

Tested for Our Sake: The Temptations of Jesus in the Light of Hebrews

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Abstract

In this paper, I illustrate that there has been a neglect to consider what Hebrews has to say on Jesus' temptations in studies on the temptations of Jesus. I therefore conduct an exegesis of Hebrews, whereby I argue that in the epistle, the purpose of Jesus' temptations is understood as designed to enable fully his priestly role of intercession for those in temptation whom he represents before God. Such an anthropocentric understanding of the purpose of Jesus' temptations makes them highly devotional in their application as I demonstrate in applying them to the experiences of the Baganda Christian martyrs of the 19th century, with the edification of Uganda Martyrs' Seminarians in view.

Keywords

Jesus' temptations, Hebrews, Jesus' priesthood, intercession, Namugongo martyrs

Introduction

This paper is a study of the purpose of the temptations of Jesus, inspired by Hebrews and the experiences of the first African Christian martyrs in Uganda. I wish to offer a neglected understanding of the purpose of Jesus' temptations, which comes from the epistle to the Hebrews and apply it briefly to Jesus' Gethsamane and Golgotha temptations in relationship to the Baganda martyrs. I begin my paper by illustrating the neglect I allude to in discussions of Jesus' temptations by briefly reviewing the predominant views on the purpose of Jesus' wilderness temptations (Matt. 4:1–11, Mark 1:12, 13, and Luke 4:1–13; cf. Matt. 27:40) before turning to the light of Hebrews.

The Purpose of Jesus' Wilderness Temptations

The nature of Jesus' wilderness temptations has usually been conceived of messianically or anthropologically. When conceived of messianically the temptations of Jesus in the wilderness are understood to be aimed somewhat at the nature of his Messiahship. In this regard, for example, the temptation to have the kingdoms of the world by worshiping the devil (Matt. 4:8–10 and Luke 4:5–8) is almost unanimously

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viewed as a test of whether Jesus would choose to be God's Messiah and have the kingdoms of the world, for which he would have to suffer and die, or be the devil's Messiah and have the kingdoms of the world by worshiping him, without the necessity of suffering and dying.¹ Those who view the nature of Jesus' temptation as a test of the nature of his Messiahship understand its purpose to be to lead Jesus astray so that he does not fulfil his destined messianic role.²

When conceived of anthropologically, the temptations of Jesus in the wilderness are understood as, in essence, a test of Jesus as a human being since he could not have been tempted as deity. There seem to be two main views on the nature of Jesus' temptations as a human being. In the first view, the temptations of Jesus in the wilderness are understood against the backdrop of Israel's temptations in the wilderness as portrayed in Deuteronomy.³ In this regard, the temptation to turn stones into loaves, for example, is a test, akin to Israel's in the wilderness, of how Jesus would react to privation, whether he would trust in God on whom life depends.⁴ Those who

understand the nature of Jesus' wilderness temptations against the backdrop of Israel's testing in the wilderness view the purpose of his temptation typologically, i.e., in parallel to Israel's. So, whereas Israel (the type) in the wilderness was tested and found wanting, Jesus (the antitype) passed the test and is now considered by God as worthy of his messianic destiny.⁵

In the second view, the wilderness temptations of Jesus are understood against the backdrop of temptations common to human beings. These temptations could be classified as the lust of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, and pride of life as described in John's epistle (1 John 2:16), or as the threefold vices of love for pleasure, love of glory, and love of possessions,⁶ or even the three instincts common to humans of appetite, ambition, and avarice.⁷ On the basis of this view, for example, the temptation on Jesus to throw himself down from the mountain top is viewed either as a test on Jesus directed to the pride of life or the love of glory. Those who view Jesus' temptations as a test of his humanity may view Jesus' temptation as a parallel to Adam's in the garden of Eden. But unlike Adam, Jesus defeats the devil, and this is understood variously to herald the onset of the reversal of the effects of sin on humanity, and opening the door for the salvation of humankind. Luke's and Mark's accounts of the wilderness temptations are especially seen to have this purpose in the foreground, because in Luke's gospel, Jesus' Adamic genealogy is sandwiched between his baptism and temptations,⁸ while Mark's gospel

¹ See, for example, T. J. Jansma, 'The Temptations of Jesus', *Westminster Theological Journal* 5.2 (1946): 166–181 and D. A. Carson, *Matthew*, The Expositor's Bible Commentary with the New International Version (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), 114. For more on persuasions on the nature of Jesus' wilderness temptations as messianic in nature see A. B. Taylor Jr., 'Decision in the Desert', *Interpretation* 14.1 (1960): 300–9; S. L. Johnson Jr., 'The Temptations of Christ', *Bibliotheca Sacra* 123.4 (1966): 342–52; and L. Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 70.

