

## The Temptation of Jesus

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Text: [Matthew 4:1-11](#).

As we read in [Hebrews 4:14-16](#), we have a great high priest who was tempted in every kind of way that we are, yet unlike us He escaped without sin. Because of His sinlessness in the face of trial, we can boldly draw near to the throne of grace for help in time of need.

Jesus was tempted at times other than what we read as "The Temptation of Jesus," but the Spirit records these for our benefit. Many of you have read the accounts in Matthew, Mark and Luke many times, others perhaps not. Maybe we've glossed over this and other events in the gospels because we think they are so familiar to us. Let's try to understand this passage this morning as if we have never seen it and then see some truths that will help us walk closer with our Lord.

We'll be in [Matthew 4](#) for this study, though we will note a few details that Mark and Luke give us along the way. Read [Matthew 4:1-11](#).

### BACKGROUND

This event is parallel to Israel's time in the wilderness, a place of trial and difficulty. In fact, Jesus quotes exclusively from Deuteronomy in His responses to the devil. At that time, the Israelites had wandered in the wilderness for 40 years and are preparing (again) to enter the promised land, but because of unfaithfulness the first time around, this time it is the next generation that is going in. Moses is recounting the law and God's will for the people before entering the promised land.

This is parallel in the wilderness setting, but Jesus' response to the events is in sharp contrast with Israel's. Where Israel failed, Jesus perfectly obeys. The temptation account is one of many events showing that Jesus perfectly obeys where man has failed.

### THE SPIRIT DRIVES JESUS INTO THE WILDERNESS TO BE TEMPTED

[\[4:1\]](#) "Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil."

It says "Then" Jesus was led up. What had just happened? Jesus had been baptized with John's baptism, but Mark is more specific. He notes that immediately after the voice from the heavens says "You are My beloved Son, in You I am well-pleased.", "the Spirit impelled Him to go out into the wilderness." ([Mark 1:11-12](#)). The Spirit descends upon Jesus as a dove, confirming for John that this is the Son of God. Then that Spirit drives Jesus into the wilderness.

Mark is unique in observing that the Spirit drove Jesus there. The Spirit didn't nudge Jesus and whisper that it might be a good idea to go into the wilderness. He drives Jesus there. God has driven Jesus into the desolation of the wilderness to endure trial at the hand of the devil. It is not unusual for us either to encounter trial and testing after a spiritual high point.

The wilderness represents evil, difficulty and trial. Israel wandered for 40 years as a consequence of their faithlessness leaving Egypt. Jesus comes into the wilderness and prevails where man has failed.

[\[4:2\]](#) "And after He had fasted forty days and forty nights, He then became hungry."

## Why was the Lord fasting?

As a child reading this story I thought that Jesus fasted to weaken Himself to show that even when weak, He would still defeat Satan. That is not why anyone fasted in scripture. Throughout time, God's people have fasted to 1) mourn, 2) humble themselves in devotion to God and 3) seek His care during times of trial and hardship.

Jesus is fasting to draw on God's strength because He is enduring the most difficult period of testing any man has endured, and He will do it as a man. In every way that man has failed, Jesus will prevail. That is what gives such great meaning to passages like [Hebrews 4](#). He didn't work a miracle and make His problems go away. He went head to head with the devil *as a man*.

We would do well to follow Jesus' example in fasting. The duration is dependent on the need and purpose of the fast, but Jesus assumes that His disciples would fast and in fact places it in the list of three things He teaches about in [Matthew 6](#) ("when you give... when you pray... when you fast..."). If He expects that we will give and pray regularly, why would we not fast regularly?

There is no command that Christians fast, but fasting is a tool to draw closer to God. If Jesus assumes that His disciples would fast and if the early church fasted, but we don't fast, why? Is it possible that we are like the Laodiceans who felt they were rich and needed nothing? Is it because we don't feel a deep dependence on God? It's something to consider.

Note: Jesus was tempted during the period of fasting, not after, as is more easily seen in the other accounts. These temptations occurred during the 40 days of fasting.

## Why do both Matthew and Luke tell us that Jesus became hungry?

It seems obvious that someone who does not eat would become hungry. But why would Jesus become hungry *after* 40 days of fasting? It is helpful to understand what happens to the body during a fast.

There are several kinds of fasts in scripture, all of which involve abstaining from food. There are absolute fasts, where one abstains from both food and drink. None of those went beyond 3 days, except Moses' miraculous 40 day absolute fast on Mt. Sinai. Daniel's fast involved eating no delicacies or meat and drinking no wine for 21 days. There are also regular fasts, where only water is consumed for a period of time. Jesus underwent a water fast.

In the first 2-3 days of a water fast, you feel the traditional hunger pangs from the emotional and physical desires for food as your body uses up the available glucose stores. After approximately 3 days your body enters ketosis where it switches to your fat stores as its fuel source. Your body is remarkably adept at minimizing impact to muscle tissue and avoiding vital tissue. At about the 3 day mark, the hunger pangs disappear when your body switches fuel sources to the fat stores. An adult male with an average amount of body fat can go around 40-50 days without food.

Your body also will unmistakably let you know when your fast is over. If you fast long enough, your body will enter "true hunger." When that occurs your body demands fuel. You suddenly feel it everywhere, and your desire for food is extreme. If you ignore it, you have transitioned from fasting to starvation and will die in a short time.

