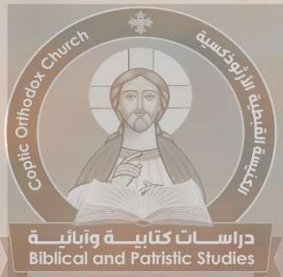


# Our Christ the Lover of Humankind Combats Satan

By St. Jacob of Serugh and other Church Fathers



Preparation & Commentary : Fr. Tadros Y. Malaty  
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# **Our Christ, the Lover of Humankind, combats the prince of the air in the wilderness**

## **Our Christ, the lover of mankind, frees the captive bride from the devil**

In our conversation about the baptism of Christ, we noticed that the Father said: "This is my beloved son" (Matthew 3:17). It was intended to confirm the divinity of Christ to the bride (the church), so that she may know the truth about her Bridegroom. The Father spoke personally, not through angels or other voices like other apparitions. Just as it was Christ who sanctified the waters, not baptism that sanctified Him. The Holy Spirit did not descend to sanctify the water, but descended *after* our Lord Jesus was baptized. This was all for *our* sake, so that we would experience the appearance of the Holy Trinity and realize God's wonderful love for humanity and His eternal plan for us.

The bride was waiting for Christ and got to know Him after His baptism. He had to offer to His people something worthy of His royal work! So, He entered into a public battle in the wilderness against Satan, the prince of the power of the air, on behalf of His bride, to grant her victory. He took her from the kingdom of Satan and established her as His own kingdom. The Master entered this battle on behalf of His people, and every victory He won was for their sakes.

Christ's temptation is an integral part of His divine economy (plan) of salvation. The evangelists (Matthew 4: 1-11, Mark 1:12-13, Luke 4:1-7) detailed its timing, the role of the Holy Spirit, the object of temptation, who is tempted, the connection of temptation to fasting, and the three types of temptations: how Satan attacks believers, how they can conquer him, and the fruits of temptation.

- ❖ After (Jesus) ascended from the water the Holy Spirit descended, took Him and went out from among the multitudes to the wilderness.

The bride saw the Bridegroom coming, and she knew who He was, and He went out immediately to fight with the unrighteous one.

He left the bride after she had recognized Him, and left to fight the prince of the powers of the air (Eph 2: 2).

He went to wage the battle with the leader of evil, and after tying him up, He came to show His richness to the bride ...

After He was tempted and had battled and conquered Satan, He proclaimed Himself with mighty miracles.

When the enemy fell like lightning from heaven (Luke 10:18), the Son of God began to perform miracles.

The bride recognized the Bridegroom, and realized why He went forth to fight (on her behalf),

In order to defeat the rebel who had plundered the bride, take away his authority, and then save the daughter of the peoples.

The Spirit led him to be tempted and fight, and by conquest He shows himself in the congregations.

He struggled, and the enemy fell like lightning, and then proceeded to follow the path of the troops.

All paths of the Only Begotten are full of wonder! Blessed is His radiance, for His coming enlightened all creation.<sup>1</sup>

**St. Jacob of Serugh**

- ❖ That we by His means, and in Him, might gain the victory, whereas of old we were vanquished, and fallen in Adam. Come therefore and let us praise the Lord, and sing psalms unto God our Saviour: let us

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<sup>1</sup> Jacob of Serugh, Homily 7 on "The Baptism of the Law, The Baptism of John, The Baptism Christ gave to His Disciples" in: Behnam Sony, *Tarjama men Al-Suryania Ila Al-Arabeyya Wa Derasa Ala Myamer Al-Malfan Mar Ya'coub Al-Serugy (A Translation from Syriac to Arabic and Study on the Mimre of the Teacher Mar Jacob Al-Serugy)*. Part One (Baghdad, 2003).

trample Satan under foot; let us raise the shout of victory over him now he is thrown and fallen: let us exult over the crafty reptile, caught in an inextricable snare: let us too say of him in the words of the prophet Jeremiah, "How is the hammer of all the earth broken and beaten small! Thou art found and hast been taken, because thou stoodest against the Lord." For of old, that is before the time of the advent of Christ the Saviour of all, the universal enemy had somewhat grand and terrible notions | 50 about himself: for he boastfully exulted over the infirmity of the inhabitants of the earth, saying, "I will hold the world in my hand as a nest, and as eggs that are left I will take it up: and no one shall escape from me or speak against me." And in very truth there was no one of those upon earth who could rise up against his power; but the Son rose up against him, and contended with him, having been made like unto us. And therefore, as I said, human nature, as victorious in Him, wins the crown. And this in old time the Son Himself proclaimed, where by one of the holy prophets He thus addresses Satan; "Behold, I am against thee, O corrupting mountain, that corruptest the whole earth (Jeremiah 51:25).<sup>2</sup>

### **St. Cyril the Great**

- ❖ It is worth remembering how the first Adam was cast out of paradise into the wilderness, to realize how the second Adam came back from the wilderness to paradise.

Let us also observe how reparation was accomplished, and in what order. A virgin land gave birth to Adam, Christ was born of the Virgin; this one was made in the image of God, while Christ is the Image of God; this one was placed above all the irrational animals, this one above all the living;

Eve was a hesitant woman and St. Mary was a virgin full of wisdom. Death came by a tree, while life came by the cross. Adam was in paradise and Christ was in the wilderness: for he knew where to find the condemned ones and restore them to paradise... As the divine

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<sup>2</sup> *Commentary on Luke, Sermon 12 – 21.*

decrees could not be abrogated (cancelled), one was substituted for the other.

Adam had lost his way in paradise because he had no guide. How could he find his way back from the wilderness without a guide? Temptations abound, and the path to sin is easy.

What guide can aid us against the many temptations of this life and the many ruses of the devil? We wrestle "not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places."(Ephesians 6: 11-12)?