² See, for example, D. A. Carson, *Matthew*, 113.

³ See, for example, A. Stock, *The Method and Message of Matthew* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press), 51 and Gerhardsson, *The Testing of God's Son* (Lund: C. W. K. Gleerup, 1966).

⁴ See, for example, R. H. Mounce, *Matthew*, Understanding the Bible Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 1991), 29; D. L. Bock, *Luke*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 128; and R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 127–128.

⁵ See T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 128; J. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 192–3; and H. Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978), 166.

⁶ L. T. Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, Sacra Pagina (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1991), 76.

⁷ D. Thomas, *The Gospel of Matthew: Expository and Homiletical*, Kregel Bible Study Classics (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979), 20–1.

⁸ G. H. P. Thompson, 'Called—Proven—Obedient: A Study in the Baptism and Temptation Narratives of Matthew and Luke', *Journal of Theological Studies* 11 (1960): 1–12, on 7.

mentions that Jesus was at peace with wild animals after he defeated the wiles of the devil's temptations.⁹ Alternatively those who view Jesus' temptations as a test of his humanity may view the way in which Jesus deals with his temptations as a model for Christians of how to overcome, or cope with, temptations.¹⁰

These views, which biblical scholars have advanced on the purpose of Jesus' temptations, have strong exegetical and theological merits to be discounted. Furthermore, they can also be variously combined to provide a better picture of the purpose of Jesus' wilderness temptations.¹¹ However, those who advance these views omit from their discussion what Hebrews explicitly says about the purpose of Jesus' temptations. Where they do, it is usually incidental or in passing, with the effect that they ignore the priestly context of Hebrews' commentary on the purpose of Jesus' temptations.¹² Yet cognisance of Hebrews' priestly context is necessary for a proper understanding of Hebrews' commentary on the purpose of Jesus' temptations. This neglect of Hebrews applies, too, in other discussions of Jesus' temptations, whether they are discussions of his temptations by the hill besides the sea of Tiberius (John 6:1–15), at the onset of his journey to the cross (Matt. 16:21–23 and Mark 8:31–33), in Gethsemane

(Matt. 26:36–46, Mark 14:32–42, Luke 22:39–46, Mark 8:33, John 12:27–33), at Golgotha (Matt. 27:32–44, Mark 15:21–32, and Luke 23:32–38), or elsewhere.¹³ This state of affairs in the study of Jesus' temptations is odd, since, if it is only in Hebrews that we have explicit NT comments on the temptations of Jesus, then it ought to be incumbent on those studying the temptations of Jesus to bring to bear Hebrews' comments on the same. Moreover, apprehensions on the purpose of Jesus' temptations stand to be enriched from this additional biblical perspective which we turn to below.

Hebrews, Priesthood, and Jesus' Temptations

Hebrews is a sustained rhetoric on Jesus as mediator *par excellence*.¹⁴ Jesus' mediatorial functions are articulated in comparison to OT prophets (1:1–2, 3:1–6), angels (1:4–2:18), and, for the most part, to Aaronic high priests (1:3, 2:14–18, 4:14–5:10, 6:16–8:7, 9:1–10:18), with pastoral admonitions drawn from these Christological functions. It follows that Hebrews' commentary on Jesus' temptations are within the context of Jesus' mediatorial roles, and more specifically, as we shall see shortly, within the context of his priestly role.

⁹ See R. A. Guelich, *Mark 1.8.26*, Word Biblical Commentary 34A (Dallas, TX: Word Book Publishers, 1983), 38–9, and J. R. Donahue and D. J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, Sacra Pagina (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2002), 66.

¹⁰ See S. R. Garret, *The Temptations of Jesus in Mark, 70*, and I. H. Marshall, *Commentary on Luke*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978), 166.

¹¹ A good example of the combination of these views is in M. J. Wilkins, *Matthew*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 156–157.

