *how* to help the weary with a word" (Isa. 50:4a).

The Father's education of His Son continued after the Son came to earth; Jesus said so: "The Father delights in the Son, and He is showing him everything that He is doing" (Jn. 5:20). The author of Hebrews agreed that the Son was still learning while he was among us (Heb. 5:8), and of course, it would have been the One greater than the Son, the *only* One greater than the Son, who was teaching him.

The Son truly knew God, and that is true the entire time he walked among us. But we have seen that the Father conceals and reveals all truth and that until He reveals a thing, it is unknown to everyone. So, when did the Father reveal to the Son that the once-upright Satan had become wicked? We know that the Son created Satan (Jn. 1:3; Col. 1:16) and that when he created Satan, he created him perfectly upright (Ezek. 28:15). But did the Father, *the Son's sole source of knowledge*, let the Son know about the change in Satan's heart when it first happened, or at some other point before, or even after He sent him down to earth? And could there have been a real temptation if the Son knew that Satan was wicked when he met with him in the wilderness? Or would the Son have cried out through David for Satan to avenge him of Judas (Ps. 109:6) if the Son had known in David's time that Satan was wicked and would one day inspire Judas to betray him (Lk. 22:3–4)?

Admittedly, it is difficult to imagine the Son of God not knowing that Satan was wicked before he came to earth, but if the story of the Father and the Son teaches us anything, it teaches us that our assumptions are often clouded by wrong ideas and that no one in heaven or earth, including God's Son, knows anything until God reveals it.

It could certainly be that the Father revealed to the Son that Satan was wicked before He sent the Son to earth, and if He did, then in the Temptation, Jesus was following his Father's example of not letting Satan know how He saw him.¹⁸ Be that as it may, it is obvious from the preaching Jesus did after the Temptation that by then, at least, he knew very well how wicked Satan was. Perhaps the Father revealed it to him during the Temptation itself, when Satan asked Jesus to bow before him, for the Son would have known that no messenger sent from God had ever *asked* those to whom he was sent to fall down and worship him.

Men had fallen down, of course, when angels visited them (Num. 22:31; Josh. 5:14; Judg. 13:20). Ezekiel became so weak that he fell and could not stand back up, even when God told him to (Ezek.

¹⁸ In that case, Psalm 109:6 would have been a prayer of the Son for any prosecutor, not just Satan. See the discussion in Chapter 6 under TARES IN HEAVEN: Satan and the Hidden Son.

1:28–2:2), and Daniel passed out completely when Gabriel started talking to him (Dan. 8:16–18). In none of these cases, however, did the angel ask men to bow. Those men fell down because they were overcome by the angels' powerful presence. Even Balaam's donkey fell down when he saw an angel from the LORD (Num. 22:27). By way of contrast, the Son of God felt no awe in Satan's imposing presence. Terror would have seized any normal human being, but the Son of God was not human, and he has never feared or bowed to anyone except the Father, and never will.

Jesus quoted scriptures when refusing two of Satan's suggestions. However, when Satan asked him to bow down and worship him in addition to the Father, Jesus shot back a barbed, non-scriptural arrow from the quiver of the Spirit: "Get behind me, Satan!" (Lk. 4:8). Satan must have marveled at the sternness in the voice of Mary's son. As far as we know, no human had ever spoken to Satan at all, but even if someone had spoken to him, it was not like that.

Satan knew the Scriptures well, and knowing that mankind had been created lower than heavenly beings (Ps. 8:5), he saw his offer to Mary's son to be made king over the whole earth as very generous, even if Jesus was the Messiah. But the Son of God was not created lower than heavenly beings; he created the heavenly beings, including Satan. The Son was hidden now within a fleshly body instead of where he had been hidden before, but he was still the Son of God, and Satan still had no power over him whatsoever.

The Report

Immediately after the Temptation, Satan departed from Jesus "for a season" (Lk. 4:13). When he left Jesus, he no doubt returned to heaven as he had returned to heaven after being sent to earth on other missions, and when he returned from the wilderness to report to God, he must have felt the way the officers of the chief priests felt after they returned from their failed assignment to arrest Jesus. When the priests who sent the officers asked why they had returned empty-handed, the embarrassed officers could only respond, "Never has a man spoken like this man" (Jn. 7:46). Satan may have even reported to God, "This Messiah is more hardheaded than Job!" We can only imagine what the conversation in heaven was like. Supremely confident of God's favor, Satan would have had no reason to hide his displeasure at Jesus not bowing to him. God, as usual, would have kept His thoughts to Himself, and Satan, as usual, would have assumed that God felt as he did. Perhaps, Satan's report before the heavenly council contained the statement, "Jesus did not bow to me!" God's secret thought would have been, *You did not bow to my Son!*

But God was patient.

God and Satan Agree: Jesus Must Die

In the story of Esther, the Persian king asked wicked Haman, "What shall be done for the man whom the king delights to honor?" (Esth. 6:6). Haman, assuming that he was the one in whom the king delighted, suggested several rare honors, which the king gladly and quickly bestowed — upon Mordecai, whom Haman hated *because Mordecai refused to bow to him*. On occasion, as we saw in Chapter 6, God would put forth such a question to His heavenly council, and it is easy to imagine God asking Satan, "What should be done to him who refuses to bow before the one I have chosen to reign with me?" Stern creature that he is, and assuming that he was the chosen one, Satan might have suggested great suffering for that person and an eternal death of relentless, excruciating pain. If he did, God would have agreed to it, which would have filled Satan with greater pride than ever, not knowing that God had determined before the world began that all who refused to bow to His Son would be eternally damned in a "Lake of Fire" (Rev. 20:10, 14–15).

In whatever way Satan's report played out, at its end, all of heaven knew that God's will was for Jesus to die. If anything, God would have been more insistent than Satan that Jesus must die, and afterward, Satan would have congratulated himself that, once again, his thoughts and God's were alike. Was there anyone else in all of creation so much like God as he? Anyone so worthy to sit at God's right hand? Since God had never explained what He had really done to Job, Satan still thought God had proved him right about Job. And in spite of the contrary evidence, it was still widely held that God would not afflict the righteous. Even John the Baptist, as great a man of God as he was, did not expect the cruel abuse he suffered, and he even began to doubt that Jesus was the Messiah as he languished in prison, (Mt. 11:2–3).

When God sent Satan back to earth to make sure Jesus died, Satan left heaven knowing that it would please God for him to carry out the mission of killing the Messiah. God had, of course, planned from the beginning for His Son to die (Acts 4:27–28), but no one even knew that He had a Son, much less that God would send him to earth to suffer and die for sinners.

The prophets had spoken mysteriously about a righteous man who would suffer and die, and after God agreed that Jesus must die, Satan probably realized that those ancient prophecies were about Jesus. But he would have seen that truth through the prism of his own delusion, and he would have admired God again for having seen, centuries ahead of time, that the Messiah would have to die. Moreover, when God made it known to the heavenly council that the Messiah must die, it would have seemed obvious to them that God did not love Jesus as much as He had loved Job. After all, God strictly commanded Satan *not* to kill Job.

God had it all under control. The Son's death was not Satan's plan, even if God let him think it was. Satan would never have smitten God's Messiah on his own initiative, for he was still entertaining hopes of being exalted to God's right hand. And God putting Satan in charge of killing the Messiah would have been seen by the sons of God in heaven only as more evidence of the high regard in which the Almighty held that anointed cherub. It certainly would not have indicated to anyone that Satan was evil.