Can God send us an angel? Some of them have already fallen. Send a seraph? But he came down to earth "in the midst of a people of unclean lips" (Is., 6:6), and there was only one prophet whose lips he purified with a coal. We have to look for another guide to follow. But what guide can be so great and good except Him who is above all? Who would establish me above the world, except He who is greater than the world? Who can guide men and women, Jews and Greeks, Barbarians and Scythians, slaves and free men (Col. 3:11) on the same path, if not the One who is all and in all, Christ?

Traps abound wherever we go. There are traps of the flesh and traps of the Law. There are traps set by the devil atop temples and walls. There are traps of philosophy and of lust, for an adulterous gaze is the trap of the sinner (Cf. Prov. 7:21). Money, false religiosity, and even preferring a life of chastity and despising marriage, all include traps. How can we avoid these pitfalls? The best way to break the trap is to present some bait to the devil, so when he throws himself on the prey, he would be caught in his own net. Then I can say: "They have dug a pit before me; Into the midst of it they themselves have fallen. "(Ps. 57:6). What is this bait if not the flesh? The Lord Jesus took our modest and weak flesh and presented it as bait to Satan in the wilderness. Satan would attack Him and be defeated.

Now Christ is in the desert, leading humanity. He guides, instructs, trains and anoints humanity with holy oil, and when it is ready, He shall guide it to the green lush pastures ... all the way until the Garden (of Gethsemane) during His passion. As it is written: "When Jesus had spoken these words, He went out with His disciples over the Brook Kidron, where there was a garden, which He and His disciples entered." (John 18:1). God's power restores humanity, and this emphasizes the truth that Christ spoke to the thief on the cross, and which St. Luke clearly recorded: "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43).

- ❖ Filled with the Holy Spirit, Jesus went out to the wilderness to defy the devil - for if He had not fought, He would not have triumphed for my sake - in a mysterious way, to deliver Adam from the exile.

**St. Ambrose**

- ❖ By His example, the Lord demonstrated how we can be victorious, even as He triumphed when he was tempted.<sup>3</sup>

**Fr. Serapion**

- ❖ If the devil had not tempted Him, the Lord would not have triumphed for my sake in a mysterious way to free Adam from captivity<sup>4</sup>.
- ❖ It was really fitting for that Who came to replace our death with His death, to also prevail over our trials with His trials.<sup>5</sup>

**Pope Gregory the Great**

- ❖ As He is our intercessor, He helps us to overcome temptation, as He became an example for us.
- ❖ Jesus, our leader, allowed Himself to be tempted in order to teach His children how to fight.<sup>6</sup>

**St. Augustine**

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<sup>3</sup> *The Conferences of John Cassian* 5: 5-6.

<sup>4</sup> *Commentary on Luke* 4: 1.

<sup>5</sup> PL 76: 1134 Ser. 16.

<sup>6</sup> Ser. on N. T. homily1; On the Holy Trinity 4:13.

## **On the Evangelist's words: "Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit." (Matthew 1: 4)**

The Holy Spirit led Him to the battle to fulfill the divine plan, which is the joy of both the Father and Son. He was not led up involuntarily, for the Holy Spirit is *His* Holy Spirit, one with Him in essence, so what Christ does is that He fulfills the will of the Spirit which is one with the will of the Father and the will of the Son.

- ❖ He did not ascend (to the wilderness) like someone who is bound or who is a prisoner, but He was led with longing to the battle.

**St. Jerome**

- ❖ Satan went to tempt man (Adam), but since Satan cannot attack Christ, Christ went to him.
- ❖ And see whither the Spirit led Him up, when He had taken Him; not into a city and forum, but into a wilderness. That is, He being minded to attract the devil, gives him a handle not only by His hunger, but also by the place. For then most especially doth the devil assail, when he sees men left alone, and by themselves.

Thus, did he also set upon the woman (Eve) in the beginning, having caught her alone, and found her apart from her husband. Just as when he sees us with others and banded together, he is not equally confident, and makes no attack. Wherefore we have the greatest need on this very account to be flocking together continually, that we may not be open to the devil's attack.<sup>7</sup>

**St. John Chrysostom**

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<sup>7</sup> In Matt. hom 13:1.



## **The Lord's incarnation misled Satan, & Christ battled him with His humanity**

Because the Word of God was incarnate, the enemy did not recognize Him and remained in doubt as to whether He was God or an ordinary person.

- ❖ You are God, how did the evil one (Satan) not fear You? If he knew who You are, he would not have battled You.

You are the Son of Man, hidden, visible and lonely, and the enemy hesitates [at the sight of] of your body.

I marveled at your fasting that led Satan to tempt you and know who you are, O Son of God ...

By your weakness, you concealed your strength when you fought, and your greatness was hidden by your humility (your incarnation).

With your humanity, your divinity (was hidden) with wisdom, and the wicked went astray, and entered into a strange battle with you.

Give me the opportunity to speak your story without debate. The Son of God desired to pay the debt, and for this He endured the trial of the enemy.

Adam lost the battle when he was tried, and so the battle was renewed so that the enemy would retreat ...

Christ, the conqueror of all, descended to the battle, to become an example of victory for all.

He showed humankind how to defeat the enemy, and so battled with His human flesh.

He took on human flesh; He became human to fight as a human ...

Our Lord humbled himself before the enemy and wanted to fight the rebel in weakness.

And when Satan saw Him as a human, he thought that he was not God but a man like Adam. The Son of God showed His body in battle, and concealed the great power of His divinity.

The evil one fought with Him because he did not recognize Him. Whose Son he is? If he had known, he would have fled and not fought Him.<sup>8</sup>

**St. Jacob of Serugh**

### **Our Lord fasted because Adam fell by eating the fruit**

- ❖ He began fasting at the start of the battle, seeing that Adam had retreated by eating the fruit.

The Mighty One descended and put on all modesty and condescended to the utmost.

