

Temptation in the Desert

written by Joe York

Scene 1

Lights up on reclining figure of Christ, propped on an elbow. He is counting pebbles as he removes them from his pouch.

Jesus:

35...36...Um...37...38...What? Only 38? *(He digs frantically in his pouch)* Oh! *(sobs as he pulls out one more)* 39!! *(Looking up, he whispers)* Thank you! This is the fortieth day! *(to himself)* Tomorrow you eat, Jesus. You lucky dog! *(he refills his pouch)* Forty days...forty days ago I was baptized by John and the whole universe opened up and You said that I am your beloved son. What does it mean?

Satan 1:

(enters, wearing a business suit and power tie) Allo, allo, allo. G'd day, mate. I see you're lazing away the fine desert day. Can I interest you *(pulls a box from his robe)* in a set of the finest cutlery ever produced by human hand?

Jesus:

I-

Satan 1:

(during Satan's spiel Jesus makes several attempts to answer his questions)

I know what you're thinking, mate. Why should anyone pay a high wilderness price when everyone knows blacksmiths sell them in the city for much less. Of course, but, who has time to run into the city when you happen upon a nice fat desert hare or a jackal, say. And, by the way, I've seen plenty of tracks: both hare and jackal. In fact, *(glancing around)* just between you and me, there are goat tracks, just down the path I came up, there. They are so easy to catch, too. Oh! I have the most wonderful recipe for roast goat in mustard sauce! Buy today and I'll throw the recipe in free. But that's not all! Since I'm here, I will also be your wilderness hunting guide, as well, for one low price! Similar offers cost as much as 20 Roman drachmas. But, for a limited time, we refuse 20 drachmas! We won't even take 5 silver pieces. No. The guided hunt, the roast goat recipe and the cutlery are yours for only ...39 pebbles.

Jesus:

No.

Satan 1:

Aren't you hungry? You look hungry.

Jesus:

I'm starving.

Satan 1:

Well, let's hunt the goat, cut it up and roast it in mustard sauce! Yummm-yum!

Jesus:

I don't want any knives.

Satan 1:

Oh, a vegetarian. Well I suppose we could roast tofu in mustard sauce.

Jesus:

No thank you, very much. I'm fasting.

Satan 1:

Oh, I see. You're one of those spiritual types, heh? Getting holy, huh? Fasting. Well don't ask me for a colon cleanse, there aren't enough pebbles in the universe to get me to do that.

Jesus:

What are you doing here? I mean, I've been out here 39 days, haven't seen a soul and then you show up like this is your office or something.

Satan 1:

So, you've been fasting 39 days? I get it. You're doing the full Moses, aren't you: a forty day fast. Well, why not? Ezekial did it. Of course, then he started seeing space chariots and what not. So you are going to be some great holy man?

Jesus:

I am here only because the spirit lead me here, into the wilderness. It leads me now.

Satan:

Hey! Like the children of Israel led into the desert for forty years. Yeah. Of course God fed them when they got hungry. Remember, manna from heaven. Yeah. They were the children of Israel and they got manna. It seems to me, if you are the son of God, you ought to get a little something to eat. Like, here, take these stones and turn them into bread.

Jesus:

(takes stones into his hands and looks at them, shakes his head) God fed Israel, when He chose to. Man shall not live on bread alone but on every word that comes out of the mouth of God. I will wait for the word from God's mouth!*(throws stones away)*

Satan 1:

Go ahead and starve, you Holy so and so! (*exits*)

Jesus:

I think I better take a moment to re-center, here. (*takes deep breath, centers as Satan 2 enters*) Hello.

Satan 2:

(*in leather coat and slicked down hair*) What up?

Jesus:

I'm just basking in the mystery of God's love.

Satan 2:

Say no more! I myself am intimately involved with the question.

Jesus:

You are?

Satan 2:

Sure.

Jesus:

How's that?

Satan 2:

Let's just say I aid people in their explorations of the limits of God's love- and forgiveness.

Jesus:

Oh, I think I see...

Satan 2:

You shouldn't think. It slows down the decision making process.

Jesus:

I wasn't making a decision.

Satan 2:

If you are trying to argue, I'm your guy!

