

From the top of the mountain there is nowhere else to go but down. The baptism of Jesus was certainly a mountaintop experience as the Godhead joined together to initiate the ministry of Jesus. Immediately thereafter, He journeyed into a spiritual valley where every facet of His divinity and humanity were challenged and tested by Satan. Only a spotless lamb could become the redeeming sacrifice for mankind (1 Peter 1:18-19). A lamb was not brought for sacrifice, however, until it was thoroughly examined. Although the Father knew of Jesus' impeccable righteousness, it is placed on display here for all of mankind and even the devils to see (Hebrews 4:15). This was endured for our sake that we might believe in Him and desire to become partakers of His righteousness through faith (Philippians 3:9).

Into the Wilderness (4:1-2)

To get a more vivid picture of our Lord's journey into the wilderness, it would be best to make use of the "camera angles" recorded in the gospels of Mark and Luke. Read Mark 1:12-13 and Luke 4:1-2 and answer the following questions.

How does Mark describe the timing of this trip, and why did He go into the wilderness?

How does Luke describe Jesus' encounter with the Holy Spirit and how does it comport with Mark's?

THE WILDERNESS OF JUDEA

"The wilderness of Judea is a hot, barren, and desolate area that extends west from the Dead Sea almost to Jerusalem, and is some thirty-five miles long and fifteen miles wide. George Adam Smith described it as an area of yellow sand and crumbling limestone. It is an area of contorted strata, where the ridges run in all directions as if they were warped and twisted. The hills are like dust heaps, the limestone is blistered and peeling, the rocks are bare and jagged, and often the ground sounds hollow... Nowhere in Palestine could Jesus have been more isolated or in less comfort."

— *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary, Matthew 1-7, p. 87*

All of the gospels agree that Jesus was led into the wilderness for forty days to be tempted (tested). What is significant about this time? Is the Lord tying some things together? Consider Deuteronomy 8:1-3 and discuss why Jesus was led into the wilderness for forty days and fasted.

The Gospel of Matthew

TESTED IN THE WILDERNESS (4:1 - 4:11)

During Jesus' ministry He encountered many demons. We recognize them as fallen angels that joined Satan's rebellion against God. Although we do not know how Satan organizes his legion of demons, we know that they are subservient to him in some way. Note that Satan himself comes to tempt Jesus during this time in the wilderness. A lesser demon is not given this task, but rather the father of lies himself comes to tempt Jesus Christ. From this interaction, we learn the following truths about Satan:

- He is a _____ being with intellection, emotion, and will, not just a concept or power.
- He is actively engaged in trying to _____ the work of God.
- He is not all-powerful and can be resisted in the _____ of the Spirit.
- He can be _____ used by God to accomplish the Divine plan.

Satan presents three temptations to Christ in the trial. The number and type of the temptation are not random. John the apostle describes three categories of temptation used against man by Satan in 1 John 2:14-17. We first see Satan appeal to men in this way back in Genesis 3:1-6. Identify these basic levels of temptation and discuss their meaning and application from Eve's encounter in the Garden of Eden. We will discuss their application to Jesus' temptations in the remainder of this lesson.

- The Lust of the _____ –

- The Lust of the _____ –

- The Pride of _____ –

The First Temptation (4:3-4)

The final words of Matthew 4:2 remind us that Jesus is hungry after forty days and nights of fasting. No doubt, He fellowshiped with His Father and sought His divine guidance for the days of ministry to come. Yet, He was no longer just a Spirit; He also possessed flesh. Read Hebrews 2:14-17 and discuss the extent of Jesus' humanity. Also read Matthew 4:11. How hungry was He?

Jesus' first temptation was much like that faced by the Israelites in the wilderness. He journeyed there at the clear direction of His Father. Just like Israel, He was miraculously baptized before His entrance into the wilderness. Just like Israel, His first test was one of provision (See Exodus 15:22-27). Would God provide Him the essentials necessary to sustain life? In Scripture, the Lord had promised that He would fulfill all the needs of the righteous. Isaiah 33:16 says, "He shall dwell on high: his place of defence shall be the munitions of rocks: bread shall be given him; his waters shall be sure." How did this temptation of Christ go even farther than the test Israel experienced in the wilderness?

