

4 Then Yeshua was led by the spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the accuser.² After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry.³ The tempter approached him and said, If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.⁴ Yeshua answered, It is written: Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God. [Deut 8:3]

textual variants

4:1 by the accuser - That is Satan. Satan in Hebrew literally means: opponent, someone who resists you, if by words, then it also means 'accuser'. In a judicial context 'Satan' means prosecutor. His job as a prosecutor can be seen in the book of Yov, or in Zechariah 3:1. The midrash also says: "On the day of Atonement Satan comes to accuse Israel enumerating their sins" (*Pesiqta Rabbati 185b*). The Greek manuscripts use the word "diabolos" (διάβολος), which comes from 'diaballo' (to accuse someone, to slander), so, although in common Christian translations 'diabolos' turned into 'the Devil', the word is just a close translation for 'Satan'. While the Hebrew manuscripts use 'haSatan' (השטן), the Peshitta uses a word that can also be rendered as 'the accuser', or 'the adversary' (Akhelqartza אכלקרטצה).

commentary

4:2 fasting forty days - Immediately after being immersed by Yohanan, he went to fast for 40 days. The number forty corresponds to the letter 'Mem' מ which symbolizes water (mayim מים). The 'Forty' is especially connected to a spiritual rebirth. It takes, normally, forty days from conception to the initial formation of the fetus, and forty are also the weeks of pregnancy. So there's no wonder that the new world came after a 40 days great flood. In Hallakha, the minimum quantity required for a proper immersion is of 40 se'ah of water (*Eiruvim 4b*). In the same manner Israel had to pay their rebellion with 40 years of wandering in the desert, as they also had 40 days of repentance for the sin of the Golden Calf. Moses himself received the highest revelation in human history, the revelation of the Torah, after three periods of 40 days and 40 nights "in heaven", as the Midrash says, without eating bread or drinking water (*Ex 24:18, 34:28, Deut 9:18*).

4:3 the tempter approached him - The Tempter (hamnaseh המנסה), refers to the Yetzer haRa, the Evil Inclination, which pressures us to commit transgression - thus being a "Tempter of immorality" (Yitzra d'Aveirah איצרה דעבירה) (*Yoma 68b*). The Yetzer haRa dwells side by side with the good Inclination (Yetzer haTov) within each one of us. It's human nature. Yeshua had been 40 days in the realm of holiness, but after the 40 days he came back to the world, his body was weakened, hungry, and his evil tendencies approached. The work of the 'Yetzer haRa' is to tempt us, to look for ways to make us stumble, but its Divine goal is to push human beings towards higher moral achievements. If we fall into temptation the mission actually fails. But its power is great, as our sages say: "A persons' Evil Impulse overpowers him every day and wishes to destroy him, and were it not for God's help, he would not be able to fight it" (*Sukka 52b*). The tempter and the accuser are synonymous. This is, as our sages say, "Satan, the Evil Inclination, and the Angel of Death are the same" (*Bava Bathra 16a*). The Tanna explains: "Satan descends and seduces [that is, the Yetzer haRa], then ascends to Heaven and awakens wrath [that is, the accuser], and then he is given permission to take away the soul [that is, the Angel of Death]" (*ibid*).

4:3 If you are the son of God - You've been living a righteous life - for the midrash says, "Listen to your Father who is in Heaven, for he deals with you as an only son if you obey him" (*Pesiqta Rabbati 132b*) - and you've been immersed by Yohanan, and you both have had a mystical experience in which you received Messiah's soul, who is also called the Son - for the midrash says: "God calls the Messiah 'My son' [*Psalms 2:7*] and [in relation to this] he calls Israel 'my daughter'" (*Shemot Rabbah 52:4*). So now prove it to me. Use God's powers to get you some bread. You know how to do it, you can do it, and it's been 40 days since you didn't eat anything, so go ahead. That's basically what was running in Yeshua's head.

4:3 tell these stones to become bread - Notice this, there was no one with Yeshua when this incident happened. The only way they could record this is if he told someone, and he usually made use of metaphorical language. So here we have a situation that should be familiar to everyone of us, when we are alone and feel the temptation to do things, sometimes little things that are not a sin per se, but when we do them these things lead us to do something even worse and worse until we finally sin. This is precisely what happens with the stones into bread. Is it a sin to feed yourself? Not really, but what if this small thing of using the power of creation (maasei Bereshith) to feed yourself leads you to act only to satisfy your personal desires and then to go against Heaven's will, ending in a grave sin? Our sages say "Sanctify yourself by abstaining from things that are permitted to you" [so that you won't fall into what is not permitted] (*Yevamot 20a*). [We will take a different approach of this on verses 4:7 and 4:9]

4:4 Man does not live on bread alone - The entire verse talks of Israel's hunger in the desert "And he afflicted you and let you go hungry, and then fed you with manna, which you didn't know... so that he would make you know that man does not live on bread alone... etc" (*Deut 6:3*).