¹² See, for example, M. E. Ross, *Let's Study Matthew* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2009), 33–4; Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, 75; N. Geldenhuys, *The Gospel of Luke*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979), 156; and R. K. Hughes, *Mark: Jesus' Servant and Saviour* (Wheaton, IL: Crossways, 1989), 131.

¹³ There have been arguments that the life of Jesus in the Gospels is characterised by temptation of affliction and seduction, principally from Satan, Jewish authorities, and his disciples. For a comprehensive view on this, see S. R. Garret, *The Temptations of Jesus in Mark* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998).

¹⁴ Indeed, the speaker in Hebrews characterises it as 'a word of exhortation' (*logos tēs paraklēseōs*—Heb. 13:22), which is usually understood as an oral discourse, that is a sermon (cf. Acts 13:15). For more see, T. H. Olbricht, 'Hebrews as Amplification', in S. Porter and T. Olbricht (eds), *Rhetoric and the New Testament: Essays from the Heidelberg Conference*, JSNTS 90 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1992), 357–87; H. W. Attridge, 'Paraenesis in a Homily: The Possible Locations of, and the Socialization in, the "Epistle to the Hebrews"', *Semeia* 50 (1990): 211–26; and C. F. Evans, *The Theology of Rhetoric: The Epistle to the Hebrews* (London: Dr. Williams's Trust, 1988).

The context of the first of the two commentaries on Jesus' temptation comes from Jesus' comparison with angels. The author of Hebrews starts the comparison of Jesus to angels in Hebrews 1:4 with reference to the name that he has inherited as more excellent than that of angels. The angels in view here are, in all likelihood, 'chief' angels (or archangels) since, in the Jewish religious tradition, only archangels such as Michael (Dan 12:10–14) and Gabriel (Luke 1:26) bore names, and they were understood chiefly as mediators and leaders.¹⁵ As noted by Gieschen, it was believed amongst Jewish groups, that 'God is enthroned in heaven while carrying out his work in the world by means of angelic leaders who have myriads of other angels at their command'.¹⁶ If we take this to be the case, then Jesus' comparison with angels as signaled in Heb. 1:4 is, to be more precise, with principal angels. Thus following Heb. 1:4, from Heb. 1:5 to Heb. 1:14, there are then seven scriptural quotations from the Old Testament (Ps. 2:7 in Heb. 1:5a and 2 Sam. 7:14 in Heb. 1:5b, Ps 2:7 in Heb. 1:6; Ps 104 in Heb. 1:7; Ps. 45:6–7 in Heb. 1:8–9; Ps. 102:25 in Heb. 1:10; and Ps. 110:1 in Heb. 1:13), which serve to make clear the superiority of Jesus' mediation over that of angels. The first two (Ps. 2:7 in Heb. 1:5a and 2 Sam. 7:14 in Heb. 1:5b), for example, declare the Sonship of Jesus; angels may have been collectively called 'sons of God' but no angel was singly declared a Son of God.

After a pastoral admonition drawn from the superiority of Jesus mediation over angels (in Heb. 2:1–4), the comparison continues in Hebrews 2:5–18 with reference to Psalm

8:4–6 (Heb. 2:6–7). More precisely, the author of Hebrews applies Psalm 8 (where it is stated that human beings have been created a little lower than angels but enthroned as royalty) to Jesus in three main points, which culminate in his first commentary on the purpose of Jesus' temptations.

The first point is that, according to this psalm, we do not see everything yet under Jesus' feet (Heb. 2:8). (This subjection in following Hebrews later chapters (Heb. 11 and 12) is to happen absolutely sometime in the future). The second point is that Jesus' humiliation is not permanent, but temporary. The third point is that the temporary nature of his low-ering is, precisely because of his incarnation (Heb. 2:9), followed by a crowning with glory and honour with all subjected to him. Without the incarnation, the glory and honour referred to would not be granted since the one bringing salvation must be totally identified with those he sanctifies (Heb. 2:10–13). But there is more to this third point: Jesus' incarnation, suffering, and death have enabled him to destroy the one who holds the power of death (Heb. 2:14) and free those who have been held in bondage by the fear of death (Heb. 2:15). And, coming to the purpose of Jesus' temptation according to Hebrews, in virtue of his incarnation and temptations, he is able to help Abraham's descendants by being a merciful and dependable high priest (Heb. 2:17–18).¹⁷ On account of context, it is proper that we understand that the high-priestly help which Jesus gives is through intercession. That is, Jesus helps his brothers and sisters by faithfully praying to God for them out of his empathy with their situations (quite like Jesus' intercession for Peter in anticipation of his coming temptation (Luke 22:31–34)). The author of Hebrews knitting together of the purpose of Jesus' temptations to his priestly role of

