

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?

It occurred immediately after His baptism. The Spirit "driveth" Him into the wilderness. This word literally means to "eject". This wasn't difficult for Jesus to discern but a clear and vivid guidance from the Holy Spirit who just came upon Him.

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

Luke describes Jesus as being "full" of the Holy Ghost. Mark said He was driven into the wilderness. To be full of the Spirit is to be under His influence and control. It isn't merely a feeling, but a practical reality born out in behavior.

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.

This passage reminds us of Israel's journey in the wilderness for forty years. The Lord sent them there to test them, to see if they would obey. Jesus was clearly sent into the wilderness to be tempted/tested by the Lord by allowing Satan to come and tempt Him to sin. He was brought into a state of weakness to have His heart tried. As the true Israel, Jesus fulfilled in His person everything the Lord had desired to see out of the nation of Israel.

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 **personal** being with intellection, emotion, and will, not just a concept or power.
- He is actively engaged in trying to **destroy** the work of God.
- He is not all-powerful and can be resisted in the **power** of the Spirit.
- He can be **unwillingly** 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 **Flesh** – Our flesh is our natural body that is corrupted by sin, just as our spirit was corrupted by the fall. The spirit is forever purified at the moment of salvation but we remain in these corrupt bodies until our resurrection. A lust is a passion or desire. It can be good or evil, depending on whether it is in line with the will of God. The lust of the flesh describes the natural cravings of our body that are taken to excess and pitted against God's plan for our life. This can be cravings for beauty, food, sex, comfort, etc... In the Garden, Eve saw that the fruit looked good to eat. Her flesh was tempted by the anticipated taste.
- The Lust of the **Eyes** – Our eyes are the window to our heart and they tend to focus on our desires and wants in life. In Matthew 6:21-24, Jesus discusses how the fixation of our eyes can lead us to meaningful worship or idolatry. The lust of the eyes may be another way of expressing covetousness, which is idolatry. We want something we don't have. In the Garden, Eve saw that the fruit was delightful to the eyes. It was beautiful and she wanted it.
- The **Pride of Life** – Pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall (Proverbs 16:18). Pride is the origin of much evil and certainly was the case with Satan. It wasn't enough to be the greatest created being in the world. He wanted to be greater than God. Many times it isn't enough for us to be good at something or have something; we want to be recognized for it. This was another avenue Satan used to tempt Eve. He told her that if she ate, she would be like God. She recognized that eating the fruit would make her wise. She wanted that ability and recognition more than she wanted God. Her pride led her into the fall.

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?

We read that Jesus was really hungry and suffered everything as a man. We have to get away from the notion that somehow things were not as hard for Him. His hunger pains were real. When we are told Jesus hungered, I personally believe that He was probably starving to death. I'm not sure He had sufficient strength to make it back from the wilderness (or the mountaintop) at this point. We read in Matthew 4:11 that angels came and ministered to Him. It is likely that this was a physical necessity because His body was so weak. He was brought to the very end of Himself and tested. Praise God He passed the test!

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?

This test was also unique because of the power and ability of Jesus. He wasn't isolated from food in the wilderness; He was willingly withholding the use of His power for Himself. If you can imagine sitting in front of a fully stocked refrigerator for forty days, but not opening it, nor even questioning the Father for not letting you open it, you begin to feel the extent to which Jesus was tested.

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

This temptation is clearly a test of the "lust of the flesh". His flesh had a natural desire for food, but Jesus did not let this overshadow obedience to His Father. His Father desired Him to fast and so He did.

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.

The Father didn't direct the ministry of Jesus in a way that makes sense to man. Consider John the Baptist questioning whether Jesus was "the One". Jesus did not conduct His ministry in the way that John expected. God's Divine plan never involved the Son flaunting His power, but rather using it at each juncture in accordance with His Father's will. Even godly Moses took the staff and struck the rock in self-will because he became tired of the cry of the people. Jesus never did this, despite clearly growing weary of the foolishness of the people and His own disciples (Mark 9:19). It would make sense to man to just use His power to feed Himself. This wasn't God's way.

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.

Food appears to be the most basic need of men. Without proper sustenance, we die. Yet, Jesus was willing to jeopardize His very life and withhold His ability to provide for His own food if it was outside of His Father's will. Man's greatest need is God. If we seek Him above all else, He will provide for our needs. Food may be provided by our labors, the gift of others, or even miraculous means. Nevertheless, He will provide.

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

In both circumstances, His flesh cried out. He was dying of starvation in the wilderness and He was dying from the wounds of the cross. Both times He was tempted to remove Himself from the situation "If He was the Son of God". He did not give in either time. Truly, His sufferings during life prepared Him for the death of the cross. There was nothing more important to Jesus than obeying His Father.

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.

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.