When Jesus had fasted 40 days and nights, He became hungry. He entered true hunger and was literally starving.

## TEMPTATION 1: COMMAND STONES TO BECOME BREAD

[4:3-4] "And the tempter came and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread." 4 But He answered and said, "It is written, 'MAN SHALL NOT LIVE ON BREAD ALONE, BUT ON EVERY WORD THAT PROCEEDS OUT OF THE MOUTH OF GOD.'""

The devil says "If You are the Son of God." Don't think that the devil is seeking confirmation because he doesn't know who Jesus is. His own demons cannot help but cry out that Jesus is the Son of God when they see Him. Of course the devil knows who He is. The word "if" indicates a presupposition of the condition, like the word "forasmuch." These temptations are challenges to Jesus.

The devil tempts Jesus, who has not eaten, to turn stones to bread. Jesus refuses. Why?

Was Jesus not capable? We should all understand the answer is no.

Was it wrong to work a miracle to meet a physical need? No, Jesus miraculously fed thousands on multiple occasions.

Did God want Jesus to die in the wilderness? No, Jesus had not yet completed his mission.

So what was the problem with Satan's suggestion?

If we were presented with the same situation, we probably would find perfectly reasonable ways to explain why there would be nothing wrong with creating food. After all, the Son of God cannot honor His Father and go about teaching and saving the world from sin if He's dead, can He? He needs to meet His own needs first so he can then glorify God, right? Surely God will understand!

The devil tries to convince Jesus that God was depriving Him of good things, and he encourages Jesus to meet His needs *independently* of the Father. The Deuteronomy passage from which Jesus quotes reveals that God allowed Israel to become hungry to test them, so they would learn to seek God and allow the physical needs to follow. Read [Deuteronomy 8:1-3](#).

The problem with Jesus turning stones to bread is that He would no longer be trusting in the God who drove Him into the wilderness. That God who planned for Christ to redeem man from sin would sustain Him until He would accomplish that mission.

A key lesson for us is to trust God even it seems impossible to trust God. God might just be testing you as He did Israel in the wilderness.

## TEMPTATION 2: CAST YOURSELF DOWN FROM THE TEMPLE

[4:5-7] " Then the devil took Him into the holy city and had Him stand on the pinnacle of the temple, 6 and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down; for it is written, 'HE WILL COMMAND HIS ANGELS CONCERNING YOU'; and 'ON their HANDS THEY WILL BEAR YOU UP, SO THAT YOU WILL NOT STRIKE YOUR FOOT AGAINST A STONE.' " 7 Jesus said to him, "On the other hand, it is written, 'YOU SHALL NOT PUT THE LORD YOUR GOD TO THE TEST.' " "

The devil sees that Jesus responds with the tools available to mere men - God's word. The devil then quotes from [Psalm 91:11-12](#) to challenge Jesus to prove that God keeps His promises.

The psalm is one of comfort for those who trust in the Lord. Those who put the Lord to the test are no longer trusting His will.

God never sanctions presumption from His people. He promises to provide and protect those who trust in Him. When we challenge His authority or test Him to see if He will fulfill his promises, we no longer trust Him. When you trust Him, you will see His promises fulfilled. God is not strong armed by man's faithlessness.

### **TEMPTATION 3: WORSHIP SATAN AND RECEIVE ALL THE WORLD AND ITS GLORY**

[\[4:8-10\]](#) "Again, the devil took Him to a very high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory; 9 and he said to Him, "All these things I will give You, if You fall down and worship me." 10 Then Jesus said to him, "Go, Satan! For it is written, 'YOU SHALL WORSHIP THE LORD YOUR GOD, AND SERVE HIM ONLY.' ""

The devil offers all the kingdoms of the world and all their glory. Remember that Satan is a liar, so don't assume that he actually could or would give Jesus that kind of power.

Christ was actually going to receive authority over all the kingdoms of the world from the Father. What the devil offers is a shortcut. Why go through the pain and trouble of being nailed to a cross by people who hate you? You can have it now!

Satan offers us shortcuts today. Why wait for God to accomplish His purpose? You can have what you want now!

The devil promises the things that appeal to us. Even if he does deliver short term enjoyment, he does not provide the fulfilling joy that the Lord does. All he offers are shortcuts and substitutes. If we take those things instead of the good blessings the Lord gives, our enjoyment will be very short lived.

More importantly, God is our creator, not Satan. That alone entitles God our exclusive devotion. Worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only.

### **THE DEVIL DEPARTS**

[\[4:11\]](#) "Then the devil left Him; and behold, angels came and began to minister to Him."

The devil departed from tempting Jesus, though until an opportune time, Luke tells us. Jesus would be tempted again, but for now it was over.

This statement is reminiscent of [James 4:7](#): "Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you."

God allowed Israel to go without in order to test them, and they failed. When confronted with similar situations, Jesus remained faithful to God. What will you do when it feels like God has abandoned you to let Satan have free reign?

We have the promise that God will not allow the devil to tempt us beyond what we are able to bear, but will make a way of escape so that we too may endure ([1 Corinthians 10:13](#)).

God will not abandon you in temptation. Cling to Him! Draw near to Him. Seek Him.