

Jesus, Son of Joseph, Son of God
Luke 3:21-4:13

Repeatedly in the first few chapters of the Gospel, we see Luke mulling over the notion of Jesus as both son of Mary and son of God. Now Luke returns to this theme, which unites all three portions of this section; Jesus is the son of God, (a) anointed at his baptism; (b) credentialed by his genealogy; and, (c) proven through obedience under Satanic temptation.

Day 1: Luke 3:21-22 Son of God once: Jesus, Father and Spirit

Jesus' baptism provides the occasion of his commissioning and anointing for service. The event and Luke's account tie together several OT texts and incidents of anointing. Jesus takes on all sacred roles assigned to Israel's leaders in the OT: he is a prophet like Ezekiel, commissioned by a voice from heaven, and anointed by the Spirit of the Lord (Ezek 2); he is the ideal king of Israel, the anointed one, enthroned in Zion, Son of God, ruler of all the earth (Psalm 2); he is the servant of Isaiah, beloved of God, the chosen one, imbued with Spirit (Isa 42). Jesus folds all these roles into one: authoritative prophet, righteous king, chosen servant.

Jesus is the ultimate of all Israel's God-appointed leaders and heroes, folding all their roles into his own, and fulfilling all the nation's hopes and God's promises: prophet, king, and servant. He is equally the ultimate in all that we seek of a leader, whether spiritual, political, or corporate. So we worship him, holy prophet, righteous king, chosen servant.

And in worshipping his integrity, we moderate our expectations of all human leaders, religious, spiritual or corporate. We rightly seek integrity in our leaders, and hold them to certain standards, we recognize that only Christ will not disappoint, so we put our confidence and hope in him alone.

Day 2: Luke 3:23-38 Son of God twice: Jesus and Adam

Both Matthew and Luke supply genealogies of Jesus, and Luke's distinctive features reveal his message. First, his genealogy stretches back beyond Abraham all the way to Adam: Jesus comes not only as redeemer of Israel, but as savior of the world (cf. Acts 10:34-43). Secondly, the genealogy provides a second sense in which he is son of God: he is descendant of Adam, son of God, i.e., he is human.

Thirdly, Luke's genealogy runs backwards, from Jesus, back through all his ancestors, culminating in Adam. As a result, this section is linked with the next, juxtaposing mention of Adam with the account of Jesus' temptation. By this subtle mechanism, Luke contrasts Adam and Jesus. Adam lives in idyllic Eden; Jesus is in the hostile wilderness. Adam has all fruits and plants at his disposal, bar one; Jesus fasts 40 days and is hungry. Adam is tempted by Satan, and falls into sin; Jesus is tempted by Satan, and successfully resists.

Jesus does what Adam was meant to do; Jesus succeeds where Adam failed; Jesus is the anti-Adam, bringing salvation where Adam brought corruption. The apostle Paul makes this same point, albeit more explicitly: “By the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man; how much more will those who receive God’s abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ” (Rom 5:17, cf. 5:12-21). So Jesus is son of God, in the lineage of Adam, savior of the world, by virtue of his sinless life and atoning death.

He is the son of God whom Adam was meant to – but proved not to – be. And so we worship him, holy, savior, victor over Satan.

Day 3: Luke 4:1-13 Son of God thrice: Jesus and Israel

Jesus was in the wilderness for 40 days, as Israel had been for 40 years. He ate nothing and was hungry, as Israel had been. He was tempted, as Israel had been. Yet he did not succumb to temptation, as Israel had.

Luke clearly intends – and Jesus originally realized – the parallel between Israel’s temptations and his own, because each time he rebuts the devil, he does so in words from Deuteronomy 6-8, when Israel faced crisis in the wilderness.

Two of these temptations – in Luke’s order, the first and the last – explicitly reference his identity as son of God. Israel earlier had been invited to be God’s first-born son of God (Exod 4:22-23). But she turned out to be rebellious, persistently turning from God. Now Jesus succeeds not only where Adam failed, but also where Israel failed. And so we worship him as the faithful son of God, sinless and obedient, both in life and in death.

Day 4: Luke 4:1-4 Jesus and the temptation of hunger

In Exodus 16, Israel is wandering in the wilderness, hungry nomads in a place where there was no food to forage, grumbling against Moses and against God: “If only God had killed us in Egypt, where we had pots full of meat, and all the food we wanted. But you have brought us into this wilderness to starve.” So God provided manna and quail, and with it, a test, to see whether or not they would trust him. They failed.

