TEMPTATIONS

Then the devil took him to the holy city and set him on the pinnacle (πτερύγιον – pter-oog-ee-on) of the temple
Matthew 4:5

Note that Matthew once again begins another section while connecting it to the former section with the word *"then."*

Also, Matthew shifts here from the designation of *"tempter"* to its counterpart the *"devil."*

The location of course refers to the 2nd temple of Zerubbabel in Jerusalem. The sages taught and those in rabbinic tradition expected the Messiah to appear on the roof of the temple.

Our sages taught that when the King, the Messiah will appear, he will stand on the roof of the Temple. He will make Israel hear and say to them, 'What shall we do?' Humble ones, the time of your redemption has come.
Pesikta Rabbati, Piska 36

What does Matthew mean by *"the pinnacle of the temple?"*

Some believe it refers to the southeast corner of the temple where it looms directly over a cliff some 450 feet high.
Some suggest the roof of the temple or a projection of the roof.
Still others see it as a reference to the lintel of the temple's high gate, or a tower in the temple courts.

The word *pinnacle* in Greek is *πτερύγιον – pter-oog-ee-on* is an unusual word. If Matthew meant some superstructure of a temple gate or lintel, there are other words to better describe that.

Therefore, we should give deeper consideration to his use of the word *pinnacle* for it may reveal to us a greater theological significance in this second temptation.

The word does not mean the highest point such as the apex of a building. Rather it means *winglet* as in a pointed extremity such as the wing of a bird or the fin of a fish.

Matthew could be piecing Old Testament theology into this scene, using a word that conveys the idea of safety in God. What makes this idea plausible is that the Psalm from where Matthew could be using this concept of safety will be quoted in the next verse.

He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say to the LORD, "My refuge and my Fortress, my God, in whom I trust. He will cover you with his pinions (feathers), and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness is a shield and a buckler.
Psalm 91:1-2, 4

This makes even more sense when we understand that the temple wasn't chosen here as the scene of a public spectacle. Indeed, the temple always served as the location of a place synonymous with divine protection.

Hegisippus (Jewish convert to Christ, 110-180AD) gives an account of the brother of Jesus named James who was martyred with the exact language Matthew uses in the temple temptation.

> *In the seventh book of the same Hypotyposeis, Clement also speaks concerning James as follows: "The Lord after His resurrection delivered knowledge to James the Just and to John and Peter; these delivered it to the rest of the apostles, and the rest of the apostles to the seventy, of whom one was Barnabas. But there are two Jameses: one called the Just, who was thrown <u>from the pinnacle of the temple</u> and beaten to death with a club by a fuller, and another who was beheaded.*
> *Eusebius, H.E. 2.23.11*

> *and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written, "He will give his angels charge concerning you, on their hand they will bear you up. Lest you strike your foot against a stone."*
> *Matthew 4:6*

Once again, the tempter introduces a temptation with the phrase *If you are the Son of God.* Doubt is the lever of temptation.

In the first temptation, Jesus is tempted to provide food for himself – to save himself by exercising his messianic power. Here, by contrast, he is told to place himself in mortal danger and thus force God to save him.

What might not be apparent is that this test involves a jump to safety, not to destruction. As already stated by the use of Psalm 91, the text speaks of refuge in God, not harm.

> *no evil shall be allowed to befall you, no plague come near your tent. For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways. On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.*
> *Psalm 91:10-11*

If God's word stands, then by jumping, Jesus would have avoided harm. By refusing to jump, he chose the path of continuing danger and hardship.

Again, Jesus is called upon not to capitalize or exercise his power as the Son of God, but to yield in obedience to the Father and to trust in his will for his mission.

for it is written

Note that in this temptation the devil uses the same introductory formula Jesus used to rebuke his first temptation.

That the devil quotes Scripture here is paradoxical but in no way is Matthew implying that he is on par with the knowledge of Jesus in this matter. In fact, the command for Jesus to throw himself down wouldn't make sense without the devil's use of Psalm 91.

> *To see the scriptural warrant is to set forth the justification that could be legitimately claimed by Jesus for jumping to safety, and accordingly to sharpen the struggle that goes on within him.*
> *Hagner – Matthew, page 67*

Though there is not explicit messianic language in Psalm 91, there are those who believe it to be a psalm depicting the security found only within the refuge of being in allegiance with Yahweh. That the conflict within the psalm refers to a spiritual battle – ultimately between the Messianic Son and his adversaries – could be given validity by its inclusion here in the conflict between Jesus and the devil in Matthew's temptation narrative.

