

The Temptation of Jesus
Matthew 4:1-11
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The temptation of the lust of the flesh (4:1-4)

The location of this temptation was the wilderness. Just as Israel was tested for 40 years in the wilderness and failed, the Messiah would overcome temptation in the place of Israel for 40 days and nights. Moses, the leader of Israel, fasted for 40 days and 40 nights (Deuteronomy 9:9). The temptation connects the reader to the people of Israel's disobedience as a contrast to the Messiah of Israel fulfilling all righteousness.

This temptation dealt with Jesus' body since he had fasted forty days and forty nights in the wilderness and then became hungry. The temptation of Jesus was personal to His physical needs and would be especially tempting.

The Spirit of God is prominent in Matthew with the conception of Jesus by the Spirit (Matthew 1:20), the approval by the Spirit (Matthew 3:16) and now in the validation by the Spirit by leading Him to the wilderness to overcome temptation.

The word "if" in Matthew 4:3 is a first class conditional clause, meaning that this statement of Jesus as the Son of God is assumed to be true by the speaker. For this temptation to have a meaningful effect, it must be understood as true or else it could be simply denied. The devil understood the truth about Jesus (cf. James 2:19) and was not questioning His position but rather he was attempting to have Jesus fulfill His desires apart from God the Father and detract Him from His earthly mission. This temptation would be revisited at the crucifixion by those passing by, "If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross" (Matthew 27:40).

The stones in the wilderness that the devil referenced for Jesus to turn into bread were previously used as an illustration by John the Baptist in Matthew 3:9 regarding God's power. Would Jesus show that He was the Son of God by doing the very thing that John said that God could do...turn stones into bread?

Jesus' responded by quoting Deuteronomy 8:3, which was originally directed at Israel, "He humbled you and let you be hungry, and fed you with manna which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that He might make you understand that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord." Thus Jesus rightly stated this as a universal principle for everyone.

He is contrasted with Israel where the nation grumbled and complained for food in the wilderness without trusting God's supply and perished. Jesus did not succumb to Satan's temptation and fulfilled all righteousness.

As critical as bread would be for a person who had not eaten in forty days, the Word of God was said to be necessary. God's word is imperative for life even beyond what physically sustains us.

- 1 Peter 2:2: "Like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation"

Furthermore, the emphasis is on the words spoken by God. This will stand in contrast to the words spoken by the Pharisees and Sadducees who did not represent the words spoken by God.

- Matthew 7:15: "Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves."
- Matthew 16:11-12: " 'Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.' Then they understood that He did not say to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees."
- Isaiah 8:19-20: "When they say to you, 'Consult the mediums and the spiritists who whisper and mutter,' should not a people consult their God? *Should they consult* the dead on behalf of the living? To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because they have no dawn."

Also, note that this statement by Jesus speaks of every word. The Scripture in its entirety is referenced here.

- Matthew 5:18: “For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished”
- 1 Timothy 3:16-17: “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

This first temptation Satan sought to lure Christ into using His own will in escaping physical hardship instead of submitting to His Father’s will. Jesus' real food was to do the Father’s will: “Jesus said to them, ‘My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work’ ” (John 4:34). Likewise, our desire ought to be to do the Father’s will even to our own physical hurt.

The temptation of the lust of the eyes (4:5-7)

The location of this temptation was the temple in Jerusalem. The “holy city” was a familiar term used to refer to Jerusalem (cf. Neh. 11:1; Isa. 48:2; Dan. 9:24; Matt. 21:10; 27:53). That this setting was Jerusalem points to this temptation being national in nature, rather than individual in 4:1-4. The center of the holy city was the temple and the pinnacle of the temple would provide a vantage point to see the Kidron valley below, as well as overlooking the city from its tallest structure.