When Jesus is hungry in the wilderness, Satan sidles up to him: ‘Surely it is not right for the Son of God to suffer privation. Look after yourself; you can make your own food.’ Jesus refuses, recalling the words of Deuteronomy 8:2-3, and Moses’ rebuke of Israel: “Remember how the LORD your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years, to humble you and to test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands. He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD. “

Hungry, Jesus, awaited God's provision, living not by bread alone, but by the word of God. Momentary hunger, periodic fasting, or the threat of joblessness and abject poverty, all remind us that our deepest need for nourishment is supplied not by food, but by the word of God, and by relationship with God himself. So just as we eat regularly, we also spend time with God in his Word.

Day 5: Luke 4:5-8 Jesus and the temptations of power, wealth & fame

Satan next offers Jesus all the self-gratification that a human heart could ever desire: power, wealth and fame. All Jesus need do is to bow down and worship the devil.

The irony is that God himself offered the Son exactly the same thing. At Jesus' baptism, God's voice from heaven proclaimed, "This is my Son" (Luke 3:17). The words recall Psalm 2:8, where God says, "You are my Son; today I have become your Father. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession." So Jesus has to choose between two paths to the same goal: suffer crucifixion and inherit from God, or worship Satan and inherit from him.

Satan invites Jesus to stand with him against God; but Jesus is the true Son, and stands with God against Satan., quoting Deut 6:13, "Worship God and serve him alone." In so doing, he reminds us that the material things which so readily attract our attention and our devotion – power, wealth, and fame – are Satanic temptations that lure us away from God and from life.

Day 6: Luke 4:9-12 Jesus and the temptation of self-aggrandizement

The final temptation invites Jesus to revel in his own glory as the Son, beneficiary of God's promises of protection; Satan even quotes Scripture to buttress his argument (Ps 91:11,12). Of course, he quotes out of context: the promise of divine protection served only those who trust in God (Ps 91:2), and who make him their dwelling (Ps 91:9).

So Jesus returns to the experience of Israel in the wilderness, and to the lessons Israel learned through failure and judgment: "Do not test the Lord; keep his decrees and his statutes" (Deut 6:16). Deprivation and thirst had prompted grumbling against Moses, and against God (Exod 17:1-2). God provided water from a rock (Exod 17:3-6), but the incident marked their failure to trust him. Jesus, for his part, trusts where Israel doubted, and waits for God to act in his time and in his way, whatever his circumstance or need. So should we.

Conclusion

How do Jesus' temptations apply to us?

The point might seem obvious: Jesus models for us how to overcome temptation: be filled with the Spirit; meet temptation with Scripture; stand firm against Satan and he will leave, defeated, at least for a while.

Not so fast! For one thing, two of these temptations – the first and last, forming bookends around the account – are unique to his role as Son of God. Second, no one else in the remainder of the New Testament is recorded as having a similar face-to-face encounter with Satan. Third, and most important, our need is not for an example.

Sure, Jesus is an excellent example in all the ways suggested above. And faced with temptation, we do well to follow his example: seek always to be filled with the Spirit; quote Scripture; resist the devil and he will flee (temporarily). But here's the rub: we are constitutionally incapable of following his example! We do not need an example. What we need is transformation.

Happily, Paul tells us in Romans, this is exactly how Jesus helps. He not only died for us, but we died in him; moreover, we rise with him to new life. "Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. ... The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires" (Rom 6:8-12).

So this is what Jesus provides: not simply an example of how to overcome temptation, but, in union with him, a death to sin, and a resurrection to holiness. This inner transformation – and not simply an external example – enables us to overcome temptation, and to live for God.

At least, in part. Still, even with this inner transformation, we stumble and fall. At such times, we take heart from two other implications of Jesus' temptation, both underscored in the book of Hebrews.

For one, because he directly experienced temptation, he is sympathetic to us when we fall: "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are.... Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need" (Heb 4:15-16). Confidence in Jesus' sympathy, born of his own experience of temptation, emboldens us to approach God's throne for forgiveness when we sin.

For the other, because Jesus successfully resisted temptation, he is able to atone for us when we fall. "The blood of Christ, who ... offered himself unblemished to God, [will] cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!" (Heb 9:14).