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Christ's Sonship as The Test for the Salvation Of Mankind (Luke 4:1-13)

Thesis: Luke's "sonship" *leitmotif* emphasizes how, as the second Adam and true Israel, Christ overcame the devil's challenges by submitting to His Father in contrast to the failure of Adam and the people of Israel in the wilderness.

- I. The significance of the "sonship" leitmotif becomes evident through the context in which Luke places the temptations of Jesus.
 - A. Christ's affirmation as beloved son and empowerment of the Holy Spirit at his baptism as a first sign.
 - B. Luke's genealogy emphasizes the significance of "sonship"
 - C. The temptations as a "bridge scene" connecting baptism with Jesus public ministry.
- II. Christ's solidarity with humanity made manifest through the connection of the temptation with Adam's fall and Israel's testing in the wilderness.
 - A. Luke builds a connection to Adam's fall through genealogy and similarity of temptation
 - B. Luke deliberately draws multiple connections, reminding the reader of the tests of Israel in the wilderness.
 - C. Where Adam and Israel failed, Christ as the New Adam and true Israel overcomes and so recapitulates by submission to the Father, therewith inviting humanity into Sonship.
- III. The temptations challenge Christ's relationship to the Father through autonomy rather than submission, revealing the devil's assault on His identity and mission.
 - A. Self-Provision: The first temptation tests Jesus' trust in the Father's provision as His Son
 - B. Self-promotion: The second temptation reveals the enemies plan to subvert Christ's mission by providing what seems to be a "short-cut" to it
 - C. Putting God to the test: The last temptation puts into question the Father's protection from harm, by putting it to the test and so revealing doubt

INTRODUCTION

Every great composition of music uses a *leitmotif* consisting of a short melody or simple rhythm. A leitmotif (i.) binds a work into a coherent whole, (ii.) enables the composer to convey an overarching theme and (iii.) empowers the listener to understand and identify with a specific interpretation within a story. A close study of the temptation of Jesus in Luke 4:1-13, manifests such a *leitmotif* – a well-known theme that has significance and great implications for a believer’s discipleship today: Christ’s sonship in solidarity with humanity. The devil’s assault on *humankind’s identity and mission* started at the Garden of Eden, continued by testing the people of God in the wilderness, and in Luke’s account, is issued afresh against the Word made flesh, the Son of God who comes to redeem humanity. In this paper, I will argue that Luke intentionally develops the *leitmotif* of “sonship”¹ as it relates to Christ’s solidarity with humanity in His (and our) relationship to God the Father. Luke uncovers the enemy’s purpose: to tempt Christ (as Adam was tempted) to attain by autonomy what is already His through submission, with the goal of bringing division between the Father and Son. Luke’s “sonship” *leitmotif* emphasizes how, as the second Adam and true Israel, Christ overcame the devil’s challenges by submitting to His Father in contrast to the failure of Adam and the people of Israel in the wilderness. First, I will look at the context in which Luke places this passage and work out how “sonship” is the motif leading towards the temptations. Secondly, I will develop the significance of Christ’s solidarity with humanity through the connection to Adam and the people of God in the wilderness. My last argument will highlight the temptations themselves as a challenge of Christ’s relationship to the Father by promoting autonomy rather than submission.

¹ “Sonship” in this paper primarily focuses on *the relationship between God the Father and God the Son*.

I. The significance of “sonship” in Luke’s context to the temptations

Luke’s account of the temptation of Jesus is carefully placed into the wider narrative of the story of Jesus’ life. In view of this, it is important to ask the question: does the context in which the testing of Jesus is placed confirm the *leitmotif* of “sonship”? Why would Christ’s sonship be tested? Can we observe explicit and implicit traces of this *motif* leading up to the temptation, as well as the importance for the continuation within the narrative of the gospel? All these questions are significant as we look at the context of the narrative and so solidify that the “sonship” in fact is this *leitmotif* that is suggested above.