¹⁵ For more on 'principal' angels, see C. A. Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Christology: Antecedents and Early Evidence* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), and L. Hurtado, *One God, One Lord: Early Christian Devotion and Ancient Jewish Monotheism*, 2nd edn (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 71–2. See also S. M. Olyan, *A Thousand Thousand Served Him: Exegesis and the Naming of Angels in Ancient Judaism*, *Texte und Studien zum Antiken Judentum* 36 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1993), for a discussion on the origins of naming angels.

¹⁶ C.A. Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Christology*, 124.

¹⁷ It is no wonder that mercy (*eleēmōn*) as referred to here 'bears a strong affective element—lenience is shown toward another because of the feeling of 'pity' or 'compassion', a sense of empathy with the situation...' (L. T. Johnson, *Hebrews: A Commentary*, New Testament Library (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2006), 104).

intercession is more pronounced in his second comment on the purpose of Jesus' temptation, to which we turn below.

As already mentioned, the bulk of the content of Hebrews has to do with Jesus' comparison with Aaronic high priests in articulations of Jesus as mediator *par excellence*. Intercession and mediation of forgiveness are the mediatorial roles of Aaronic high priests in focus in Hebrews, with both highlighted in contrast to the superiority of Christ's priesthood. We shall limit our discussion to the mediatorial role of intercession, since it is the role which is related to Hebrews' comments on the purpose of Jesus' temptations.

The first contrast, which casts into sharp relief the superiority of Jesus' priestly role of intercession over the Aaronic one, is in regard to the permanency or temporal nature of a priestly ministry. While Jesus' priesthood, being in the order of Melchizedek (Heb. 5:5–6, 7, Heb. 6:20 and Heb. 7:17), is forever (Heb. 7:1–28), the Aaronic priesthood had many priests succeeding each other on account of their mortality (Heb. 7:23). Therefore, as an eternal priest, Jesus is able ceaselessly and eternally to make intercession for 'those who come to God through him' (Heb. 7:23–25), something which the Aaronic high priests cannot do. For the confidence of his audience, the author of Hebrews points out that this superior priestly intercessory role of Jesus was evident during his earthly ministry when he made prayers and supplications to God, which were heard (Heb. 5:7–10).

The superior intercessory role of Jesus' priesthood over the Aaronic one is brought out further in the contrast between the sanctuary within which the Aaronic priests minister and the one which he serves in (Heb. 8:1–6, Heb. 9:1–11, and Heb. 9:23–25). The Aaronic high priest serves on earth in a sanctuary made by hands and 'as a copy and foreshadow of what is in heaven' (Heb. 8:5, Heb. 9:1–10, and Heb. 9:23), whilst Christ serves in heaven, in the 'true tabernacle set by the Lord' (Heb. 8:2, Heb. 9:11 and Heb. 9:24). In virtue of this, and since intercession was understood as the primary role

of priests in the temple—symbolised in their vestments' bearing the twelve tribes of Israel (Exod. 39:6–7, 14) and the requirement always to wear them when they entered the temple for ministry (Lev. 16:32–33)¹⁸—we can say that Christ has a superior intercessory ministry to the Aaronic priests.

However, this superiority of Christ's priestly role in the area of intercession over the Aaronic one is given only after the validation of the priesthood of Christ (Heb. 4:14–5:6). It is in the context of this validation that the author of Hebrews gives his second comments on the purpose of Jesus' temptations in the following manner. A vital ability of those who represent people before God (i.e., priesthood), the author of Hebrews explains, is the ability to sympathize with those whom they represent. For Aaronic high priests, this ability is inevitable since as humans, the weakness of those whom they represent before God saddle them as well, thereby allowing them to be gentle and understanding with the wayward (Heb. 5:1–3). With Jesus, this ability is on account of his humanity and attendant temptations but without sin (Heb. 4:14–16). The temptations of Jesus, therefore, were purposed to qualify him to be a priest by enabling him to sympathize with those whom he represents before God and then intercede for them accordingly.

