

4:1 Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led around by the Spirit in the wilderness

4:2 for forty days, being tempted by the devil. And He ate nothing during those days, and when they had ended, He became hungry.

In the Gospel of Matthew the temptation account begins with the word “then” which ties Jesus’ three temptations to His baptism; furthermore, Matthew says, “Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness *to be tempted by the devil.*” The Holy Spirit first descended upon Jesus (Lk. 3:22). Now, He sends Him into the desert *so that Jesus would be tempted by the devil*; that is the reason Jesus was to go into the desert – to be tempted by Satan and tested by God. The baptism declared that Jesus was the Son of God, the King; the temptation proved that He was worthy to rule over the Kingdom of God.

The desert was essentially uninhabited land, but was also often associated with demonic activity (Isa. 13:21; 34:14; Matt. 12:43; Rev. 18:2) (Carson, 112).

In Greek, the word *πειράζω* (*perazo*) means to try or test. The motive for such testing may be good or evil. When the motive is evil, it is usually translated as “to tempt.” When the motive is good, it is translated as “to test.” God tests us; Satan tempts us. God’s tests are designed to reveal or develop character (Gen. 22:1; Exo. 20:20; Jn. 6:6; II Cor. 13:5; Rev. 2:2); Satan’s temptations are solicitations to do evil (I Cor. 7:5; I Thess. 3:5) (Carson, 112).

“Testing” and “tempting” can occur in the same event. Satan may tempt us to sin while God is using the same event to test our character. This is clearly illustrated in the life of Job (Job 1:8ff.). It is also illustrated here. The Holy Spirit compelled Jesus to go into the wilderness to test Him, but the test involved the temptations of Satan.

Inward desire is at the root of temptation, but desire is not necessarily sinful. We have many strong natural desires (the desire for sex, food, etc.) which in themselves are not wrong, but when they seek gratification in illegitimate ways (such as immorality, stealing, or gluttony) they become evil. In Jewish theology, “The impulse itself was considered a simple, non-directed desire and a part of created human nature. But it was dangerous in that it could break the bounds of the law and therefore lead to sin. The solution was not the removal of all desire, but a counterforce (variously described as the law, the good impulse, or the Holy Spirit) which channels and limits the evil impulse into doing good” (Doerksen, James, 31).

Thus, when Christ was hungry, He desired bread. Hunger pains are not evil; they simply tell the body that it needs food. It wasn’t sin for Christ to desire food. However, if eating bread was against the will of the Father, it would have been sinful to fulfill that desire (Matt. 4:3-4; Broadus, 63). Likewise, it is not sinful for Jesus to want to preserve His life. However, if by doing so was contrary to God’s will, He should choose death over life (Matt. 4:8-9; 26:42). Thus, temptation occurs when we are faced with a choice to disobey the will of God or not. In the temptation of Christ, Satan was soliciting Jesus to do evil, but the temptation was also a test that revealed the character of Jesus and that what God had just said about Him was true: “This is My beloved Son in Whom I am well pleased” (Lk. 3:22).

If Jesus is sinless, how could He be tempted?

It must be stressed that it is possible to be tempted without having a sin nature. Adam and Eve were not created with sin natures (God declared their creation to be “very good” – Gen 1:31), yet they could be tempted. They could be given a choice to disobey the will of God or not. In other words, mankind’s first sin did not spring from an evil nature; it resulted in one. So also Christ had genuine human nature: innocent, sinless, though capable of being tempted. Jesus, like us and like Adam and Eve, had to choose to surrender to God’s will or revolt against it.

The difference between Jesus’ temptations and ours as fallen men is that He was never tempted by desires springing from an evil heart. Therefore, because Jesus never hated, He was not tempted to kill. Because He was never filled with lust, He was not tempted to commit fornication. Because He was never greedy, He was not tempted to steal. In this way He was *not* like us, for many of our temptations come from the sinful desires of a sin nature. As James 4:2-3 says, “We lust and do not have it; so we murder. We covet something and cannot obtain it; so we fight and quarrel. We ask and do not receive, because we ask wrongly, in order to spend it on our pleasures.” These things could not be said of Christ.

Fifty years ago C.S. Lewis imagined someone objecting here: “If Jesus never sinned, then He doesn’t know what temptation is like. He lived a sheltered life and is out of touch with how strong temptation can be.” Here is what Lewis wrote in response to that objection:

It is silly to think “that good people do not know what temptation means. This is an obvious lie. Only those who try to resist temptation know how strong it is . . . A man who gives in to temptation after five minutes simply does not know what it would have been like an hour later. That is why bad people, in one sense know very little about badness. They have lived a sheltered life by always giving in . . . Christ, because He was the only man who never yielded to temptation, is also the only man who knows to the full what temptation means. . .” (sermon by John Piper, Heb. 4:14-5:3, September 15, 1996 - John Piper. © Desiring God. Website: desiringGod.org).

Leon Morris arrived at the same conclusion. He said, “We give in before temptation has fully spent itself; only he who does not yield knows its full force” (Morris, 40).