He waged war with the watchman of the night and overcame him, neither by force nor by the authority of His divinity.

But when He fought, He descended to the level of a human, for He was incarnate from a woman and then began to fight.

He began by fasting in order to despise greed and gluttony ...

The Son of God began by fasting. He fasted for forty days, like Moses and Elijah, to follow a path that the prophets had prepared for Him.

They preceded Him and prophetically foreseen Him, and by their fasting they imitated His fasting.

He began to fast, and the prince of the earth feared him. He waged a battle to face danger with might.<sup>9</sup>

**St. Jacob of Serugh**

- ❖ The devil despaired when he saw Christ fasting for forty days, but when he realized that He was hungry, he regained his hope, 'and the tempter came to him' (Matthew 4: 3) ... And if you fasted and suffered

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<sup>8</sup> Jacob of Serugh, Homily 82 on "Our Lord's Battle with Satan" in: Behnam Sony, *Tarjama men Al-Suryania Ila Al-Arabeyya Wa Derasa Ala Myamer Al-Malfan Mar Ya'coub Al-Serugy (A Translation from Syriac to Arabic and Study on the Mimre of the Teacher Mar Jacob Al-Serugy)*. Part One (Baghdad, 2003); Homily on "Our Lord's Battle with Satan", Coptic text.

<sup>9</sup> Jacob of Serugh, Homily 82 on "Our Lord's Battle with Satan" in: Behnam Sony, *Tarjama men Al-Suryania Ila Al-Arabeyya Wa Derasa Ala Myamer Al-Malfan Mar Ya'coub Al-Serugy (A Translation from Syriac to Arabic and Study on the Mimre of the Teacher Mar Jacob Al-Serugy)*. Part One (Baghdad, 2003); Homily on "Our Lord's Battle with Satan", Coptic text.

from temptation, do not say that I have lost the fruit of my fast. If you fast and enter into temptation, you will gain victory over the temptation.

- ❖ In His (Christ's) hunger Satan approached Him; to teach you how great fasting is, and how it is the most powerful shield against the devil, and that after baptism, men should give themselves up, not to luxury and drunkenness, and a full table, but to fasting. For, for this reason Christ fasted, not as needing it Himself, but to instruct us ... For indeed both Adam by gluttony was cast out of paradise; and the flood in Noah's time, this produced; and this brought down the thunders on Sodom. For although there was also a charge of whoredom, nevertheless from this grew the root of each of those punishments; which Ezekiel also signified when he said: "Look, this was the iniquity of your sister Sodom: She and her daughter had pride, fullness of food, and abundance of idleness; neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy." (Ezekiel 16: 49). Thus the Jews also perpetrated the greatest wickedness, being driven upon transgression by their drunkenness and delicacy. (Isaiah 5:11-12).<sup>10</sup>

#### **St. John Chrysostom**

- ❖ When there is an increasing struggle from the tempter, we must fast, so that the body may fulfill the Christian duty in its war against the (desires) of the world, by repentance and urging the soul to be victorious in humility.

#### **St. Augustine**

- ❖ The first man, having obeyed his desire for food, not God, was expelled from Paradise to the Valley of Tears.<sup>11</sup>

#### **St. Jerome**

- ❖ Be the master of your stomach before it prevails over you. Whoever feeds his gluttony and hopes to overcome the spirit of immorality is like someone who tries to extinguish fire with oil.<sup>12</sup>

#### **St. John Climacus**

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<sup>10</sup> On. Imperf.

<sup>11</sup> Ep. 22:10.

<sup>12</sup> *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, step 14.

- ❖ Just as the Resurrection offers us a life equal to the angels, and with the angels there is no food, this is sufficient to believe that the person who will live on the angelic rite is justified from (servitude to food and drink).<sup>13</sup>

**St. Gregory of Nyssa**

### **Satan tempts the Lord to discover who He is**

- ❖ Satan was anxious, and know not: who is He? And who is His Father?

...

The Son of God had a body, and that encouraged him to fight Him. And since there was no human sin in His body, he feared (and said): Perhaps he is the Son of God?

He knew and did not know; He approached and wanted to to fight Him, to know and recognize Him clearly in the temptation.

For forty days the enemy waited to see, will He starve or not? If He is not hungry then He is spiritual, and if He is hungry, then I will overcome Him because He is a human.

And he was burning with false thoughts, grumbling, worrying, and pondering (saying): Is He earthly? Heavenly? Why does he fast? How does He fast? On whose behalf is He fasting?<sup>14</sup>

**St. Jacob of Serugh**

### **The evil one fights Christ with all his forces**

- ❖ Our Lord was calm and full of humility; He fasted and trod the path of righteousness.

The villain was on fire, filled with every rebellion, restlessness, and turmoil, and became a disgrace to victory.

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<sup>13</sup> On Making of Man 18:9.

<sup>14</sup> Jacob of Serugh, Homily 82 on "Our Lord's Battle with Satan" in: Behnam Sony, *Tarjama men Al-Suryania Ila Al-Arabeyya Wa Derasa Ala Myamer Al-Malfan Mar Ya'coub Al-Serugy (A Translation from Syriac to Arabic and Study on the Mimre of the Teacher Mar Jacob Al-Serugy)*. Part One (Baghdad, 2003); Homily on "Our Lord's Battle with Satan", Coptic text.

Christ enjoyed His fast in humility, and the son of perdition strongly stirred up strife.

Satan called upon his companions to help him and his hosts to secure his victory. And he said to the sons of darkness who follow him:

Behold, here is One who does battle with me. He is earthly yet heavenly, divine yet human, spiritual yet fleshly.

I do not know if He is from above or below? Here He is, calmly standing against me in battle and despising me.

Come, my soldiers, from every side, for the battle is not easy, let us all strive together.

If He defeats us, He will bind us, imprison us, despise us! Let us all awaken and fight.