Psalm 91 promises protection for those who make the Lord their refuge and dwelling place and love Him (vs. 1, 9, 14). This means that they abide within His will and His presence. If Jesus jumped off the roof of the temple without knowing this was God the Father’s will, He would be stepping out from under that shelter. Also, Satan is literally interpreting a passage that appears to have a figurative meaning. Verses 3-7 and 13 contain language that is interpreted figuratively, especially walking on “lions and dragons (cobras)”. Clearly, God’s people, even those who are closest to Him suffer difficulty and adversity, but if we hold to Him, we will not suffer spiritual harm or duress but will overcome and even grow stronger from the difficulties.

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?

Israel tested God, asking, “Is the Lord among us, or not?” after all of the miracles, signs, and wonders they had witnessed. They questioned God’s motives for bringing them thus far and they questioned God’s man, who He had used to lead them out of bondage. Basically, they were trying to force God’s hand to act in accordance with their desires rather than trust Him. For Jesus to step off the temple would have been to force His Father’s hand by seeking to accomplish the Divine plan in His own way rather than His Father’s.

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

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.

Performing spectacular miracles never made people believe, but only created the opportunity to minister the Word of God to them that they might repent and have faith in Jesus to forgive them of sin. It is one thing to believe that Jesus can help you and another to believe that He can save you. The Lord performed miracles in accordance with His Father's will. The Lord's goal was not to put on a show but to draw men to salvation.

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

Tempting God is seeking to force His hand to act in a specific manner. It is an action taken in a presumptuous and rebellious spirit. In contrast, Gideon had a heart that was seeking to gain assurance of God's will and presence in his life. God set forth the plan for Gideon and he was willing to obey it as long as he knew this was truly of the Lord. In a sense, he is an Old Testament example of "trying the spirits" (1 John 4:1).

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

This temptation is an example of the pride of life.

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 Lord God will sometimes allow His children, even His only begotten Son, to fall into the hands of Satan to accomplish a greater purpose. Nevertheless, God set boundaries around Him that protected Jesus from an all out physical assault. Even in great trials like Job and Jesus endured, God's promises remain true and He watches over us. If we remain faithful, our trial will work to His glory and our gain.

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?

Satan states that he has the authority and glory of the kingdoms of men and he gives it away in accordance with his will.

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. He is a father to those who are lost and they do his bidding. He rules the hearts and minds of lost men and women, their actions and deeds being turned toward sin, which is consistent with his will. Without God, the object of man's worship is ultimately Satan.

- How did Satan gain such a power over mankind? Read Genesis 3:1-5 and 1 John 3:8-10.
Essentially, man trusted Satan over God. Whether they realized it or not, they were choosing their master here. By trusting the lies of Satan, they came to know sin and their hearts were corrupted, bent toward evil. Satan gained a hold upon their hearts that can only be broken by the cross. Therefore, the worship lost man offers up is to Satan.
- 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.
Our God reigns in the heavens over all things and is still in control of the kingdoms of men. He can accomplish whatsoever He wishes among men. He has never lost control.
- How do we reconcile the truths we have just uncovered?
God reigns supremely in this world. Yet, Satan has captured the hearts of men, the pinnacle of God's creation. The adoration God deserves has largely gone to Satan. The whole of creation groans and travails under the curse of sin, awaiting the day of redemption of God's children and the world.

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

Satan was offering Jesus the hearts of men, the hearts which He had lost at the fall of mankind in the Garden. He was being offered their love, adoration, and worship. This is an alternate meaning of the "glory" mentioned in Matthew 4:8... praise, worship, or adoration.

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

Satan would have gladly allowed Jesus to receive the honor and glory of the kingdoms because Jesus would in turn be giving it to Satan by worshipping him. The praise and adoration Jesus would have received from men, however, would not be worship coming from a pure heart beholding His beauty. Men would remain corrupt; their praise would be hollow and conditional. The only thing that would have changed was that Jesus Himself would be corrupted. Through the light of Divine truth we see that Satan was offering something of no value for a great price.

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.

His ultimate desire is to be like God. He wants worship and adoration. No greater worship could he obtain than usurping the place of the Father and receiving the adoration of the Son. This is what he wanted and he would do anything to achieve it.

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

Christ desired that men would see Him in His glory and worship Him with a pure heart. Man was created to enjoy God and thereby worship Him. He alone is worthy.

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

This temptation is an example of the “Lust of the Eyes”. Satan was trying to get Christ to exalt His desire for the adoration of men (the lust of the eyes) above His adoration of the Father.

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.

If we submit ourselves to the Lord and resist Satan, he will flee from us. Satan had no choice but to flee.

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.

It is our only hope to stand against Satan. Christ had to stand against Satan as a man and therefore used the only sure tool available to man, God’s revealed Word. We must become skilful in the Word if we want to withstand the attacks of Satan.

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.