In other words, although none of Jesus’ temptations came from inclinations of a wicked heart, He still experienced temptation in the fullest sense; He did not need to experience the exact same temptations that we do to be able to sympathize with us; every temptation has as its core the same basic element of choice.

As a note, the Bible teaches that our nature is totally corrupted. If left to our own impulses, when given a choice, we would never choose God. As unbelievers the things of God are not our concern. However, when we become Christians God gives us a new heart that desires to follow God and the Holy Spirit to guide and empower us. Therefore, Galatians 5:16 tells us to walk by the Spirit, and we will not carry out the desire of the flesh.

As believers we should not think that we are ever choosing to do what we want; what we *do* is either generated by the flesh which opposes God or by the Spirit who pleases God (Moo, 356). Therefore, no action is neutral; the believer either serves the flesh or follows the Spirit (Fung, 251). But the conflict is not an equal conflict; 1 John 4:4 tells us that “greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world.” And as Paul says in Romans 8:37, “in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us.”

4:3 And the devil said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread."

4:4 And Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'MAN SHALL NOT LIVE ON BREAD ALONE.'"

In Greek, the phrase, “if you are the Son of God,” is called a “first class condition” (εἰ plus the indicative mood). This is a statement assuming that what is said is true. In other words, Satan is not doubting the sonship of Christ, but assumes Jesus’ sonship to be real. It is as if Satan were saying, “If you are the Son of God (and you are), and you are hungry, then tell the stone to be bread!” Satan isn’t challenging Christ to prove His Sonship, rather his temptation comes by suggesting it was not proper for the Son of God to suffer hunger and it wasn’t even necessary; all He needed to do was to “speak that these stones may become loaves.” He was tempting Christ with the idea that His sonship involved the right to fulfill His own needs (Broadus, 63).

Jesus’ answer comes solely from scripture (Deut. 8:3). “It is written” is in the perfect tense, meaning “it stands written” (Broadus, 64). Jesus’ answer (“Man shall not live on bread alone”) helps us to understand the exact nature of the temptation placed before Him. The full quote from Deuteronomy 8:3 is recorded in Matthew 4:4: “man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the LORD.” Eating bread to fulfill need is not in itself sinful. But in this case, it was contrary to the will of God. The Spirit had propelled Jesus into the desert *to be tested* (= a purpose clause Matt.4:1). Satan wanted Jesus to meet His own needs in spite of God’s will that He fast. Therefore, Jesus is not saying that the Word of God is spiritual food that sustains us, as so many interpret it. Rather, He is saying that doing the will of God was more necessary than satisfying His hunger. Man is more than a beast that is only concerned about physical sustenance; he must also consider the word of God and live by it, as well. He recognized that as the mediator for mankind, what applies to all men applies to Himself, even if He is the Son of God.

The first temptation also shows that Jesus and the nation of Israel are closely linked by means of a type / antitype relationship. A “type” is when God directs history in such a way that a person, event, or thing prefigures someone or something greater that is to come. The type points toward something greater than itself. The antitype is the fulfillment of what was prefigured in the type. The nation of Israel prefigured Christ; thus it was a type and Jesus is the antitype. For example, both Israel and Jesus are called God’s servant; both are called the vine; both are called God’s son (Hos 11:1). Israel was tested in the desert for *forty years*. Jesus was tested for *forty days*. The purpose of the testing in both cases was to determine if they would obey God. When Israel hungered in the desert God sustained them supernaturally with manna, but He also let them go hungry and instructed them to put their trust in His word rather than the manna He gave (Deut. 8:2-3). Israel, however, rebelled, demanded bread, and was

judged (Exo. 16:1-5); Jesus, the True Son, also hungered; however, He denied Himself bread and fulfilled the will of God.

It is also significant to note that in Luke 3, Luke inserts Jesus' genealogy between His baptism and His temptation. The genealogy is in reverse order ending with "the son of Adam, the son of God." Not only does this make it clear that Jesus was genuinely human, it also reminds us of the contrasts between Jesus and Adam in relation to their responses to temptation. Adam was tempted in the bliss of Eden, yet sinned; Jesus was tempted in the hardships of the wilderness and triumphed (Carson, 111, Thomas, Gundry, A Harmony of the Gospels, 37 note "b"). Adam's sin resulted in death; Christ's victory over sin will result in life.

4:5 And he led Him up and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time.

4:6 And the devil said to Him, "I will give You all this domain and its glory; for it has been handed over to me, and I give it to whomever I wish.

4:7 "Therefore if You worship before me, it shall all be Yours."

4:8 Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'YOU SHALL WORSHIP THE LORD YOUR GOD AND SERVE HIM ONLY.'"