Into which of the three types of temptations defined in 1 John 2:16 does this temptation fit?

Satan began this temptation with the question, "If You are the Son of God...". How would this question further tempt Christ? Consider John the Baptist's question sent to Jesus in Matthew 11:1-6.

Jesus responds to Satan by quoting from Deuteronomy 8:3, which says in part, "...man doth not live by bread only, but by every *word* that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD doth man live." In this

passage, Moses recounts the Israelites time in the wilderness. What does this mean? Is there a need man has that is greater than God Himself? Consider Matthew 6:31-33.

How is this temptation similar to another temptation levied at Christ in Matthew 27:38-42?

The Second Temptation (4:5-7)

As Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, He uttered these words, "... Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee: As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him. And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent." (John 17:1-3)

Eternal life is wrapped up in knowing God and His Son, Jesus Christ. One of the greatest affirmations in the Apostle Peter's life occurred as he spoke to Jesus on the coasts of Caesarea Philippi. Jesus asked who men thought He was. The disciples responded that men thought He was Jeremiah, Elijah, or perhaps a reincarnation of John the Baptist. When Jesus asked them who they thought He was, Peter boldly said, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God." (Matthew 16:16) Jesus responded by blessing Peter and affirming that it was God the Father who had revealed this to Him. Jesus also knew Peter and would use him, along with the other apostles, to build His church. Again we see that eternal life hinged upon knowing God.

If only men would recognize Jesus' identity, maybe they would believe and be saved. We know that Jesus came with a heart to save the lost. This was the very reason for His birth, life, death, and resurrection (John 3:16). Every fiber in Jesus' body ached with desire for men to see and believe. It was this godly compassion that Satan tried to use against Jesus.

THE TEMPLE MOUNT

The Jewish temple built during the days of Ezra was rebuilt and expanded during the days of Herod the Great (the Herod ruling at the time of Jesus' birth). He first expanded the platform surrounding the temple to about 330 by 500 yards, a huge feat of engineering and labor in hilly terrain. He then rebuilt the temple itself, enlarging it and embellishing it with beautiful snow white masonry and gold, according to the description of Josephus the Jewish historian. The final structure was capable of holding thousands of worshippers as they came to honor the Lord.

The Gospel of Matthew

TESTED IN THE WILDERNESS (4:1 - 4:11)

Satan took Jesus to the top of the temple mount, in the very heart of the City of Jerusalem. The “pinnacle” of the temple itself is not specifically identified in Scripture. It could be the top of the temple structure itself, which could be seen from throughout the temple complex and stood over the inner court or it could be some tall colonnade that overlooked one of the outer courts. There is not clear pictorial representation of what Herod’s temple looked like because it was destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD and there have been limited archaeological excavations since then. Regardless, it was a very high point that would have been visible to the thousands that usually filled the temple mount.

Since Jesus overcame Satan’s first temptation by the Word of God, Satan attempted to use the Word of God against Jesus by quoting from Psalm 91:11-12, which says, “For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone.” Read Psalm 91 and discuss how Satan misused this passage.

WHY JUMP?

Performing a spectacular public miracle, such as casting Himself from the temple, was exactly what the Jews would expect of their Messiah. A.T. Robertson, noted Greek scholar and author of Word Pictures in the New Testament, said, “It was a skilful thrust and would also be accepted by the populace as proof that Jesus was the Messiah if they should see him sailing down as if from heaven. This would be a sign from heaven in accord with popular Messianic expectation. The promise of the angels the devil thought would reassure Jesus. They would be a spiritual parachute for Christ.”¹

Jesus responded to Satan with a simple statement, “Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God”, taken from the first portion of Deuteronomy 6:16. Read the account of Israel at Massah in Exodus 17:1-7. What are the similarities between Israel’s behavior in Massah and the second temptation of Christ?