Cease your quarrels, discussions, evils, and all the seductions and traps set for this world! Let us set them up for this One; if you hunt Him, you are indeed mighty!

The battle is cruel because He does not want to win for Himself alone! He wants to raise up Adam, whom you overthrew.

If Adam, who was defeated, rises again, it is we who shall fall! Come on, let us strive so that we do not suffer loss.<sup>15</sup>

**St. Jacob of Serugh**

## **The Demons fight the Lord with hidden wars**

❖ The demons feared to attack the Son of God, and they all trembled when He fought.

They feared him because of his wondrous humility, and because they saw his immense serenity and calm.

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<sup>15</sup> Jacob of Serugh, Homily 82 on "Our Lord's Battle with Satan" in: Behnam Sony, *Tarjama men Al-Suryania Ila Al-Arabeyya Wa Derasa Ala Myamer Al-Malfan Mar Ya'coub Al-Serugy (A Translation from Syriac to Arabic and Study on the Mimre of the Teacher Mar Jacob Al-Serugy)*. Part One (Baghdad, 2003); Homily on "Our Lord's Battle with Satan", Coptic text.

And because he misled them and disturbed them with His righteous body, they did not know if He was from heaven or earth?

The enemy remained trying Him for forty days, and was waging hidden wars against the Savior.<sup>16</sup>

**St. Jacob of Serugh**

## **The Incarnate Christ took Adam's nature before sin**

- ❖ Satan could not tempt Christ with lusts, because there was no sin in him that covets greed ...

The Son of the Living One descended the station Adam had before eating from the tree. He came to revive Adam who had sinned and perished.

The enemy approached Him to launch the battle, and the sin that had been the cause of Adam's downfall was not there.

When the Only Begotten became human like us, sin did not come near Him, because He is the Only Begotten.

He resembled us except for sin, and differed from Adam's race with His lack of sin.

The rebel came out to fight the King face to face, because the war was harsher than he could bear.

He did not send the serpent, for Eve was not with him, so he tempted the Son personally without any mediator.

He tried Him for forty days and could not trick the Savior: neither with temptations, nor fears, nor terror, nor ideas, nor false visions ...

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<sup>16</sup> Jacob of Serugh, Homily 82 on "Our Lord's Battle with Satan" in: Behnam Sony, *Tarjama men Al-Suryania Ila Al-Arabeyya Wa Derasa Ala Myamer Al-Malfan Mar Ya'coub Al-Serugy (A Translation from Syriac to Arabic and Study on the Mimre of the Teacher Mar Jacob Al-Serugy)*. Part One (Baghdad, 2003); Homily on "Our Lord's Battle with Satan", Coptic text.

He fought Him spiritually for forty days, and in all attempts, he was foiled.<sup>17</sup>

**St. Jacob of Serugh**

### **The first trial: to make bread from stones (Matthew 4: 3-5)**

- ❖ At the end of the forty days our Lord was hungry, and the enemy found an opportunity to try Him.

He hungered according to the *economia* and to nature, for both were present in the Only-Begotten.

According to the *economia* because He is God with His Father, and according to nature because He was incarnate from the daughter of Adam.

He hungered like He did on the way (Matthew 21:18), ineffably, and the tempter found it a reason to wage war. He approached him as one who cares, a spy, an advisor, and an assistant to the Perfect One.

Satan began to say: If You are the Son of God, command that these stones<sup>17</sup> to become bread and eat!

Satan saw that He who is hungry would ask for bread, and with that convincing argument he tempted Him.

He did not show himself as a hater or an enemy, but a friend who cares about good deeds. He appeared like the angel who were sent to meet the saints' needs.

He counseled Him: If you are the Son of God, say a word and there will be bread you can eat!

O Satan ... Do you desire to know or become a teacher, so you can teach the ignorant ones what you have come to know?

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<sup>17</sup> Jacob of Serugh, Homily 82 on "Our Lord's Battle with Satan" in: Behnam Sony, *Tarjama men Al-Suryania Ila Al-Arabeyya Wa Derasa Ala Myamer Al-Malfan Mar Ya'coub Al-Serugy (A Translation from Syriac to Arabic and Study on the Mimre of the Teacher Mar Jacob Al-Serugy)*. Part One (Baghdad, 2003); Homily on "Our Lord's Battle with Satan", Coptic text.

They did not ask you to say who He is. Why do you burn so when you ask if He is the Son of God? ...

Since when have you been merciful, that you should care for much about the hunger of Jesus?<sup>18</sup>

**St. Jacob of Serugh**

## **Would making bread from stones impede the Lord's humble journey?**

- ❖ What would the enemy gain if our Lord made bread as He told him? It would have revealed Christ as the Son of God.

This would be a victory for the tempter, for it would obstruct His path of humility.

If He had commanded and the stone became bread, He would have given in to pride, and His power would have been displayed.

His humility would have been impeded, and the evil one would have rejoiced because he obstructed the path of humility of the Only Begotten.

A victory for the enemy! ... Blocking the path of the Son's humility, who has humbled Himself to raise Adam.

And the enemy would have grown vain, in his cunning success to deviate the Son from His humble path.

(Christ) bowed His might to humility and temptation, and remained in the hunger and weakness to which He had condescended.<sup>19</sup>

**St. Jacob of Serugh**

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<sup>18</sup> Jacob of Serugh, Homily 82 on "Our Lord's Battle with Satan" in: Behnam Sony, *Tarjama men Al-Suryania Ila Al-Arabeyya Wa Derasa Ala Myamer Al-Malfan Mar Ya'coub Al-Serugy (A Translation from Syriac to Arabic and Study on the Mimre of the Teacher Mar Jacob Al-Serugy)*. Part One (Baghdad, 2003); Homily on "Our Lord's Battle with Satan", Coptic text.