1. The Substance of the Difference in the Quotation by the Devil

Matthew 4:6	Psalm 91:11-12
<p>“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.”</p>	<p>“He will give His angels charge concerning You, to guard you in all your ways. They will bear you up in their hands, That you do not strike your foot against a stone.”</p>

2. The Significance of the Difference in the Quotation by the Devil

Many teachers suggest that this omission was an attempt to fool Jesus into disobedience. Yet the exclusion of the phrase “to guard you in all your ways” is not inherently wrong. It is not uncommon for the NT authors to exclude a portion of the OT text that they quote. Indeed, later in this same chapter we see Matthew do this in showing the fulfillment of Isaiah 9:1 in Matthew 4:15.

Matthew 4:15	Isaiah 9:1
“The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, by the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—the people who were sitting in darkness saw a great Light, and those who were sitting dwelling in the land and shadow of death, upon them a Light dawned.”	“But there will be no <i>more</i> gloom for her who was in anguish; in earlier times He treated the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali with contempt, but later on He shall make <i>it</i> glorious, by the way of the sea, on the other side of Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles. The people who walk in darkness Will see a great light; Those who live in a dark land, The light will shine on them.”

3. The Sinfulness of the Quotation by the Devil

The problem was not the interpretation of Psalm 91 but the application. Satan sought to have Jesus apply this Scripture in a manner that violated another Scripture. This would be a sinful application.

There is one interpretation of Scripture and many applications, but not every application. We can make wise applications and avoid foolish applications by knowing the Scripture. Furthermore, we can make wise applications and avoid foolish applications with wise counsel.

4. The Sufficiency of the Quotation by Jesus

Jesus refused Satan’s temptation because the Scripture strictly forbade putting God to the test. Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 6:16, which referenced Israel’s questioning God’s provision of water in the wilderness (Exodus 17:7, cr. Psalm 95:7-11; 1 Corinthians 10:9; Hebrews 3:7-19) in opposition to Satan’s application. The Deuteronomy verse does not contradict Psalm 91:11-12 but Psalm 91:11-12 was misapplied.

Matthew 4:7	Deuteronomy 6:16
"You shall not put the Lord your God to the test."	"You shall not put the Lord your God to the test."

Satan tempted Jesus to put God to the test and Jesus refused. It is sinful to test God. Testing God to fulfill His promises is not trusting God. Jesus did not question God's faithfulness to His promises but knew this application was morally wrong. The promise of Psalm 91:11-12 was valid but this application was wrong. In His role as the righteous King of the Jews, Jesus acted in obedience to Deuteronomy 6:16, unlike Israel in the wilderness who God's provision of water (cf. Exodus 17:7).

We act sinfully when we demand that God fulfill His promises to us in the manner that we desire. We cannot expect God to fulfill His promises on our terms. We must faithfully trust Him in obedience to accomplish His will in His way (Deuteronomy 6:16-17). This is the essence of trusting God.

When we faithfully obey the revealed will of God rather than demanding or expecting certain outcomes, God will "guard our ways" through His grace, perfecting our weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9). When people use Scripture out of the context of other Scripture when pressing for application, they are following the path of Satan.

The temptation of the boastful pride of life (4:8-11)

The location of this temptation was a very high mountain, traditionally considered to be near Jericho. It was a place to see far into the distance.

Many hold to this temptation to not be at a physical location but rather in a vision. The support for a visionary experience comes from Luke 4:5, "And he led Him up and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time." There is no statement about a location where Jesus was led in Luke's Gospel.

While Luke 4:5 allows for this to be a non-physical visionary event, Matthew specifies a mountain was the location. While possibly the mountain was part of the vision, there is not compelling evidence to argue that this temptation was not actually on a mountain. If it was visionary, it would stand in contrast with the other two temptations. Indeed to consider the temptation in the wilderness to be visionary undermines the significance of the physical nature of the temptation itself. It appears best to consider each of the three temptations to be understood in the plain sense of an actual physical event.

The purpose of Satan's temptation was to entice Jesus to worship him in return for all the glorious kingdoms of the world. The devil is the god of this world (2 Corinthians 4:4), who as the ruler of the world (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11) has power over the entire world (1 John 5:19). This temptation was therefore beyond personal or national but universal in its nature.