> *According to some commentators, <u>the shelter of the Most High</u> (Psalm 91:1) is the Temple, and the psalm was part of the liturgy for entering or departing from the Temple.*
> *Commentary from JPS Tanakh Translation*

Jesus could throw himself down and claim his faithfulness in that he trusts in the words of God found in the Psalm. This, however, would be presumptuous and by that presumption, put God to the test.

> *No one psalm is a compendium of all theological truth, however, and balancing passages make it clear that many times the righteous do suffer. At any rate, even within the context of the psalm's worldview, there is no justification for provoking God by deliberately putting oneself in harm's way, demanding that he come to rescue.*
> *Craig Blomberg - Commentary on the New Testament use of the Old Testament, page 16*

The message of the psalm is that God protects the faithful.

The reference to angels giving protection is used by Matthew to anticipate the statement Jesus later makes at the time of his arrest.

> *"Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more that twelve thousand legions of angels?"*
> *Matthew 26:53*

What Matthew is directing us to understand here is that this is a test of obedience and trust.

One other thing to note in this temptation narrative is its lack of messianic witnesses. This is a conflict between Jesus and the tempter alone. Matthew makes no mention of anyone else involved as a witness to this wilderness scene.

Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, you shall not put the Lord your God to the test.
Matthew 4:7

With this phrasing of *"Again it is written,"* Jesus stresses the importance of Scripture.

"You shall not put the LORD your God to the test, as you tested him at Massah.
Deuteronomy 6:16

Therefore the people quarreled with Moses and said, "Give us water to drink." And Moses said to them, "Why do you test the LORD?" And he called the name of the place Massah and Meribah, because of the quarreling of the people of Israel, and because they tested the LORD by saying, "Is the LORD among us or not?"
Exodus 17:2, 7

Massah means *testing* and in the wilderness, Israel failed in disobedience and put God to the test. Where Israel failed, however, the Son is obedient.

The people of Israel put God to the test in the sense that they reserved their trust in him until he had demonstrated his power. Devastating Egypt, parting the Red Sea, making sweet the bitter water, and raining bread from heaven was not enough to win their trust. *"Prove yourself!"*

Jesus asserts that he will not tempt God on this or any other issue. At stake here again, is Jesus' implicit trust in and obedience to his Father.

To throw himself from the temple, would be to act in his own self-interest. God has a road of sorrow for him to walk, and he must walk it in suffering, sorrow – *and obedience.*

Suffering, not safety, is God will for the life of the Son until that suffering is fulfilled.

The Son trusts the Father's will and the Father's provision in that will, even if that will involves the risk of his life.

"Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more that twelve thousand legions of angels?"
Matthew 26:53

Even here, on the night of his arrest, this same temptation presents itself to Jesus and the result is the same: he will trust in the refuge and safety of the Father as Psalm 91 proclaims.

The Son thus proves that he loves God with all of his life (or soul).

You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all of your might.
Deuteronomy 6:5

Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory.
Matthew 4:8

Matthew's wording is orderly, here echoing the same phrasing found in v.5.

The language here might not need be taken literally since no mountain can afford one a view of every kingdom of the world – much less a view of every kingdom in a moment of time as Luke states.

The reference, however, does have literal associations since Moses was commanded to go to the top of Mount Pisgah. From there he was to survey the Promised Land and to look in every direction which the rabbi's took symbolically to mean survey the world.

Go up to the top of Pisgah and lift up your eyes westward and northward and southward and eastward, and look at it with your eyes, for you shall not go over this Jordan.
Deuteronomy 3:27

What Matthew may be connecting for us in the third temptation of Jesus on a high mountain and the Exodus account in Deuteronomy with Moses on Pisgah, is the temptation of the riches of the world.

The whole commandment that I command you today you shall be careful to do, that you may live and multiply, and go in and possess the land that the LORD your God swore to give to your fathers. And you shall remember the whole way that the LORD your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not. You shall remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth, that he may confirm his covenant that he swore to your fathers, as it is this day.
Deuteronomy 8:1-2, 18

Moses warns the people not to be tempted by the riches of Canaan, for it is God who gives wealth.

Another context for Matthew's use of a high mountain could be that mountains are often associated with idolatry.

You shall surely destroy all the places where the nations whom you shall dispossess served their gods, on the high mountains and on the hills and under every green tree.
Deuteronomy 12:2

Only from the top of the high mountain does the devil tempt Jesus with worldly glory.