<sup>19</sup> Jacob of Serugh, Homily 82 on "Our Lord's Battle with Satan" in: Behnam Sony, *Tarjama men Al-Suryania Ila Al-Arabeyya Wa Derasa Ala Myamer Al-Malfan Mar Ya'coub Al-Serugy (A Translation from Syriac to Arabic and Study on the Mimre of the Teacher Mar Jacob Al-Serugy)*. Part One (Baghdad, 2003); Homily on "Our Lord's Battle with Satan", Coptic text.



## **Moses was not hungry during his fast, and Christ was hungry during his fast**

- ❖ It was easy for Him not to hunger if He so desired, but He chose not to expel hunger from the fast that he had begun.

Moses fasted for forty days, and it is not written that he was hungry, and the Son of God grew hungry during His fast while he was tempted.

Moses was not hungry, because he saw the Father, and the Son is in the Father ... He hungered to prove that He took flesh, became one of us, resembled us, and was hungry with us and for our sake.

Without hungering, he would not have descended to our lowliness, and would not have become one of us.<sup>20</sup>

**St. Jacob of Serugh**

## **Man shall not live by bread and water alone**

- ❖ Our Lord answered the pride of the tempter, and spoke with him modestly, saying: "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God." ... The wise Son used a weapon from his Father's house in order to face His fighting enemy. He disdained hunger and did not want to perform a miracle. He despised pride, and did not appear as the Son of God. He despised knowledge as if He did not know the enemy, and He spoke with humility during His temptation.

He mentioned Moses's words against [Satan]: The word of the Lord gives life, and a man can live without bread.<sup>21</sup>

**St. Jacob of Serugh**

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<sup>20</sup> Jacob of Serugh, Homily 82 on "Our Lord's Battle with Satan" in: Behnam Sony, *Tarjama men Al-Suryania Ila Al-Arabeyya Wa Derasa Ala Myamer Al-Malfan Mar Ya'coub Al-Serugy (A Translation from Syriac to Arabic and Study on the Mimre of the Teacher Mar Jacob Al-Serugy)*. Part One (Baghdad, 2003); Homily on "Our Lord's Battle with Satan", Coptic text.

<sup>21</sup> Jacob of Serugh, Homily 82 on "Our Lord's Battle with Satan" in: Behnam Sony, *Tarjama men Al-Suryania Ila Al-Arabeyya Wa Derasa Ala Myamer Al-Malfan Mar Ya'coub Al-Serugy (A Translation from Syriac to Arabic and Study on the Mimre of the Teacher Mar Jacob Al-Serugy)*. Part One (Baghdad, 2003); Homily on "Our Lord's Battle with Satan", Coptic text.

## **The second trial: If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down. For it is written: 'He shall give His angels charge over you,'**

- ❖ It is written thus: The enemy led Jesus and set Him on the pinnacle of the temple,

So that the mind inquires how the enemy can lead and bring the Son of God to the holy temple?

Did he lead him like a mighty man driving weak? God forbid that the Son of God be called weak!

Did he lead Him against His will?! God forbid that we would ever think this! ...

The enemy had launched the first battle and lost it, and was eager to enter into the second...

The enemy was complaining and thinking (saying): Who gives me a pit or a hole here? To seduce and deceive Him to throw Himself. I will know if He is spiritual, if He resists ...

He moved and left the wilderness, and stood on the pinnacle of the temple. The enemy did not know why the Son of God had changed the place at that time.

Our Lord stood on a high place according to the will and desire of the enemy. That is why it is written: The enemy led him, because the Son of God allowed him according to His desire.

Smoke can never lead the wind, nor the wildfire control the storm. Our Lord desired, according to the will of the enemy, to lead Himself to a place where battle would be waged ...

The Son of the Living God stood over the pinnacle of the temple. The tempter immediately approached and said to him: If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down. Satan saw a high position and a great depth, and he desired to see the fall there.

The wicked one dared to speak from the psalm in the second battle ... It is written thus: He shall give His angels charge over you,'

And, In their hands they shall bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone (Matthew 4: 5-7).

You will not stumble your feet with a stone, if you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, and you will not be harmed.

Our Lord also said that it is written by the prophet: “You shall not tempt the Lord your God.”

I am neither tempted nor will fall like you say, you do not tempt me because I will not give in to your temptation.<sup>22</sup>

### **St. Jacob of Serugh**

Satan tempts us with honeyed words filled with poison, for his words are 'softer than oil, yet they are drawn swords.' He uses the word of God after he distorts it. The psalm says: “For He shall give His angels charge over you, to keep you in all your ways. In their hands they shall bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone” (Psalm 91: 11-12) as a sign of God’s constant care for us. Satan used it to push the Lord Christ to tempt the Father, or to corrupt His mission away from carrying the cross. Satan tried to tempt Him to be concerned with displaying His capabilities and asking angels to protect Him instead of entering a life of suffering.

**St. Jerome** says: [Satan misinterprets what is written ... It was appropriate for him to complete the same psalm directed against him, saying: “You shall tread upon the lion and the cobra, The young lion and the serpent you shall trample underfoot..” He talks about the angels’ help as if he is talking to someone who is weak or needy, but he is deceitful, as he did not mention that he will be trampled underfoot.]<sup>23</sup> **St. Jerome** also says: [These are the words of Satan as he always wishes everyone to fall.]<sup>24</sup>

**Saint John Chrysostom** trembled when he beheld the Lord Jesus’s patience even in His dealings with the devil during the temptation. He says: [He was

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<sup>22</sup> Jacob of Serugh, Homily 82 on “Our Lord’s Battle with Satan” in: Behnam Sony, *Tarjama men Al-Suryania Ila Al-Arabeyya Wa Derasa Ala Myamer Al-Malfan Mar Ya'coub Al-Serugy (A Translation from Syriac to Arabic and Study on the Mimre of the Teacher Mar Jacob Al-Serugy)*. Part One (Baghdad, 2003); Homily on “Our Lord’s Battle with Satan”, Coptic text.