⁵Then the accuser took him to the Holy City and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. ⁶He said, If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down. For it is written: He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone. [Psalm 91:11-12] ⁷Yeshua answered him, It is also written: Do not put the Lord your God to the test. [Deut 6:16]

⁸Again, the accuser took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. ⁹He said, All this I will give you if you bow down and prostrate before me. ¹⁰Yeshua said to him, Away from me, Satan! For it is written: The Lord your God you shall venerate, and him alone you shall serve. [Deut 6:13]

—commentary—

4:5 took him to the Holy City - That is, according to the Aggadic language that Yeshua used to tell the story to whoever wrote it down. In our world it might be expressed as a vision, or an hallucination, or just a thought that passed through his mind. The text makes clear he was all the time in the wilderness.

4:6 throw yourself down - The Yetzer haRa brings to Yeshua's memory the Psalm 91, which is precisely a Psalm of protection. It is a pivotal psalm recited in many different contexts [for example, before sleep]. The Targum Tehillim and Rashi explain that this Psalm speaks of protection from demons and other negative forces to those who live in obedience. In other words, you are a righteous person, in fact you are the Son of God, so why not jump from the Temple and prove that the angels are going to protect you like the Psalm says?

4:7 Do not put the Lord your God to the test - The imagery used in the story is quite telling. Yeshua throwing himself down from the highest point of the Temple? Every righteous person is tempted on this way. The Yetzer tells him to abandon - i.e. to throw himself from - his service with HaShem, and he is given every Biblical reason to believe that everything is going to be ok after that. The verse: "so that you will not strike your foot against a stone" is rendered in the Targum Tehillim as "so that you will not stumble against the Evil Inclination, which is likened to stones at your feet" (*Targum Tehillim 91:12*) - that is, the same stones that he wanted to turn into bread; i.e. the selfish desires. The angels protect those who do God's will, to help them fight the Yetzer haRa, they don't protect those who put themselves in unnecessary trouble only to see if God is there or not. This is why it is latter written that angels came and served him. Yeshua endures the temptation by recalling the verse that says: "Do not put the Lord your God to the test as you tried him in Massah" (*Deut 6:16*), when they tested him concerning water and asked: is the Lord among us or not? (*Ex 17:7*). "Massah" מַסָּה means 'test'.

4:9 All this I will give you if you bow down and prostrate before me - The three temptations, in the way that are offered by this author, represent temptations that we all experience when immersed in Divine service. First we want to use our divine service to benefit ourselves with little things, then we throw ourselves down from the Divine Service thinking that everything is going to be fine, we start to question God's existence, and end up in a complete lust for materiality and human glory, which is idolatry. "He who exploits the crown (of Torah) perishes" (*Avot 1:13*). If we obey our Yetzer haRa in little things, it will continue commanding, until we obey also in bigger things, to the point that it manifests itself as a foreign god. It is therefore taught by our sages about the Yetzer haRa: "Today, he says to man: Do this, and tomorrow he tells him: Do that, until he bids him, Go and serve idols, and he goes and serves them. Rabbi Abin said: which verse [teaches this]? (*Psalm 81:10*) 'There shall no strange god be in you, neither shall you prostrate to any foreign god'. Who is this strange god that resides in man himself? That is the Yetzer haRa" (*Shabbat 105b*).

4:10 The Lord your God you shall venerate, and him alone you shall serve - Here Yeshua is rephrasing Deuteronomy 6:13, which literally says: "HaShem your God you shall fear, and him you shall serve, and [then] swear by his name". The very next verse says: "Do not go after other gods" (*6:14*) and immediately before: "Beware, lest you forget HaShem" (*6:12*). So, contextually, it is accurate to interpret here "Him alone you shall serve" (which by the way is an interpretation also used in the LXX). However, the first part of the verse as interpreted by Yeshua is not found in Targumim and might be his personal take on it, "The Lord your God you shall venerate" - in Aramaic: 'Maria Alahakh tisgod'. 'Saged' סָגַד means to bow down or to venerate, a pagan sanctuary is called "Bet segda". The Hebrew for "serving" (Avod) is often what Jews render as "worship", since the way we worship HaShem is by our obedience, but the author chose instead to translate the word: "Fear, Awe" (yare יָרָא) as veneration. 'Yare' is fear, awe or reverence. The "Fear of HaShem is the beginning of Wisdom" (*Psalm 111:10*). Fear of HaShem is what keeps you holy in situations where no one else is watching. If you could do anything you want and none would ever know, would you do it? And would it be a good thing? Fear of HaShem is the real veneration: "The Blessed Holy One created the world only that humans should fear/revere/venerate God, for it is said (*Ecc1 3:14*), and God has done it, that humans should fear God" (*Shabbat 31b*).