¹ Word Pictures in the New Testament, by A.T. Robertson, reference for Matthew 4:6.

The Gospel of Matthew

TESTED IN THE WILDERNESS (4:1 - 4:11)

Laying aside the fact that this test was Satan's idea, why is a spectacle like this outside of the will of God? Read John 2:23-25, 6:26-27, 6:60-66.

How do we differentiate "tempting God" from Gideon's behavior in Judges 6:33-40?

Into which of the three types of temptations defined in 1 John 2:16 does this temptation fit?

The circumstances of this temptation beg a really important question. How could Satan take Christ anywhere? Was Christ given over to the whim of Satan to do with Jesus as he pleased during these trials? Read Job 1:6-12.

The Third Temptation (4:8-10)

In discussing the third and final temptation, it is useful to read the account provided in Luke 4:5-8. What additional detail does Luke provide?

One thing we know about Satan from Scriptures is that he is a liar. We cannot trust everything he says. Usually, there is an element of truth twisted in a perverse direction. Does Satan really have control of the kingdoms of this world? Can he give them to whoever he wishes? Rather than trusting his words, we will look at other Scriptures to delineate what power he does and does not hold.

- What is the relationship of Satan to men? Read John 8:44, 2 Corinthians 4:4 and Ephesians 2:1-3.

The Gospel of Matthew

TESTED IN THE WILDERNESS (4:1 - 4:11)

- How did Satan gain such a power over mankind? Read Genesis 3:1-5 and 1 John 3:8-10.
- Does Satan hold all power over this world? Read Psalm 24:1-2, Proverbs 21:1, 1 Chronicles 29:11, and Daniel 4:24-25.
- How do we reconcile the truths we have just uncovered?

What then was Satan offering to Jesus in Matthew 4:8?

What would have happened if Jesus had given in to this temptation?

In this temptation Satan lays aside his misuse of Scripture and plays his ultimate desires against one of Christ's greatest desires. What was the ultimate desire of Satan? Read Isaiah 14:12-14.

What was the great desire of Christ? Read Hebrews 12:1-2, Philippians 2:5-11, and Revelation 5:11-14.

Into which of the three types of temptations defined in 1 John 2:16 does this temptation fit?

Jesus responded to Satan by saying, "Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve". This is partially a quotation from Deuteronomy 6:13. The meaning is clear; God the Father is the only one worthy of worship and adoration.

One of men's great weaknesses is a lack of patience. This is why credit agencies are so profitable. Why wait when you can have it now! Unfortunately, there is a price to impatience and that price often results in slavery. Men get shackled under the weight of debt and can fall into despair. Long after the shine has worn away from our "prize", the price remains. Satan was trying to get Jesus to avoid the long and painful road to the cross and the wait for the consummation of all things when He receives His prize (Philippians 2:9-11). The Father's way was going to be difficult and Jesus had no idea how long He would have to wait until He received His inheritance (Matthew 24:36). Yet, the value of this prize and love for His Father has produced the greatest example of patience the world has ever known. Jesus would not forsake His Father and the prize of pure praise for some flimsy imitation, even though it would require a long wait of unknown duration.

The writer of Hebrews reminds us in chapter 12, verses two and three, "Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds." Praise God that Jesus endured the trials and resisted Satan!

Comforted by Angels (4:11)

The first thing we notice in this verse is that Satan left Jesus. What happened? Read James 4:7.

Looking at Jesus' response to Satan throughout these temptations, what do we learn about the power of God's Word? Read Ephesians 6:10-18.

In closing, note that when Satan tempted Christ, he could only try to take good and natural desires and twist them to sin. There was no natural inclination towards sin in Christ as He has no sin nature. Satan not only works by drawing us toward inherently evil things but by taking what is good and pure and twisting it into something impure. We must always be on guard; we are never above temptation. Finally, notice that in Luke's account of Jesus' temptations (Luke 4:13), he mentions that Satan departed for a season. This won't be Jesus' last encounter with Satan, although he will work in even more subtle ways.