

The Testing of the Lord Jesus in the Judean Wilderness

Matthew 4:1-11

Matthew 4:1-11 - *"Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ² And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterward He was hungry. ³ Now when the tempter came to Him, he said, '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 by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.'"*

⁵ Then the devil took Him up into the holy city, set Him 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 shall give His angels charge over you,' and, 'In their hands they shall bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone.'⁷ Jesus said to him, 'It is written again, 'You shall not tempt the LORD your God.'"

⁸ Again, the devil took Him up on an exceedingly 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 will fall down and worship me.' ¹⁰ Then Jesus said to him, 'Away with you, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve.'"

¹¹ Then the devil left Him, and behold, angels came and ministered to Him."

Background Notes

After the Lord Jesus was baptized in the Jordan River, He was led up by the Holy Spirit into the Judean wilderness to be tempted by the devil. Notice - the devil didn't lead the Lord into the wilderness. No, the Holy Spirit led Him into the wilderness. God was in control here, not the devil! In addition, notice that the Holy Spirit didn't lead the Lord Jesus into temptation. The Holy Spirit led the Lord into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. Question: Why would the Holy Spirit do this? Answer: **To prove that the Lord Jesus wouldn't sin.**

So from the divine point of view, it's best to think of the three temptations of Christ as three "tests" – not to **see** if Jesus was the Son of God, but rather to **prove** that Jesus was indeed the Son of God! Of course Satan's intention was to make Jesus sin, and thus disqualify Him as the Redeemer in God's plan of salvation for man.

After the Lord fasted for forty days and forty nights, He was hungry (v2). There was nothing wrong in becoming hungry and desiring bread - in fact, this demonstrates that our Lord was truly human. The Lord Jesus was - and is today - 100% God and 100% Man.

Doctrinal Points

1. The temptations of Christ do not imply that Jesus could sin.

The Bible clearly teaches that Jesus didn't sin – at the time of temptations, or at any other time. 1 Peter 2:22 - *“Who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth...”* 2 Corinthians 5:21 - *“For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”* And 1 John 3:5 - *“In Him is no sin...”* In Hebrews 4:15, we read that He was *“tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.”*

When a temptation is presented to us from without (outside of our own sinful thoughts and desires), if we do not yield to that temptation we have not committed sin - right? The sin is not in the temptation, is it? We sin when we **yield** to that temptation. James 1:14-15 says, *“But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.”*

Here's an illustration. Suppose someone urges you to cheat on your income tax return, and tells you how to do it without being detected. Have you been tempted? Yes, from tempted without. Have you sinned? No - not if you haven't yielded in any way. But you **have sinned** once you begin to yield in your heart and think in your mind about committing this sinful temptation. You have sinned, even if you never actually commit the act of filing a false income tax return! Do you follow that thought? So our Lord Jesus faced real temptations, but He didn't yield in any way. He didn't sin.

But now the harder question: **could** Jesus have sinned? We know that He didn't sin. He didn't have a sinful nature as we do. But **could** He have sinned? Was He like Adam before the fall? Adam didn't have a sinful nature before the fall, but he was capable of sinning - so as a human, could Jesus sin? Christians are not in agreement on this point.

I believe that **Jesus was impeccable!** That's the theological way of saying Jesus could not sin. He not only **didn't** sin, but **He could not sin. Jesus is God!** God can't sin - therefore Jesus could not sin.

“But wait!” someone will say. “Jesus was Man as well as God, and man can sin - therefore, Jesus could sin. He didn't sin but He was capable of sinning.” Right? Wrong! There's a flaw in the logic of that question. The fact that God can't sin, and Jesus is fully God, therefore Jesus can't sin - that is sound logic. But the fact that man can sin does not logically mean that Jesus had to be able to sin in order to be fully man. Being able to sin is not part of the essence of being human.

“Impeccability” (incapable of sinning) is intrinsic to the very essence of God. “Peccability” (capable of sinning) is not intrinsic to the basic essence of humanity. Can our Lord sin in heaven now? No! But He is still fully man as well as fully God! For Jesus to be truly human doesn't mean that He had to be able to sin while He was here on earth.

