

Twisted scripture

By [Adam Thomas](#)

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Trust the devil to be well-versed in scripture. I doubt the crafty demon wanted to stoop (rise, actually) to using God's word but--even with home-field advantage—he ended up playing Jesus' game.

I'm sure the Opposition Research Department down below had worked diligently on the game plan for those 40 days in the wilderness. The plan was simple: hit Jesus with a three-pronged attack against areas of the human experience that the ORD identified as vulnerable. A combination of Jesus' needs for food, fame and safety ought to be enough to take down the so-called Son of God.

The match begins. In his first possession, the devil goes for the hunger offense. No good. Jesus is still full of the Holy Spirit—apparently it's much better sustenance than rock bread. Possession two: throw fame, power and authority at him. Still no good. Jesus is already lord of all those kingdoms, so that kind of influence doesn't faze him. Only one possession left for the desperate devil (apparently the ORD team didn't work as diligently as it should have).

The devil pulls out the enemy's playbook and sticks his thumb halfway in. He places Jesus at the top of the temple and tells him to jump, because (the devil opens the book to Psalm 91) "He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you. On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone." The devil's desperation is clear: he's quoting holy scripture at the Son of God to try to get him to sin. Naturally the devil loses.

Note the devil's tactic here. Jesus wins all three possessions by drawing strength from the lessons of scripture, but the devil adapts after his first two attempts. Psalm 91 is a beautiful poem about trusting in God, and the devil twists it to his own devices.

Sad to say, but the ORD learned this tactic from us Christians. (I know, the timeline doesn't really work, but just go with me here.) When we get backed into corners, when we feel threatened by different interpretations of our religion, we tend to fling the shrapnel of our twisted bits of scripture at each other. Instead of looking to scripture for guidance, we look to it for munitions.

It doesn't have to be this way. Look at the other side of the match. The devil twists scripture into a weapon, but Jesus doesn't shoot verse bullets back. Instead, he quotes scripture to guide himself along the right path, to remind himself how to live.