These intercessions, according to Hebrews, are at the throne of grace in heaven where Jesus has gone, having passed through the heavens (Heb. 4:14) and sat at God's right hand (Heb. 1:3, 8:1, and 12:2), in God's very presence on their behalf (Heb. 9:24). Since Jesus is seated next to God's throne interceding for them, the recipients of Hebrews are encouraged to approach that throne of grace with confidence to receive mercy and grace to help them in their moments of need (Heb. 4:16). Indeed, the choice of the word 'approach' (*proserchesthai*),

¹⁸ For more on the high priest's vestment symbolism, which pointed to their intercessory role, see (M. Barker, *The Gate of Heaven: The History and Symbolism of the Temple in Jerusalem* (London: SPCK, 1991), 112–24.

on account of its usage in the Septuagint to denote prayers in the temple where God's mercy seat resides,¹⁹ links this encouragement of approaching God's throne of grace to Jesus' priesthood role of intercession beside it. Attridge captures this link well when he comments that the throne of grace:

was the archetype of the ark of the covenant in the inner sanctuary where God was to be found and where the rites of expiation on the Day of Atonement were conducted. The earthly counterpart of the heavenly throne was then suitably called 'mercy seat'..., and the heavenly throne where the true high priest has ministered [and still ministers] is the source of God's gracious assistance.²⁰

The linkage between the temple's mercy seat and God's throne of grace is also present in two corresponding pastoral admonitions to the audience of Hebrews to have confidence, firstly, in the surety of their hope (Heb. 6:18–20) and, secondly, in their entering God's sanctuary (i.e., his presence (Heb. 10:19–22)), all on account of Christ's present priestly abode next to God's throne in the inner sanctuary.

Thus in Hebrews' second commentary (Heb. 4:15–5:6) on the purpose of Jesus' temptations, the temptations of Jesus are understood to be for the sake of his priestly role of intercession for those whom he represents before God. But these intercessions, as we have already seen in what follows immediately after the author of Hebrews' second commentary on Jesus temptations (i.e., Heb. 5:7–9:28), are superior to Aaronic priests' intercessions since they are ceaseless, and offered in God's very presence.

In conclusion, we may say that, according to Hebrews, the purpose of Jesus' temptations was to enable fully his priestly role of intercession before God for those in temptation whom

he represents before God. As a priest, the sympathetic help (Heb. 2:17–18 and Heb. 4:14–16) which he gives to those he represents before God, by interceding for them accordingly, arises from his mercies, which are grounded in his intimate experience of their humanity and the temptations thereof. Moreover, his mercies and dependability as a priest are apparently boundless for he has been tempted in all ways, that is, in every conceivable area common to human beings (*kata panta kath' homoiotēta*—Heb. 4:15), so that no temptation which befalls any of those he represents before God is alien to him for him to be unable to offer an appropriate intercession.

With Hebrews' understanding on the purpose of Jesus' temptations so established, I wish now to apply the same to Jesus' Gethsemane and Golgotha temptations in relationship to the Baganda Christian martyrs of 1886 and, as a result, demonstrate concretely the enrichment Hebrews brings to apprehensions of Jesus' temptations.

Gethsemane, Golgotha, and Namugongo

The enrichment which Hebrews brings to the interpretations of the purpose of Jesus' temptations is their highly devotional application. In regarding the purpose of Jesus' temptations in anthropocentric terms, that is in relationship to those which assailed his audience, Hebrews, more than any other interpretation of the purpose of Jesus' temptation, makes Jesus' temptations absolutely devotional in their application in one of the following three ways.

Firstly, on the basis of Hebrews' understanding, a believer under temptation can take comfort and courage from, and pray to God in, the knowledge that Jesus empathises with him/her, and is interceding for him/her. Secondly, on the basis of this understanding, one can also encourage believers under temptation to take comfort and courage, and to pray, in the knowledge that Jesus empathises with them, and is interceding for them in God's glory. Indeed, this is the

¹⁹ For more on this word and its cultic context see J.M. Scholer, *Proleptic Priests: Priesthood in the Epistle to the Hebrews*, JSNTSS 49 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991), 91–5.