It is important to note that all of what the devil offered was something Christ had ultimate authority over in a positional sense (Matthew 28:19). Since Christ would have the authority to rule the earth as the Son of God, the temptation was primarily an issue of patience. There is application for our lives. God has promised good for us. He will provide for our needs.

- Romans 8:33: "He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?"
- Matthew 7:11: "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!"
- Philippians 4:19: "And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus."

This temptation is different from the first two in that it does not include the statement from the devil "if you are the Son of God." This is most likely absent in this third temptation because unlike the first two, this one does not involve a temptation for Christ to misuse His abilities as the Messiah for wrong purposes. There is no proving He is the Son of God by an exercise of supernatural power in this temptation.

This temptation is also different from the first two in that this one is a full assault on the worship of God. This would be similar to Israel's idolatrous worship in the wilderness with the golden calf (Exodus 32). In contrast to Israel, Jesus Christ rejected false worship to emphasize the requirement to worship God alone.

Christ referenced and paraphrased Deuteronomy 6:13-14, not only advocating the singular worship and service of God only but also banishing the devil for suggesting otherwise. The devil departed in response to Christ, picturing the application of the truth of James 4:7, "Submit therefore to God, resist the devil and he will flee from you." The Father faithfully honored Jesus' obedience with the sending of angels to minister to him (4:11).

Conclusion

It has been observed by many that Satan's tactics of tempting Jesus were not new. While Adam and Eve enjoyed a wonderful garden, Satan tempted them in the lust of their flesh, with food (Genesis 3:1-4), to do something God had forbidden and they fell. Jesus was fasting in the wilderness and Satan tempted Him with the concept of obtaining food and He resisted.

Satan tempted Adam and Eve with lust of their eyes, to have something for themselves, specifically to see the knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 3:5-7), and they fell. Jesus was the Son of God and resisted the temptation to prove this in a manner that tested God.

Satan also tempted Adam and Eve with the desire to be something for themselves, specifically to be like God (Genesis 3:5), and they fell. Jesus was the King of Kings and resisted temptation to gain what He would rule in the future. The first temptation was personal to His flesh, the second temptation was national, to His place as the Messiah of Israel, and the third temptation was universal, with regard to His rule over all kingdoms.

Jesus availed Himself of the very same resources to fight temptation that we possess: the word of God and the power of the Holy Spirit. He did not engage His Divine prerogatives or miraculous power. Rather He trusted in His Father.

It is in this that Christ is our example of enduring temptation righteously. His temptation allows Him to serve us in our temptation: "For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted" (Hebrews 2:18). Based upon these temptations Christ can relate to our weakness: "For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as *we are*, yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15). His victory over sin allows us to consider Christ as we endure temptation: "Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the Apostle and High Priest of our confession; He was faithful to Him who appointed Him" (Hebrews 3:1-2).

We are strengthened to resist temptation by knowing the Scripture. God has delivered truth regarding life and we do well to heed it. We cannot truly live without His revelation for it is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path (Psalm 119:105). If Jesus used the Scripture to resist temptation, how much more must we? By having a full understanding of truth rather than a selective sense of it, we will be able to recognize not only what is not true but what is not in balance with God's full revelation.

By knowing the actual revealed promises of God, we can trust Him to fulfill them. We may not see them fulfilled on our timetable but this does not change God's faithfulness. Consider the descendants of Abraham who "died in faith, without receiving the promises" and who "gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised, because God had provided something better for us, so that apart from us they would not be made perfect" (Hebrews 11:13, 39-40). Faith in God does not test God but trusts God.

Resisting temptation does not mean we pretend it does not exist. Jesus did not deny he was hungry or that He could make stones to be bread. He also did not deny He was the Son of God or that God would protect Him or that He would rule over all as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. But He humbly resisted using the methods of self-determination and trusted God ("not as I will but as You will" - Matthew 26:39).

In all things, including our resistance to temptation, we must worship God alone. The true worship of God, as opposed to the exaltation of ourselves, will allow us to resist the evil one so that he will flee from us.