¹¹Then the accuser left him, and angels came and attended him.

¹²When Yeshua heard that Yohanán had been put in prison, he withdrew to Galilee. ¹³Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Kefar-Nahum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naftali— ¹⁴to fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah: ¹⁵Land of Zebulun and land of Naftali, the way of the Sea, beyond the Yarden, Galilee of the gentiles— ¹⁶the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.

¹⁷From that time on Yeshua began to preach: Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near. ¹⁸As Yeshua was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Shimon called Keifa and his brother Andreos. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. ¹⁹Yeshua said, Come after me, and I will make you to be become fishers of men. ²⁰They immediately left their nets and followed him.

²¹Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, Yaqov bar Zabdai and his brother Yohanán. They were in a boat with Zabdai their father, mending their nets, and he called them. ²²Immediately, they left the boat and their father and followed him.

²³Yeshua went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the tidings of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people. ²⁴News about him spread all over Syria, and people brought to him all who were ill with various diseases, and those suffering severe pain, and demoniacs, and lunatics, and paralyzed; and he healed them. ²⁵Large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and the region across the Yarden followed him.

commentary

4:14 what was said through the prophet - The verses from Isaiah that are used in this pesher can be interpreted in various different ways, but it is unquestionable that the text, in its direct meaning, speaks of Israel's exile. There are different ways to interpret the phrase: "ve'Akharon hikhbid" which our text drops out of the verse. In the Hebrew it says: "Ka'eit haRishon heiql artzah Zebulun veArtza Naftali, ve'Akharon hikhbid derekh haYam" **כעת הראשון הקל ארצה** זבלון וארצה נפתלי והאחרון הכביד דרך הים. Following Rashi it means: "like the first time, he dealt mildly on the land of Zebulun and the land of Naftali, and the last one he dealt harshly by the way of the sea". Rashi says the word "hikhbid" **הכביד**, can come from 'kavad' **כבד** to be heavy or harsh. The Targum also takes it this way and interprets: "in the former time the people of Zebulun and the people of Naftali have gone into exile, but a strong king will exile what remains of them" (*Targum Isaiah 8:23 [9:1]*). But let's forget for a moment the direct meaning of the text and try to understand the pesher that begs to be developed here. The author takes from the first verse only the locations, where the first exile took place; he's not quoting the text verbatim, he's not telling the story of the exile. In fact he's joining two different verses that in Scripture go one after another, in order to reveal a new meaning into it. So we could interpret that verse in the following sense: "In the beginning he abated (**הקל**) the lands of Zebulun and Naftali, **והאחרון הכביד** but afterward he will honor [from **כבד**] the way of the Sea, across the Yarden, Galilee of the gentiles". We connect the next verse: "the people walking in darkness have seen a great light". Which people is walking in darkness? in our interpretation, these are those in Galil haGoyim, in Galilee of the gentiles, who walk - i.e. live - far from the Torah, which is a "lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path" (*Psalms 119:105*), as it is written: "the way of the wicked is as darkness" (*Prov 4:19*). Galilee is precisely where our tradition says the Messiah is first to be manifested: "Messiah... shall reveal himself in the land of Galilee; for in this part of the Holy Land the desolation first began, and therefore he will manifest himself there first" (*Zohar 2:7b*).

4:23 healing every disease - He's repairing the kingdom. Sin weakens the Kingdom and empowers the Other Side. In this status, the masses are filled with all kinds of illness, which is the secret in the verse: "If he commit iniquity I will chasten him... with the plagues of the sons of man" (*2Sam 7:14; cf. Zohar I, 47b*). Sin creates demons, as the midrash says, during the 130 years that Adam was cursed he created innumerable spirits and demons (*Bereshit Rabbah 24:6, Eiruvim 18b*).

4:24 Large crowds - His first disciples as well as many in the crowd were common people, even sinners. In the words of Rabbi Schochet: "The Tzaddiq... will seek out the wicked and sinful to move them to teshuvah. ... His charity, therefore, includes not only help for the materially poor and needy, but also the highest form of charity: the spiritual charity of making the wicked meritorious" (*Schochet, Chassidic Dimensions - Vol. 3, p. 93*).