²⁰ H. W. Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989), 142.

encouragement which the author of Hebrews is giving his audience thus: take heart in your struggles for Jesus who became one of us cares, and now takes our plight mercifully to God as our high priest (Heb. 2:14–18); approach God's throne of grace with confidence for help since Jesus is already there interceding for you (Heb. 4:16); you should have confidence in your hope because Christ is before the Father praying for you as a priest in the order of Melchizedek (Heb. 6:18–20); you are not alone, for Christ your high priest is always interceding for you (Heb. 7:27), etc.. This is quite like Rom. 8:34 and 1 John 2:1, which are encouragements to believers based on Jesus' priestly role of intercession.

Thirdly, on the basis of Hebrews' understanding one can, retrospectively, make sense of, be encouraged by, and offer thanks to God for, the ability which believers had to overcome temptations in astonishing ways and against all odds. Their extraordinary ability, with which they overcame the temptations in question, is owing to the fact that Jesus in empathy interceded for them before God's throne of grace, and he was heard. My concrete demonstration of Hebrews' enrichment of apprehensions of the purpose of Jesus' temptations in what follows is limited, by the scope of this paper, to the third way.

I offered an abridged version of this paper at Uganda Martyrs' Seminary in Namugongo, Kampala, Uganda. When I accepted to offer a lecture on 'Tested for Our Sake: The Temptations of Jesus in the Light of Hebrews' to students and faculty at the seminary, there was no resisting the force with which the location of the seminary urged itself on me to reflect, from the perspective of Hebrews, on events which took place at the site 130 years ago. Such a reflection would, no doubt, lead to the edification of Uganda Martyrs' seminarians as well as resulting in praise and thanks to God for the gift of his Son, Jesus Christ. Uganda Martyrs' Seminary is built in Namugongo, on the very site where 31 Baganda²¹ Christians

of Uganda were executed for their faith on the 3rd of June, 1886 (which happened to be Ascension Thursday).²² These Christians were among the early converts to the faith in Uganda from the evangelistic labours of Anglican and Catholic missionaries which began there in 1875. Theirs is a story of incredible courage and confidence in the face of death. First, when these Christians were rounded up and brought before Kabaka Mwanga (the king of Buganda at that time) in his own private quarters, knowing very well they were being gathered for execution, none of them fled.²³ When they were given the chance by the Kabaka to state their stand and escape their impending execution, none of them was willing to renounce his/her faith in the Lord, even when family members present tried to prevail on them to do so.²⁴ As expected, the Kabaka then condemned them to death by burning in Namugongo.²⁵ During their march from the Kabakas palace in Munyonyo to Namugongo (a distance of approximately 30 kilometers), they were not cowed by the brutal death some of their colleagues met *en route* but, on the contrary, were strengthened in resolve and confessed as much.²⁶ It is no wonder that their reaction and conduct confounded their executioners.²⁷ In Namugongo, as they waited calmly (for a week) for their execution, they evangelised their handlers and executioners as

²² For more on the martyrs see J.F. Faupel, *African Holocaust*, 3rd edn (Nairobi: St. Paul's Publications, 1984); M.L. Pirouet, *Strong in the Faith* (Mukono, Uganda: Church of Uganda Literature Centre, 1969); and J. A. Rowe, 'The Purge of Christians at Mwanga's Court', *Journal of African History* 5.1 (1964): 55–72.

²³ Faupel, *African Holocaust*, 151.

²⁴ Faupel, *African Holocaust*, 151.

²⁵ Namugongo was one of the thirteen execution sites in the Baganda kingdom and was the site reserved for the execution of royalty by burning. The site was chosen as their place of execution because most of these Baganda Christians were servants of the Kabaka. Faupel, *African Holocaust*, 168.

²⁶ Faupel, *African Holocaust*, 164–72.

²⁷ Faupel, *African Holocaust*, 152–3, 168.

²¹ One of the ethnic groups found in central Uganda.

opportunity arose. Lastly, they faced their pain-ful and agonising death, astonishingly, with joy and with prayers, a death which came by roast-ing slowly over a fire while tied to a tree and seated on a pyre.²⁸