Jesus:

Who are you? What do you want?

Satan 2:

OK. I'm Evil S. Evil-

Jesus:

Really?-

Satan 2:

It's my stage name. You've heard of Evil Knieval, right? Well compared to me, he was a wall-flower. I am the true dare-devil! Ha, ha, ha.

Jesus:

Well, Mr. Evil, what is it you want.

Satan 2:

I only want you to get what you want. Come with me. *(begins to step away)*

Jesus:

Where?

Satan 2:

Why to Herrod's balcony in the very tip top of the temple.

Jesus:

Sorry, I'm going to stay right here in the wilderness until the Spirit leads me somewhere else.

Satan 2:

Oh, come one wuss! I dare you to leave!

Jesus:

No.

Satan 2:

I double dare!!

Jesus:

No!

Satan 2:

I triple dog dare you!!!

Jesus:

Yes Well I can see that you are a dare devil.

Satan 2:

OK, we'll just go visionarily.

Jesus:

What?

Satan:

You know: in a vision.

Jesus:

All right, I can do that. (*stands next to Satan 2*)

Satan 2:

Behold, a sheer drop of 450 feet. (*they both look down and , in tandem, automatically back away*)

Jesus:

Breath taking view.

Satan 2:

(snide laughter)

Jesus:

So?

Satan 2:

So jump.

Jesus:

No way!

Satan:

Go ahead. Nothing can hurt you. It even says in the psalm, "He will send his angels lest you even stub your toe." Come on, your son-ship! Sure you heard God say you are his son, but talk is cheap. Prove it dude! Anyway, it's not like this is the Grand Canyon!

Jesus:

(*looks back and forth between the abyss and Satan 2*) How can you suggest that I experiment with God, as if He is some mindless MoJo or something. It is written, "Do not put the Lord, your God, to the test."

Satan 2:

(as he exits) Chickenshchickenshickjshickschschhc...

Jesus:

(looks around as if awakening) Oh, hello desert. Nice to still be here... I wonder what sand tastes like.

Satan 3:

(enters in shimmering attire) Ah, there you are, man of the hour, game-changer, wild card, long awaited messiah.

Jesus:

(shading his eyes) You sure are shiny. Would you move somewhere where you don't catch the light so well?

Satan 3:

Impossible. I'm very refractive.

Jesus:

I'll say. What are those things you are wearing?

Satan 3:

Just a little bling! Gold, sapphires, silver and diamonds: precious metals and sparkling stones.

Jesus:

You don't have any knives for sale, do you?

Satan 3:

No.

Jesus:

Or advise about leveraging God?

Satan 3:

No, no!

Jesus:

What are you doing out here in the wilderness? I mean, they didn't put in a new highway around here which I didn't know about, because there seems to be a lot of people all of the sudden.

Satan 3:

Highway? Who knows? But I'll tell you why I'm here.

Jesus:

Well, I would say I'm hungry for the knowledge, but I'm trying not to think about hunger right now.

Satan 3:

Better not to think anyway-

Jesus:

I heard that...

Satan 3:

The buzz is that you are determined to make a new heaven and new earth: you know shake things up a bit. I have what you need(*taking out an accounting ledger*) right here.

Jesus:

That looks like a double entry accounting ledger.

Satan 3:

(*astonished at Jesus' naiveté she puffs out little breaths of air*) It's not the ledger, it's the accounts. Now you have your (*air quotes*) Good News, no matter how distasteful I find it. But to get things done in this world, you need assets.

Jesus:

Assets?

Satan 3:

Money, clout, power, you need one hell of a posse to pull off the kind of change you would like to see. (*holds up ledger*) Right here baby! They all owe me. All of them. The rich and powerful, the mid-managers, village tyrants, all! And all you have to do is acknowledge the situation, sweetheart. You just have to admit that I am the master here. Just genuflect in front of me and I will knight you with this Excalibur of complete dominion.

Jesus:

How would there be a new earth with the old master's dominion intact? Begone, Satan! It is written, "You shall worship the Lord your God alone. (*Satan 3 noisily huffs away. Angels enter carrying food and drink, one can brush his hair; one can wipe his face with a cloth, etc.*)