<sup>23</sup> In Matt. 4:6.

<sup>24</sup> In Matt. 4:6.

neither angry nor revolted, but rather with extra tenderness, He discussed with Satan for the second time from the Holy Book ... teaching us that we overcome Satan not by doing miracles, but rather with endurance and long-suffering. We [should] do nothing with the intent to show off and gain vainglory.]<sup>25</sup>

**St. Ambrose** writes: [This is the demon of vain glory, for when a person thinks that he has risen high and desires to do great works, he falls into the abyss. He said to him: "*If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down.*" Only Satan can utter these words, who tries to bring the human soul down from where it has distinguished its virtues. Is there anything that fits the devil except to advise man to descend?! ...

Satan can only harm someone who pushes himself down, that is, rejects heaven to choose the earth...]

**Origen of Alexandria** writes: Let us observe the start of today's Gospel reading and let what was hidden come forth into open view. The passage says that the devil "*led*" *Jesus "into Jerusalem."* This is unbelievable-that the devil should lead the Son of God and he should follow. Obviously, he followed like an athlete who freely sets out for a competition. He was not afraid of his competitor, nor did he dread the deceits of his extremely cunning enemy. He was basically saying". You will find that I am stronger in every way." The devil proposed this dishonestly and, under the pretext of having Christ display his glory, strove for a different end.

Therefore, let us see what the devil says to the Lord from the Scriptures: "Scripture says, He shall give His angels charge over you,' and, In their hands they shall bear you up, Lest you dash your foot against a stone.." See how crafty he is, even in the texts he quotes. For, he wishes to diminish the Savior's glory, as if the Savior needed the help of angels. The devil takes his verse from Scripture and applies it to Christ. Yet it is written not of Christ, but about the saints in general. Christ does not need the help of angels. He is greater than the angels "as He has by inheritance obtained a more

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<sup>25</sup> <sup>25</sup> In Matt hom 13:4.

excellent name than they. For to which of the angels did He ever say: "You are My Son, Today I have begotten You"?" (Hebrews 1:5-7, Psalm 2:7)

The devil uses texts from Scripture so perversely as to assert that passages applying to the just should be applied to the Savior. Meanwhile, he remains silent about and passes over verses that have been written against him. For, when he quoted, "For He shall give His angels charge over you, To keep you in all your ways. In their hands they shall bear you up, Lest you dash your foot against a stone," (Psalm 91:11-12) he was silent about what follows: "You shall tread upon the lion and the cobra, The young lion and the serpent you shall trample underfoot.." (Psalm 91:13) Why do you keep silence about these words, O devil, unless you are the basilisk and the petty ruler of all serpents? Your poisons are more harmful than those of other snakes, for, as soon as you see someone, you kill him." You also know that another opposing power exists that is allied with you.

You are the "dragon" and you are the "lion" of which Scripture says, "You shall tread upon the lion and the cobra, The young lion and the serpent you shall trample underfoot.." Go ahead and keep silent. We, however, read the Scriptures more correctly. We know we have the power to tread you underfoot; we know that this word has been given to us. For, I say, it was given not only in the Old Testament, as this psalm states, but also in the New Testament. For, the Savior says, "Behold, I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you." (Luke 10:19). Encouraged by this power, we should take up these great weapons and accomplish everything. Through our lives we should tread the lion and the dragon underfoot.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> In Luc hom 31:1-7.

## Satan prepares for the third battle

- ❖ Satan had been shamed by our Savior in the second battle, and he struggled to fight and embarrass Him ...

He desired another, a third battle, so he led the Son to a high mountain, as it is written ...

The mighty Son remained humble with the rebel and allowed him to fight Him as he requested.

The evil one set all his traps and lusts and brought all his ambushes for the Savior.

He pointed all his arrows at him, and completed all the his tricks and wiles. He demonstrated all his cunningness, and set up all his traps. Not a single snare did he leave out ...

In all these victories and battles, Christ humbled Himself until He conquered the enemy, and made everyone victorious through His humility ...

The riches of Emperors piled up on their ranks, and the country was filled with their thrones,

People worship their gods in their borders, and all the nations clap for their idols ... and the nobles of the lands offer sacrifices to the gods.

If (Christ) had not desired to, He would not have viewed all this when [Satan] showed it to Him, but He saw these matters with His humility.

Our Lord saw what He wanted the evil one to show Him, to prove to him that He does not desire such matters.

Satan stood on a high mountain with our Savior, and showed Him peoples, kings, and their states.

And he said to Him: "All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me." (Matthew 4: 8-9) ...

Satan felt that the Son wanted to bring the peoples' prostration back to His Father's house if he was the Son.<sup>27</sup>

### St. Jacob of Serugh

- ❖ Both the Son of God and the Antichrist desire to reign. But the Antichrist wants to reign in order to destroy those who submit to him while Christ reigns to save (by the cross). Two rival kings eagerly strive to reign: the devil, the king of sin, over sinners; and Christ, the King of Justice, over the just!
- ❖ The devil knew that Christ had come to take away his kingdom and to begin to subject those who had been under his authority to Christ. This is why "*he showed him all the kingdoms of the world*" and its inhabitants. He demonstrated how he rules over some by fornication, others by avarice; some by popularity, and others by the allure of beauty ... as if Satan desired to say, "Do you want to reign over all these?" He showed Him countless multitudes of people whom he holds under his power. And indeed, if we want to confess our wretchedness and our unhappiness openly, the devil is king of almost the entire world. This is why the Savior calls him "the ruler of this world." (John 12:31, 16:11). What he is saying is this: "Do you see these people who are under my reign?" And "he shows [them] to him in a moment of time," that is, in the present course of the ages which, if compared with eternity, lasts only a moment.