This poignant story of the Baganda Christians facing perhaps the ultimate tempta-tion is almost incredible. There is no doubt that something remarkable and of extraordinary proportions, which begs for understanding and explanation, happened psycho-emotionally to these Christians. Their emotional state of peace and calmness, and their confidence and assur-ance, sufficient to cause them to preach to those who would execute them, were in such stark contrast to their circumstances and prospects that we are left pondering what it was that pro-duced them. It is possible to understand what produced their emotional states by applying contemporary views on the 'drivers' of marty-dom to these martyrs. The relevant applications would include their willingness to suffer death as a self-sacrifice for a greater good, as a self offering of love to get closer to the beloved; their willingness to suffer death in pursuit of veneration, exaltation, or significance; a will-ingness to suffer death on account of a malad-justed personality of masochism, for example, a willingness to suffer death because of a desire for power and influence beyond the limits of life; a willingness to suffer death in view of ultimate and eternal rewards, or even a willing-ness to suffer death willingly out of revenge or resentment.²⁹ Some of these explanations, particularly the willingness to suffer death as

a sacrifice, are religiously compelling, and can help us understand what produced the remarkable emotional state in the face of death on these Baganda martyrs, but we do well to apply the explanation of Hebrews.³⁰ Indeed, in comment-ing on Jesus' temptation in relationship to our own, the author of Hebrews points us elsewhere for understanding and explanation of what happened. The Gospel accounts show that in Gethsemane (Matt. 26:36–46, Mark 14:32–42, Luke 22:39–46, Mark 8:33, John 12:27–33) and at Golgotha (Matt. 27:32–44, Mark 15:21–32, and Luke 23:32–38), Jesus respectively faced the shadow of death, and a painful death, but withstood the temptation to shy away and deny his destiny together with that of the world's sal-vation. From Hebrews we understand that due to Jesus' own intimate experience of tempta-tion with death, he empathised with what these 31 Baganda Christians faced and accordingly interceded for them before God as their mer-ciful and faithful priest. And Jesus' prayers for them were heard. For that reason, they received from God timely help in their time of need, which accounts for their confidence, courage, and peace, and for the assurance of their des-tiny in the face of a painful death, all of which defied human expectation and experience.

Conclusion

I am aware that my concrete demonstration of Hebrews' enrichment to apprehensions of the purpose of Jesus' temptations is remote terri-tory in academic theology given our preoccupa-tion with, on the one hand, doctrinal, historical, and literary studies of the Bible, and, relatively recently, with socio-economic, political, gen-dered, and cultural interpretations of the Bible on the other. This is to say that in academic the-ology, there is an apparent dearth of theological scholarship of the contemplative and experien-tial ilk. But a psycho-emotional and experiential understanding of biblical texts is not entirely

²⁸ Faupel, *African Holocaust*, 191–9.

²⁹ Discussions are plentiful on understanding what 'enables' martyrdom. See for example, N. Verbin, 'Martyrdom: A Philosophical Perspective', *Philosophical Investigations* 35.1 (2011): 68–87; Smith, J. W. 'Martyrdom: Self-Denial or Self-Exaltation? Motives for Self-Sacrifice from Homer to Polycarp a Theological Reflection', *Modern Theology* 22.2 (2006): pp. 169–196; A. W. Krugianski et al., 'Fully Committed: Suicide Bombers' Motivation and the Quest for Personal Significance', *Political Psychology* 30.3

(2009): 331–57; and P. Murray, "'I Have Tears and Hope": Martyrdom in the Twentieth Century', *New Blackfriars* 81.957 (2000): 485–97.

³⁰ And it is possible too to have some of these views subsumed within Hebrews' explanation.

novel in biblical studies; there are studies which have sought to grapple with New Testament writings on the grounds of the experience of the early Christians.³¹ Such studies of the Bible should not be limited to early Christianity but should be extended to encompass contemporary readings of the Bible that expressly warrant

psycho-emotional appropriations and corollary experiences, as I hope I have demonstrated in my reading of Hebrews' commentary on Jesus' temptations. For doing so honours the voice and integrity of such biblical texts and their metaphysical claims, which could potentially be experienced by the very readers of these texts.

³¹ See for examples J. D. G. Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit: A Study of the Religious and Charismatic Experience of Jesus and the First Christians*, New Testament Library (London: SCM, 1975); L. T. Johnson, *Religious Experience in Earliest Christianity: A Missing Dimension in New Testament Studies* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1998); S. C. Barton, 'Eschatology and the Emotions in Early Christianity', *Journal of Biblical Literature* 130.3 (2011): 571–91; and L. W. Hurtado, 'Revelatory Experiences and Religious Innovations in Earliest Christianity', *The Expository Times* 125.10 (2014): 469–85.