The passage of Jesus’ temptation is purposefully introduced with Him being “full of the Holy Spirit” (4:1). Tannehill points out that with this statement, Luke makes a deliberate connection for the reader with the baptism of Jesus in 3:21-22.² where the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus in bodily form. It is at this baptism that God the Father affirmed their relationship with the words: “You are my beloved Son.” We see that Jesus’ identity as Son is endorsed by the Father before he does any ministry and thus clearly reveals that his ministry will be informed by his sonship and not the other way around. Regardless, we can see the overarching connection that Luke creates between the baptism and the temptation, through the theme of sonship. This shows us that the *leitmotif* of “sonship” actually gets introduced through the baptism and declaration of God the Father. Following the pronouncement, it becomes apparent that the enemy desires to test Jesus’ response to the Father’s declaration to see how strong His loyalty lays.

² Robert C. Tannehill, *Luke*, Abingdon New Testament Commentaries (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 87.

The genealogy that follows the baptism account is further evidence of the *leitmotif*, showing that Jesus' entrance into Israel's history as the son of God had been "carefully prepared through a family's and people's history", as both Carroll and Ellis state.³ Tannehill highlights the importance of genealogies as they manifest one's ethnic identity.⁴ Furthermore, there is a contrast worth noting to Matthew's genealogy (Matt 1 cf. Luke 3), that gives reason to consider that Luke's deviation is intentional in nature as it differs markedly. Most names are different, and he also traces the lineage all the way to Adam, which we will focus on at a later stage. Even more contrast is found in the wording. Where Matthew is using the word "father" in his genealogy, Luke is using the word "son", keeping the sonship *motif* present in an implicit form. It seems that with the genealogy Luke has more in mind than just a "narrative pause" as Green suggests.⁵ Rather, I would argue that it is strategically placed within this context to strengthen the sonship *leitmotif*.

Finally, it is worth noting that the temptations are placed between the baptism and the beginning of Jesus ministry as a "bridge scene moving Jesus from his endowment with the Spirit to his public ministry."⁶ After Jesus is filled with the Holy Spirit he has to endure the devil's test by responding to God's purpose in an appropriate way. Green highlights that fidelity to God in Jewish tradition was proven in the midst of testing.⁷ This makes apparent that it is no coincidence that Jesus' identity and mission are being tested *before* the beginning of his ministry

³ John T. Carroll, *Luke: A Commentary*, First edition, The New Testament Library (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012), 100.

E. Earle Ellis, *Luke: Based on the Revised Standard Version* (London: Nelson, 1966), 100.

⁴ Tannehill, *Luke*, 86.

⁵ Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, Mich: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 1997), 190.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 191.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 191.

yet *after* the Father's affirmation. Would Jesus overcome this test and operate his public mission from a place of sonship? This question could only be answered through testing, into which Jesus was led by the Spirit after his empowerment. The discussed evidence gives us a good indication of the relevance of the *leitmotif* in the context of the Lukan narrative: an affirmation of sonship, followed by a testing of sonship, culminating in a walked-out revelation of sonship.

II. Christ's solidarity with humanity through the test of his sonship

Adam, as well as Israel, were called Sons of God (Luke 3:38; Exod 4:21-22) and both were tested and failed breaking relationship with God and so turned from sonship. It is significant to understand that Christ recapitulates what has been lost through Adam and Israel and so reveals solidarity with humanity. Through the temptation passage, the connection to Adam and Israel is made visible, showing Jesus as the second Adam and true Israel who overcomes the temptation, solidifies his submission to God as a true son, and so invites humanity into sonship. Jesus as the obedient Son becomes the prototype of victory for all believers who participate and follow Him (Heb 4:14-15).⁸

Luke's statement "Adam, son of God" in the genealogy (3:38) should give us reason to see its significance for the passage ahead. He traces the lineage all the way to Adam, in order to suggest a parallel between Jesus and Adam. Tannehill remarks that "Son of God" is a title of distinction given to Jesus as well as Adam. I would agree with his observation that Luke is deliberate in drawing the connection to Adam as a son of God who through disobedience lost the

⁸ Joel B. Green, ed., *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, Second Edition (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, 2013), 955.