The phrase *"all the kingdoms of the world and their glory"* would imply *"this world and its wealth."*

> *And he said to him, "All of these will I give you, if you will fall down and worship me."*
> *Matthew 4:9*

Unlike the past two temptations where the devil gave an imperative command, here he gives a promise. This is important because it requires a reciprocal action on Jesus' part to obtain the promise.

The devil's promise is of course, a parody since God has already promised the messianic king the earth as a possession.

> *Ask of me, and I will make the nations' your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession.*
> *Psalm 2:8*

> *May he have dominion from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth.*
> *Psalm 72:8*

> *Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven saying, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever.*
> *Revelation 11:15*

Again, the devil tries to detour Jesus away from the will of the Father. Again, the temptation is something within the rights of the Son to possess. The problem is that to acquire what is rightfully his outside the will of the Father's plan, timing, and purpose is idolatry.

Ironically, the devil tempts Jesus with what the Magi had already acknowledged him to have.

> *And going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshipped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh.*
> *Matthew 2:11*

> *As in the very first account of testing, failed by Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:1-7), the question centers on a choice between the will of Satan, or the will of God, which involves implicitly the rendering of worship to the one or the other.*
> *Hagner – Matthew, page 68*

What is at stake here is the fundamental issue addressed within the first commandment not to set before oneself any other God (Deuteronomy 5:6-7).

Then Jesus said to him, "Be gone, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.'"
Matthew 4:10

The response of Jesus is direct. Only here does he respond with a command. Matthew will use this similar phrasing as a command later in his narrative.

But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a hinderance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man."
Matthew 16:23

Satan has tried in vain to tempt Jesus. The command Jesus gives reveals his victory and his authority.

Again, Jesus responds with a text of Scripture.

It is the LORD your God you shall fear. Him you shall serve and by his name you shall swear.
Deuteronomy 6:13

Jesus thus employs a verse of Scripture that addresses the issue right at the heart. We may also note that when Jesus refused the world and all its wealth, he demonstrated that he loved God with all his might (wealth) and so perfectly fulfilled the commandment of Deuteronomy 6:5, in its third and final component as in the first two. Again Jesus succeeds where Israel failed (Exodus 32 – Golden Calf). What Jesus declines to exploit on the mount of temptation, his messianic power and authority, he proclaims as his on the mount of commission at the end of the Gospel.
Hagner – Matthew, page 69

Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me."
Matthew 28:18

Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and were ministering to him.
Matthew 4:11

As you can see, Matthew once again begins a verse with the word *"then."*

Luke most likely adds to this wording *"Then the devil left him <u>until an opportune time</u>"* rather than Matthew omitting these words.

That angels came and ministered to him has a Jewish background and is more than being seen as ministering to his physical needs.

The angels call special attention for the sake of the reader to the person of the obedient Son.

And again, where he brings the firstborn into the world, he says, "Let all God's angels worship him."
Hebrews 1:6

This verse then is truly symbolic as to the true identity of the Son.

"Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more that twelve thousand legions of angels?"
Matthew 26:53

That God's angels ministered to him also underscores God's faithfulness to the obedient.

Just as the baptism of Jesus represents an identification with the people of God, so also does the narrative of the testing of Jesus. After the baptism, Jesus is called to be obedient to the will of the Father under pressure of severe testing and at the cost of self-denial.

In this pericope we encounter a theme that is vital in the theology of the Gospels. The goal of obedience to the Father is accomplished, not by triumphant self-assertion, not by the exercise of power and authority, but paradoxically by the way of humility, service, and suffering. Therein lies true greatness.

"It shall not be so among you. But whoever is great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."
Matthew 20:26-28

In fulfilling his commission by obedience to the will of the Father, Jesus demonstrates the rightness of the great commandment (Deuteronomy 6:5) as well as his own submission to it. In his faithful adherence to the teaching of the law, he reveals the fundamental consistency of his own teaching and ministry with the law rightly understood and serves as a paradigm of conduct for the early church.
Hagner – Matthew, page 70

Israel lusted after bread and grumbled against the Lord - *turn these stones to bread.*
Israel tested Yahweh at Massah - *he will give his angels charge concerning you . . . lest you strike your foot against a stone.*
Israel turned to worship in idolatry with the calf – *you shall worship the Lord your God.*

Jesus trusts God for his bread.
Jesus refuses to test God. *All these accomplished without supernatural help.*
Jesus does not succumb to idolatry.

Jesus is the True Israel, reversing the sins of the first, foreshadowing Israel.