The Bible and Bread

Context, Themes, and Word Study

The Devil Quotes Scripture

2026 Week 8

God of light and love, give us, we pray, the grace and gifts that are your will for us today.

Help us to hear and understand your holy word; to be aware of our own reactions and emotions; to be sensitive to one another's stories, and receptive to one another's insights.

May our study of your word lead us into ever deeper gratitude for all your gifts, awareness of the communion of saints, and relationship with your Word, Jesus Christ.

Amen.

Context, Context, Context…js

Scripture can be used both for good and for ill. It is perfectly possible to pick out accurate quotations from the Bible and utilise them for unhealthy and destructive purposes, as the character of the tempter does…

Threlfall-Holmes, Miranda. How to Read the Bible: 21 Ways to Enjoy and Understand Scripture (p. 58). John Murray Press. Kindle Edition.

William B. Lawrence

Lent: A Time to Confess the Deceptions of Evil

https://charlesdavidson.substack.com/p/lent-a-time-to-confess-the-deceptions?utm_source=post-email-title&publication_id=2803132&post_id=187872148&utm_campaign=email-post-title&isFreemail=true&r=3clasf&triedRedirect=true&utm_medium=email

A Sunday School teacher once told me that in order to "live" we have to reverse "evil," and in order to do that we must not "veil" the "vile."

"*Do you accept the freedom and power God gives you to resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves?*" ["Renunciation of Sin and Profession of Faith" in Baptismal Covenant I, The United Methodist Hymnal (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1989), p. 34]

But making such promises does not preclude being tempted to veil the vile. Indeed, as the Bible shows, evil is so deceptively alluring it is adorned to look good—even if it is not adored.

Two of the assigned lectionary texts for the first Sunday in Lent come from early chapters in the beginning books of both biblical testaments. They are classic tales of deceit.

In Genesis, a tempter admits—but **distorts**—the truth about God's gift of creation. Humans embrace the distortion. Then, they try to veil the vile thing by deflecting their guilt and by denying any responsibility for the evil in it.

~ William B. Lawrence

In these texts there is no effort by the tempter in either story to deny the power of God. To the contrary, the tempter in Genesis accepts that God created the great garden, and the tempter in Matthew affirms that Jesus is the son of God. Neither disputes the power of God—just distorts it.

The tools of temptation include **deceit, distraction,** and **disinformation**. They mislead and misinform. They are subtle and sinister. They **divert** us from power granted by the grace of God and **direct** us to a **disguised** version of power that might be much more to our liking and might hide us from accountability for any awful outcomes of yielding to the tempter.

~ William B. Lawrence

Genesis 3:1-7

Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God say, ‘You shall not eat from any tree in the garden’?” 2 The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, 3 but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die.’ ” 4 But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not die, 5 for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” 6 So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food and that it was a delight to the eyes and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate. 7 Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked, and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves.

Matthew 4:1-11

4 Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tested by the devil. 2 He fasted forty days and forty nights, and
afterward he was famished. 3 The tempter came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become
loaves of bread.” 4 But he answered, “It is written,

‘One does not live by bread alone,
    but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’ ”

5 **Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, 6 saying 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 dash your foot against a stone.’ ”

7 Jesus said to him, “Again it is written, ‘Do 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 I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.” 10 Then Jesus said to him, “Away with you, Satan! for it is
written,

‘Worship the Lord your God,
    and serve only him.’ ”

11 Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.

In Matthew, a tempter (the devil, διαβόλου, or *diabolou*) **admits** that Jesus is the son of God but **distorts** his mission with **deceptions**—some magic to feed hunger, a spectacular leap in sacred space, or a quick way to gain governing authority.

~ **William B. Lawrence**

Matthew 4:6: *'He will command his angels concerning you,'*
and 'On their hands they will bear you up,
so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.' ~ the tempter quoting Psalm 91:11-12

…notice about the devil's use of Scripture here is that what is quoted is both accurate and true. It's quite common to hear it said that the devil lies, or the devil twists Scripture for his uses. But that's not what's going on here. The psalm quoted (Psalm 91) is a beautiful poem about the assurance of God's protection, and it is accurately quoted. It's not that the tempter has taken a quotation out of context or twisted it to mean the opposite of what it really says. **The point is that we can tie ourselves up in knots so easily if we allow ourselves to be drawn into the game of playing one piece of the Bible off against another.** Which has priority? If the texts contradict each other, which is right? Effectively, **the temptation is for Jesus to say 'The Bible says it, so I believe it' and to be drawn into dramatic, self-destructive action to prove – to himself or to others – that he really does believe it.** And again, Jesus refers back to the Exodus narrative, part of the theological bedrock of his faith. Believing this, his identity is secure, and he has no need to demonstrate it, to himself or to anyone else who might be watching.

Threlfall-Holmes, Miranda. How to Read the Bible: 21 Ways to Enjoy and Understand Scripture (p. 60). John Murray Press. Kindle Edition.

First, don't waste time arguing about the accuracy or truth of a scriptural reference.

Second, use your common sense.

Third, be alert to any sentence that runs 'If … then …'!

[Fourth], know where you stand.

Jesus has just spent a long silent retreat in the wilderness at this point. This hasn't made him more vulnerable to temptation. On the contrary, it has made him better able to withstand it because he is immersed in his faith and sure of his roots. Spend time reading the Bible. Go on retreats. Pray. Be part of a church community. So that when the demons of self-doubt come whispering – as I can almost guarantee they will – you have the bedrock of your inheritance of faith on which to stand firm.

Threlfall-Holmes, Miranda. How to Read the Bible: 21 Ways to Enjoy and Understand Scripture (p. 61-62). John Murray Press. Kindle Edition.