honor of passing on this title to humanity.⁹ Some scholars draw a connection to the related theme of the testing Job experienced, yet given the conversation of Jesus with the devil, I would argue that the parallel to Adam is more apparent.¹⁰ The interaction with the devil who questions God's provision and goodness is a clear reference for the reader to presuppose or at least keep in mind Genesis 3. Hendriksen draws the connection to man's fall through Adam's disobedience, which Christ reverses through his trust and obedience to God.¹¹ The comparison of Adam's and Jesus' temptation is also a feature of the early church fathers (e.g. Ambrose, John Chrysostom, Theodore of Mopsuestia).¹²

The second connection Luke draws explicitly is the testing of God's son Israel in the wilderness (Exod 4:21-22; Hos 11:1). There are multiple compelling relations we can identify in this account. (i.) The wilderness plays both with Jesus and Israel a crucial role¹³ (Exod 15:22 cf. Luke 4:1) (ii.) Jesus, as well as Israel, experienced *divine leading* into the wilderness (Deut 8:2; cf. Luke 4:1). (iii.) The forty days of Jesus in the wilderness can be related to the forty years of Israel in the wilderness (Deut 8:2 cf. Luke 4:2) or the forty days of Moses on the mountain (Exod 34:28). Marshall warns that the typology between the forty days should not be pressed too closely, yet that a parallel is suggested by Luke with Israel seems persuasive.¹⁴ (iv.) Most

⁹ Tannehill, *Luke*, 86.

¹⁰ Ellis, *Luke: Based on the Revised Standard Version*, 102.

¹¹ William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Luke*, 3. print, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Book House, 1983), 230.

¹² Green, *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, 955.

¹³ It significant to note that the wilderness for Israel was necessary to drive a mindset of orphan and slavery out of them. The wilderness experience of Jesus proved what was already inside of Him. For a believer's life, these experiences are there to establish sonship inside of them. Rather than complain and be frustrated they are meant to embrace them as a gift, leading to relationship with God.

¹⁴ I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, 1st American ed, The New International Greek Testament Commentary 3 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 169.

explicitly we can detect the tie to the testing of Israel in the way Jesus responds to the devil's temptations by quoting every scripture passage from Deuteronomy 6-8. Moses reminds the Israelites of the failures in the wilderness in this scripture and calls them to obedience and trust in their God. Israel did not stay true to this call even as they went into the promised land. The passage in Luke 4:1-13 is perceived as "antitypical of the experience of Israel", revealing through the example of Jesus the way to victory where Israel fell.¹⁵ It is important to view the temptations of Jesus in a bigger light than just an example for the believer on how to overcome temptation. Jesus temptations were unique in his role as Messiah, the true Israel, and Son of God who was able to fulfill the call of God.

Adam as well as Israel failed in their sonship and broke relationship and fidelity with God. This was not just devastating for them but for all of humankind. Jesus took a hold of his identity and vocation as Son of God by going through the testing in the wilderness that echoed that of ancient Israel.¹⁶ As a result, Jesus is reversing the fall through submission and obedience to the Father for the salvation of humankind. Ambrose highlights this reversal and explains that "Adam was cast out of Paradise into the desert that you may observe how the second Adam returned from the desert to Paradise....Jesus is led into the desert for a purpose, in order to challenge the devil. If he had not fought, he would not have conquered Him for me."¹⁷ Christ's leading into the desert was a part of the salvation of humankind, his solidarity was vital for our participation in sonship. The Catholic Catechism acknowledges the connection of Adam and Israel to the temptation explaining that Jesus as "the new Adam remained faithful just where the

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 166.

¹⁶ Carroll, *Luke*, 101.

¹⁷ Arthur A. Just and Thomas C. Oden, eds., *Luke*, Nachdr, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture New Testament, general ed. Thomas C. Oden[...] ; 3 (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 73.

first Adam had given into temptation....Jesus fulfilled Israel's vocation perfectly: in contrast to those who had provoked God during the forty years in the desert."¹⁸ The call of Israel to be a "kingdom of Priests and a holy nation" (Exod 19:6), has been entered into by Jesus as the true high priest (Heb 3:1; 4:14) as he overcomes in the wilderness. As we conclude this argument we can see the implication the temptations' outcome have not just for Jesus but the fate of the whole world. His victory over the devil's test solidified his fidelity and love to the Father enabling humanity to participate in a relationship with God once again.