In the second test, Satan offers Jesus the kingdoms of the world. In Luke 4:5 it says that Jesus was taken there and showed the kingdoms of the world "in an instant," (NIV) while Matthew 4:8 says that he took Jesus to a very high mountain. These expressions probably indicate that a vision was involved for there was no "travel time," nor is there a literal mountain from which all the kingdoms of the world can be seen. Then in 4:6 Satan told Jesus, "I will give you all their authority and splendor, for it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to (NIV)." Jesus does not challenge the claim that all authority has been given to Satan, nor does He accept it. The world is the Lord's and all that it contains (Psa. 24:1), but Satan is called the god of this world (II Cor. 4:3-4; Jn. 12:31; 14:30; 16:11), and this world is said to be under his power (I Jn. 5:19). Satan is the ruler of this world in a moral sense and the world, under his influence, leaves God out of its thinking. Therefore, Satan's claim was legitimate to the extent that God has given him authority. This time Satan's temptation is blatant. He offers power by worshipping him, a shortcut that bypasses the suffering of the cross and involves false worship. God alone deserves worship and Jesus declares it. The kingdoms of the worlds *will* be Christ's, but at another time in another age (Rev. 11:15). Satan wanted Jesus to consider receiving the kingdoms of the world through illegitimate means - by bypassing the cross and worshipping the great Adversary of God.

4:9 And he led Him to Jerusalem and had Him stand on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down from here;

4:10 for it is written, 'HE WILL COMMAND HIS ANGELS CONCERNING YOU TO GUARD YOU,'

4:11 and, 'ON their HANDS THEY WILL BEAR YOU UP, SO THAT YOU WILL NOT STRIKE YOUR FOOT AGAINST A STONE.'"

4:12 And Jesus answered and said to him, "It is said, 'YOU SHALL NOT PUT THE LORD YOUR GOD TO THE TEST.'"

The last temptation takes place in Jerusalem on the highest point of the temple which overlooked a deep ravine. This is also most likely a vision-like experience (Bock, 378).

Satan had been rebuked by Jesus' use of Scripture; so he takes another tactic by quoting Scripture himself. Psalm 91:11-12 is a promise that God will protect the righteous. However, God's promise is conditioned upon Psalm 91:9 which says, "If you make the Most High your Dwelling. . ." In other words, if we place God as our refuge and take shelter under His wings, God will protect us. Though we may be threatened by dangers along the way (i.e. like stumbling upon sharp rocks), God will give His angels charge concerning us so that no evil will befall us. If this can be said of us, it is even truer for the Messiah. It is as if Satan is saying to Jesus, "If you trust God and believe what He has said is true, jump!"

God's promises, however, are not invitations to test God by purposefully placing ourselves in dangerous situations in order to see to what extent He will deliver us from troubles. God had pledged to protect His Son and Satan wanted Jesus to prove it by placing Himself in a position that demanded God's help. To demand help when help is not needed is neither faith nor loyalty.

Jesus' reply, "Do not put the Lord God to the test" reveals the nature of this third temptation. Satan misapplied scripture in hopes that Jesus would test God. Jesus didn't doubt that God had the ability to save Him from such a fall, but He knew that scripture forbid testing God in such a way. Jesus alluded to Exodus 17:2-7 where the Israelites put the Lord to the test by demanding water. For both Israel and Jesus, demanding God's care is wrong; the appropriate response is trust and obedience (Deut 6:17).

4:13 When the devil had finished every temptation, he left Him until an opportune time.

Though Satan had failed, he continued to look for an opportune time to try again. 1 Peter 5:8 states that "the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour." Nevertheless, Jesus had begun His ministry and the pattern of obedience and trust that had been established would continue throughout His life.

The importance of Christ leading an obedient life cannot be over-stressed. It is a theme that is repeatedly mentioned in Scripture. Below are some representative examples:

- John 6:38 (Jesus said) "For I have come down from heaven, *not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.*"
- Romans 5:19 For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so *through the obedience of the One* the many will be made righteous.
- Philippians 2:8 . . . He humbled Himself *by becoming obedient* to the point of death, even death on a cross.
- Hebrews 5:8-9 Although He was a Son, *He learned obedience* from the things which He suffered. And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation,

He had resisted and Satan had fled (Ja. 4:7). He had refused to place Himself in a position that demanded angelic help, He had refused to use His power to satisfy personal need, and He had rejected

Satan's offer to messianic rule. He had "made the Most High His Dwelling;" He had exhausted Satan's arsenal of temptations. Only then did Satan depart and the angels come to Jesus' aid (Matt. 4:11).

CONCLUSION:

"What Jesus does is exemplary and representative. The ultimate way to avoid falling into temptation is not to go one's own way. Faithfulness to God involves trusting Him, worshiping Him alone, and refusing to create a test of His goodness" (Bock, 383). Jesus did all of these things faithfully. He passed the test and demonstrated that He was ready for the ministry that the Father had given Him. "He also shows the reader the path to a faithful walk with God. Life is defined as doing God's will and walking in God's way, even if it entails suffering and self-denial" (Bock, 384).

Luke 4:1–13 concludes the second major portion of Luke's Gospel. The ministry of John the Baptist pointed the way to Jesus and told all to look for the coming of a Mightier One who would bring God's Spirit. The baptism showed that God had cast His lot with Jesus, the beloved Son. The genealogy tied Jesus to all humanity through Adam. The resistance of temptation showed that Jesus was righteous and faithful. Jesus was introduced and was ready for ministry. The next major pericope would let Jesus speak for Himself about His mission (4:16–30). As He enters that ministry, one thing is not in doubt. Jesus faithfully serves God and is qualified to represent His hope. He is ready to undertake His mission. (Bock 384)