By the way, when we Christians are in heaven in our glorified bodies, we will not be able to sin -- but we will still be 100% human. I hope you realize that. We'll still be human - not half God or half angel! No way! We'll be 100% human, but our sinful nature will be gone and we won't be able to sin. Praise God!

So Jesus couldn't sin. "But," you may say, "doesn't that make the temptations kind of meaningless, or almost a sham?" No! The Lord Jesus certainly felt the pressure of those temptations from without. We humans are often hardened and desensitized to sin, but Jesus felt the pressure of temptation even more because He is God! His soul was more sensitive to the grossness of sin.

Here's an illustration. In a hurricane, which of the following items feels the force of the storm the most? A flexible tree that doesn't break, but it bends and is in danger of breaking? Or a ridged steel beam rooted in concrete, that can't break and can't bend? Which feels the greatest force of the hurricane? Answer: They both feel the same force of hurricane winds - but if anything, the steel beam feels the force of the storm to a greater degree because it can't flex. Our Lord is like the steel rooted in concrete.

What kind of Savior do you want? Do you want a Savior who didn't yield to temptation, but struggled with temptation and was in danger of yielding because He could sin? Or, do you want a Savior like the steel beam rooted in concrete? He felt all the temptations of mankind, and they were more severe for His sinless soul, but he **didn't yield** and He **couldn't yield!** I think that the answer should be obvious: the temptations of Christ don't imply that Jesus could sin.

2. The temptations of Christ illustrate how we are tempted.

It has often been pointed out that the three temptations of Christ fall into the same three categories that Satan used in the Garden of Eden. They are listed in 1 John 2:16: *"For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world."*

Do you see the three categories of temptation here? They are the strong desires of the flesh (bodily appetites), the strong desire of the eyes (material gain), and the pride of life (vanity or status). Satan knows that we are vulnerable in these three areas because of our fallen sinful natures, and he has designed his world system to appeal to us in these three areas. In the Garden of Eden, Eve saw that the fruit of the forbidden tree was good for food (the lust of the flesh), and that it was pleasant to look at and possess (the lust of the eyes), and that it would make one wise (the pride of life). Our first parents yielded to the temptation and sinned.

Now notice the temptations of our Lord. In Matthew 4:3: *"Now when the tempter came to Him, he said, 'If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.'" This temptation appealed to the area of the fleshly or bodily appetites. Verse 8-9: Satan "...showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. And he said to Him, 'All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me.'" This appealed to the strong desire for gaining material*

possessions. Verse 6: *“If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down”* [from the highest point of the Temple]. This temptation appealed to the pride of life or vanity. Just think of the fame and popularity and status that the Lord could have obtained if He had jumped off the high pinnacle of the Temple and survived!

Our Lord didn't yield in the slightest in any of these areas. We, too, will face temptations in all three of these areas, and unfortunately all too often we yield to that temptation. We don't **have** to yield -- but so often we do. The temptations of Christ illustrate how we are tempted.

Practical Application

How many verses can you quote from Deuteronomy?

Did you notice how our Lord reacted to the temptations? In all three situations, He quoted Scripture!

Verse 4, *“It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.’”*

Verse 7, *“It is written again, ‘You shall not tempt the LORD your God.’”*

Verse 10, *“Away with you, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve.’”*

All three of these Scriptures are from the Book of Deuteronomy! How many verses can you quote from the Deuteronomy?

In verse 6 Satan quoted a verse from Psalm 91, but he quoted it out of context, *“He shall give His angels charge over you,”* and, *“In their hands they shall bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone.”* This Scripture doesn't mean that you can jump off tall structures and not be hurt. No! Doing such a thing would be “putting God to the test,” and it's wrong to test God, according to the Scripture that our Lord quoted in verse 7: *“You shall not tempt the LORD your God.”*

So don't be surprised if Satan uses Scripture when he tries to tempt us to sin today. You can be sure that if Satan uses Scripture, he will misquote it or pull it out of context to twist the proper interpretation. That's why it's so important to study and know the Word of God. You can't quote what you don't know!

So pay attention to this practical application! How many verses can you quote from Deuteronomy?