III. The temptations each as a challenge of Christ's relationship to his Father

In my final argument, I will analyze each temptation individually, demonstrating that their intent was to undermine and tempt Jesus' sonship by appealing to his autonomy rather than submission and obedience to his Heavenly Father. The *leitmotif* is detected clearly in each individual trial the devil casts at Jesus. The mission and identity of Jesus are tested severely yet empowered by the Holy Spirit he surrenders to the will of the Father. Orphans have to self-provide, self-promote and prove, whereas a son is able to live in obedience and trust to his Father. Jesus overcomes the temptation and so reveals that salvation to the world is accomplished through submission to the Father rather than a self-glorified display of power.

The devil's first temptation confronts Jesus in a state of hunger and fatigue after forty days of fasting (4:2). Satan's address, "if you are the son of God", has been for some scholars reason to believe that it was designed to doubt Jesus sonship, however, the evidence points to a

¹⁸ *Catechism of the Catholic Church: Revised in Accordance with the Official Latin Text Promulgated by Pope John Paul II.* (Ottawa: Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2006), 137.

subtler attempt.¹⁹ The main emphasis of the interpretation being that Jesus is tempted by miraculous provision of food to win the favor of crowds and self-provide for his kingship seems also questionable.²⁰ Rather I'm convinced that the devil is tempting Jesus to mistrust the Father by having to provide for His own needs. Through the use of His miraculous power as the son of God, the enemy's goal was for Jesus to gratify His own need and so operate independently from the Father which Jesus exclaimed in another gospel not to do (John 5:19; 8:28). By Jesus misusing His power and authority He would have stepped outside of the Father's will in the same way that Adam abandoned his identity and mission when he tried to be his own man. Instead, Jesus resists the temptation by quoting from Deuteronomy 8:3 and reminds the reader of God's people in the wilderness who complained in the time of hunger rather than trust God. Even though Luke omits the words "...but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" which we can read in Matthew's account (Matt 4:4) it becomes clear that Jesus' commitment to the words of the Father is unwavering. Jesus manifests His trust and submission to His Father in the midst of suffering and hunger, responding to the challenge of His sonship with fidelity. He shows that He will not use the power of miracles here or any other place in the gospel for His own good or needs (23:8), despite great suffering (23:37).

The second temptation in Luke's account offers Jesus the supposed reign and authority over the kingdoms of this world, tempting Him with a "short-cut" to His mission by bypassing suffering. The enemy offers the substitute of Christ's reign in a God-denying way. It is worth considering how and in what way the devil is thought to have the authority to offer the kingdoms of the world. Bock interprets that the Greek word *oikoumenes* references the Roman Empire as

¹⁹ Darrell L. Bock, *Luke*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament 3 (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Books, 1994), 372.

²⁰ Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, 170.

this was regarded the world of this day (2:1) and so sees that political power was granted to Satan by God.²¹ Hendriksen finds proof in the evidence that Jesus does not dispute Satan's claim and further refers to Ephesians where Satan is called "prince of the power of the air" (Eph 2:2) and the letter of John, which exclaims that "the whole world lies in the power of the evil one" (1 John 5:19).²² Yet either way the devil's offer is deceiving as his rule on this earth is temporary and the promise of Christ's kingdom is forever (1:33). Furthermore, it is significant to highlight the radical redefinition *power* undergoes in the Lukan narrative. What was powerful in the world's eyes is confronted in God's kingdom, as Mary's song proclaims (1:51-53) and Jesus teaches his disciples (22:24-27).²³ With the quotation of Deuteronomy 6:13, Jesus submits to "worship and serve God only" and refuses to take the substitute to the real power of God and way of the kingdom. Satan's attempt was to break the relationship between the Son and the Father. Jesus allegiance shows that no offer is great enough for Him to abandon His Father.