So, the devil said to the Lord, "Have you come to do battle against me and to take from my kingdom those whom now hold subject? I do not want you to contend. I do not want you to struggle, lest you be afflicted during the contest. There is only one thing I ask of you: 'Fall down and worship me, 'and then take the whole kingdom that I possess.'" Doubtless, our Lord and Savior does indeed wish to reign, but only through justice, truth, and all virtue. But He does not desire to reign as King without suffering [on the cross]. So He replied, "*it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve.'*" He

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<sup>27</sup> Jacob of Serugh, Homily 82 on "Our Lord's Battle with Satan" in: Behnam Sony, *Tarjama men Al-Suryania Ila Al-Arabeyya Wa Derasa Ala Myamer Al-Malfan Mar Ya'coub Al-Serugy (A Translation from Syriac to Arabic and Study on the Mimre of the Teacher Mar Jacob Al-Serugy)*. Part One (Baghdad, 2003); Homily on "Our Lord's Battle with Satan", Coptic text.

says, "I want all of these to be subject to me, so that they might worship the Lord God and serve him alone. This is what my kingdom longs for. Yet you want me to sin. But I have come here to absolve it, and I long to take it away from others also. Know and recognize that I abide by what I said. The Lord God alone is to be adored. And I shall put all of these under my power, and subject them to my reign."

And we, too, rejoice because we are his subjects. Let us pray God that Christ Jesus will put to death " that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin." (Romans 6:6) and reign alone in us, to whom is glory and power for ages of ages.<sup>28</sup>

### **Origen of Alexandria**

**St. Jerome** says: [ He showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory, these which pass away, but the Savior descended to the lower places to defeat the devil with humility.] St. Jerome also says: [What an arrogant and proud one! The devil does not possess the whole world to give his kingdoms, but rather as you know that God is the One who gives the kingship to many!]<sup>29</sup>

**Saint Anthony** views in the words of the Lord: "Away with you, Satan," a grant that the Master gives to his believers, they can, as they have authority, to utter through Christ, Who is in them, the same words, when he says: [Let Satan be ashamed through us, because what the Lord says is for us, so that when the demons hear from us such words, they escape by the Lord, who rebuked them with these words.]<sup>30</sup>

## **Christ the heir rebukes Satan who had captured His Father's possessions**

- ❖ The wicked one said: The kingdoms are his property, and here our Lord showed zealousness and rebuked him.

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<sup>28</sup> In Luc. Hom 30:1-4.

<sup>29</sup> In Matt. 4:8,9.

<sup>30</sup> St. Athanasius :*Vita Antonii* 37.



The heir was disturbed at His Father's stolen possessions, and insisted on restoring the captives from the thief ...

O rebel, they are not yours! Do not be arrogant! You plundered them, and they shall be restored.

If they had not desired to become yours, you would never have had them,

They belong to the Father and by their will they were enslaved to you.

Why would you dare say now that they are yours? From now on, they will not be left to become yours.

Away with you, Satan, because you made yourself superior to God! Leave His possessions and go, because they are His.<sup>31</sup>

**St. Jacob of Serugh**

### **Satan falls like lightning**

- ❖ The wicked fell swiftly, like lightning, and the angels arose to praise the Son of God.

Herein lies the fall that our Lord spoke about: "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven." (Luke 10:18).

Satan fell quickly, hastily, and fearfully, because the Son of God rebuked him.

**St. Jacob of Serugh**

These three trials that the Master faced and defeated are the same trials that Adam had faced and fallen in when he was in Paradise. These are: gluttony, vainglory, and greed. The enemy had tempted him to eat the forbidden fruit in order to fill his stomach, and lured him and his wife with the desire to become like God and own the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. What the first Adam fell for, the second Adam prevailed in. And so, like we were

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<sup>31</sup> Jacob of Serugh, Homily 82 on "Our Lord's Battle with Satan" in: Behnam Sony, *Tarjama men Al-Suryania Ila Al-Arabeyya Wa Derasa Ala Myamer Al-Malfan Mar Ya'coub Al-Serugy (A Translation from Syriac to Arabic and Study on the Mimre of the Teacher Mar Jacob Al-Serugy)*. Part One (Baghdad, 2003); Homily on "Our Lord's Battle with Satan", Coptic text.

destined for eternal perdition through the first Adam, eternal glory became ours through the last Adam. **Saint John Chrysostom** sees that these three temptations of Christ encompass all other temptations: [It seems to me that, referring to the main trials, he talks about all the trials as if they were to be included in them, because the leaders of incalculable evil are: the bondage of gluttony, the work for vain glory, and submission to the madness of riches.]<sup>32</sup>

### **Satan feared when he felt that Christ recognized him**

- ❖ Satan thought that Christ did not recognize him, and when he realized that He did know him, he feared and fell like an accused one.

As soon as our Lord called him by his name: Away with you, Satan, his haughty deceitful self plummeted instantly ...

In the first battle he approached Him like one who cares, and in the second he urged Him like one glorifying Him.

And in the third, as one giving Him great wealth. In all three, he thought that he was misleading our Lord.<sup>33</sup>

**St. Jacob of Serugh**

### **Satan appears to Christ like an angel of light to deceive and mislead Him**

- ❖ The Son of God, who had known Satan since the ancient times, did not reveal that He recognized him from the start.

He met him with lowliness and simplicity, and the villain thought he was misleading Him.

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<sup>32</sup> In Matt. hom 13:5.

<sup>33</sup> Jacob of Serugh, Homily 82 on "Our Lord's Battle with Satan" in: Behnam Sony, *Tarjama men Al-Suryania Ila Al-Arabeyya Wa Derasa Ala Myamer Al-Malfan Mar Ya'coub Al-Serugy (A Translation from Syriac to Arabic and Study on the Mimre of the Teacher Mar Jacob Al-Serugy)*. Part One (Baghdad, 2003); Homily on "Our Lord's Battle with Satan", Coptic text.