The last temptation in Luke's account is the second in Matthew's and located in Jerusalem, which is of importance as it symbolizes the ultimate test Jesus' sonship will face in his passion (22:1-23:56). Some scholars believe that the change of order comes from different sources²⁴ and others would argue that Luke changed the order with a particular purpose in mind.²⁵ Much speaks for the change in the Lukan account as it moves the narrative towards Jerusalem and the temple, which is a major theme for Luke (9:51; 17:11; 18:31; 19:11, 4, 45, 47; 20:1). The devil's temptation is for Jesus to throw Himself off the temple and trust that God will

²¹ Bock, *Luke*, 375.

²² Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Luke*, 236.

²³ Ellis, *Luke: Based on the Revised Standard Version*, 103.

²⁴ François Bovon et al., *Luke, Hermeneia--a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2002), 144.

²⁵ Green, *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, 955.

send his angels to protect Him, quoting scripture (Ps 91:11) in his test. Some suggest that this temple scene describes a public act, in which Jesus is meant to be tested to prove his messianic reception through “spectacular display at the place of Israel’s religion”, yet there is no mention of an audience.²⁶ What is the nature of this challenge and why the temple? Jesus referred to the temple in Luke as “my Father’s house” (2:49) and so it seems to come as no surprise that in light of the sonship *leitmotif* the enemy questions God’s care in the place which the son Himself called His Father’s. Throwing Himself off the temple trusting that God would miraculously rescue Jesus appears to be a statement of faith, but in truth, it is doubt in disguise as protection forced would have been mistrust and on Jesus’ own terms. Interestingly the Psalm the devil quotes commands the true trust Jesus displays in order to see the protection manifested (Ps 91:2). Jesus expresses through his quotation of Deuteronomy 6:16 that “testing God” truly is a form of unbelief as Israel demonstrated in the wilderness when they tested the Lord by saying: “Is the Lord among us?” (Exod 17:7) As the son of God, Jesus reveals to the enemy, that the demand for protection where it is not needed is not faith, but sin. Ellis rightly points out that as “Jesus now refuses to presume upon God’s power to deliver Him from injury, he will at the end of his life refuse to “save Himself” (23:35, 37, 39) or demand that God do so (22:42)”.²⁷ Sonship has been preserved throughout these temptations by Jesus’ response. The son of God proves at each temptation the strength of his connection to the Father through his submission to the identity and mission he has received at baptism.

CONCLUSION

²⁶ Ibid., 956.

²⁷ Ellis, *Luke: Based on the Revised Standard Version*, 104.

The implications of the Lukan temptation account for the believer's life are remarkable. It is way more than Jesus generating a *how-to manual* for the believer to overcome temptation by quoting scripture. Jesus our high priest who was tempted in solidarity with humanity (Heb 4:15) overcame by His submission to the Father and so revealed the way of the kingdom as the new Adam and true Israel. Jesus' temptations serve to undo the failure of Adam and fulfill what Israel was called to do. Salvation and Christ's ministry are set up through *submission* and *relationship* to the Father. As an alternative to miraculous self-provision Jesus models trust and reliance in His Father, instead of political power and influence he chooses devotion towards God; and in place of immunization from harm and avoidance of suffering through testing God, He manifests complete fidelity and submission emphasizing his security in His sonship. The wilderness revealed the sonship that was already established in Jesus through relationship. For us as believers, our wilderness experiences benefit us in that they establish the identity of sonship as we participate in the victory. Christ's victory is our victory as we follow His example of submission in relationship to the Father. These truths should leave us to marvel at the grace that God provided for us. We are invited to participate in the life of God through the victory that started in the wilderness and found its culmination in Jerusalem on the cross. As a faithful son, Jesus submitted to the Father throughout His whole earthly life, not looking for short-cuts or relief of suffering by means of self-provision or doubting God's protection. May we not just learn from this lesson, but engage deeply in the embrace of submission, obedience, and trust to a Father who is good and who has invited us into sonship. Sonship is the chorus that resounds throughout the temptation account, yet even more so, is seen all throughout the Gospel of Luke by the salvation of humankind. All of humanity is invited and enabled to join this beautiful *leitmotif* of sonship.

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