He did not feel that Christ knew that he was the devil until after our Lord had said to him: Away with you, Satan.

He feared Him as soon as he realized that He knew him. Satan wondered at His humility when he battled Him.

[Satan] pondered how He did not reveal Himself as the knower, and how He endured the temptation without growing tedious.<sup>34</sup>

**St. Jacob of Serugh**

### **Angels approached to serve Christ**

The evangelist concludes his talk of the temptations by saying: "*Then the devil left Him, and behold, angels came and ministered to Him*" St. Luke the evangelist says that the devil "departed from Him until an opportune time." (Luke 4:13). War never subsides, but with every victory the angels rejoice, and come to carry this victory for us to heaven as a crown of glory. They serve us here, the service of the spirit and not the flesh, so they cherish us as our guardians.

- ❖ As soon as the enemy had fallen, the angels approached, and served the Son of God as it is written ...

When He was humbly fighting the wicked one, the invisible upper forces were watching ...

In His struggle, He resembled a lowly slave, born of a womb, and it was what He desired to do.

He did not let the angels serve Him, nor did He demonstrate His strength when He was tempted.

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<sup>34</sup> Jacob of Serugh, Homily 82 on "Our Lord's Battle with Satan" in: Behnam Sony, *Tarjama men Al-Suryania Ila Al-Arabeyya Wa Derasa Ala Myamer Al-Malfan Mar Ya'coub Al-Serugy (A Translation from Syriac to Arabic and Study on the Mimre of the Teacher Mar Jacob Al-Serugy)*. Part One (Baghdad, 2003); Homily on "Our Lord's Battle with Satan", Coptic text.

His Father's servants stood away looking at him: the angels and archangels, were amazed.

They were zealous, fearful, trembling, and loving, but were not commanded to interfere.

As soon as our Lord ended His battle in humility, the angels approached and served Him with great wonder.

Not because He won, but because He had been humble. He is the conqueror who underwent temptation.

The angels were baffled by that great sight that they saw, and their multitudes sang with distinct praises.

They cried and chanted one to the other with all the blessings, all the melodies, all the praises, and all the cheers.

Satan, who was the tempter fled, and the angels stayed to serve the Son of God.<sup>35</sup>

**St. Jacob of Serugh**

**Saint Jerome** says: [The trial precedes the victory, and the angels will come and serve to confirm the dignity of the victor.]<sup>36</sup> And **Saint John Chrysostom** says: [Your victories stem from His victories, and after them the angels will also welcome you, praise you, and serve as your guards in everything.]<sup>37</sup>

### **The Believers are invited to praise the Lord with the angels**

❖ Let us now approach with the children of light and sing praises to the Son who willed to be tempted.

Our Lord trod this way in the world for us, and we should thank Him more than the angels.

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<sup>35</sup> Jacob of Serugh, Homily 82 on "Our Lord's Battle with Satan" in: Behnam Sony, *Tarjama men Al-Suryania Ila Al-Arabeyya Wa Derasa Ala Myamer Al-Malfan Mar Ya'coub Al-Serugy (A Translation from Syriac to Arabic and Study on the Mimre of the Teacher Mar Jacob Al-Serugy)*. Part One (Baghdad, 2003); Homily on "Our Lord's Battle with Satan", Coptic text.

<sup>36</sup> In Matt 4:11.

<sup>37</sup> In Matt. hom 13:5.

He traded in victory for their sake [humans], and for this He became a human to teach them,

With what weapon should they meet the enemy, and with what force should they quench unruly passions?<sup>38</sup>

**St. Jacob of Serugh**

### **Three battles to fight three passions: gluttony, pride, love for riches and power**

❖ Christ waged three battles to teach you to triumph over the three deathly passions.

Fasting and asceticism precede the beginning of the battle, *to overpower gluttony and the love of food*.

In the second battle: *vainglory is despised*, and the soul clings to the dust by of humility.

In the third battle, *the love of wealth and power falls* and is trampled upon by those who love righteousness.

Flee now from the act of gluttony and from pride when you have acquired righteousness.

And flee from everything that gives rest to the enemy, so you can be counted among the beloved sons of Light.

With humility purify yourself from the love of possessions, and praise with the angels: How beautiful you are!

The Son of God condescended to instruct you in the battle; blessed is the Victor, whose battle has made the defeated victorious.<sup>39</sup>

**St. Jacob of Serugh**

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<sup>38</sup> Jacob of Serugh, Homily 82 on "Our Lord's Battle with Satan" in: Behnam Sony, *Tarjama men Al-Suryania Ila Al-Arabeyya Wa Derasa Ala Myamer Al-Malfan Mar Ya'coub Al-Serugy (A Translation from Syriac to Arabic and Study on the Mimre of the Teacher Mar Jacob Al-Serugy)*. Part One (Baghdad, 2003); Homily on "Our Lord's Battle with Satan", Coptic text.

<sup>39</sup> Jacob of Serugh, Homily 82 on "Our Lord's Battle with Satan" in: Behnam Sony, *Tarjama men Al-Suryania Ila Al-Arabeyya Wa Derasa Ala Myamer Al-Malfan Mar Ya'coub Al-Serugy (A Translation from Syriac to Arabic and Study on the Mimre of the Teacher Mar Jacob Al-Serugy)*. Part One (Baghdad, 2003); Homily on "Our Lord's Battle with Satan", Coptic text.



Satan was anxious, and knew not:  
who is He? And who is His Father? ...

The Son of God had a body  
and that encouraged him to fight Him.  
And since there was no human sin in His body,  
he feared (and said):

Perhaps He is the Son of God?  
For forty days the enemy waited to see,  
Will He starve or not?  
If He is not hungry then He is spiritual,  
but if He is hungry, then I will overcome Him  
because He is just a human.

- St. Jacob of Serugh

