

## LESSON 5 THE TEMPTATION OF JESUS

Matthew 4 and Luke 4 will be the text for our study of the temptations of Jesus. Both accounts give us a detailed account of the devil's methods of tempting the Son of God. Mark 1:12-13 offers us only a brief summary of the temptations.

Mark does provide us with one piece of information that the other two accounts do not provide. He says that Jesus was with wild beasts. That fact must have been incidental to the lengthy descriptions of Matthew and Luke. There is no indication that Jesus was threatened in any way by these wild beasts, nor is there anything that indicates what animals these were. We don't think about there being wild animals in Israel, but several references are made in the Old Testament to their being lions and bears. David speaks of killing both in First Samuel 17:34. Lions are also mentioned during the time of the divided kingdom in Second Kings 17:26.

Most references refer to lions as being animals that prey on the weak, both physically and spiritually. The devil is referred to in the New Testament as being a roaring lion seeking someone to devour.

Matthew records the temptations as encouraging Jesus to satisfy His hunger by changing stones into bread, throwing Himself off the temple, and falling down to worship the tempter. Luke reverses the last two. There is no particular reason for this reversal, nor does it seem to make any difference in the recounting of the event or in the outcome.

This encounter Jesus had with the devil is one of only three times we find the devil speaking face-to-face with someone. The first is in the Garden of Eden in Genesis 3. The second is in Job 1 where Satan inserts himself into God's gathering of angels. The third is this event, the temptations of Jesus. In all three incidences, he shows himself as a powerful adversary. He was cunning and subtle, much like the lion to which he is compared in First Peter 5:8.

The Spirit of God leads Jesus into the wilderness for this temptation. Luke says, "being forty days tempted of the devil" where Matthew says, "to be tempted of the devil." Luke indicates that Jesus was tempted for forty days and then records three ways in which He was tempted. It makes no difference. The devil was purposefully there to test Jesus after His baptism. He is hoping Jesus will fail, but God is

allowing this for proof that Jesus can resist any worldly temptations the devil hands out.

Keep in mind that the devil, Satan, is a real being. He was created by Jesus. Remember what John says, “All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made” (John 1:3). He had, at one time, been with Jesus in heaven. Now he is an outcast, and he wants to destroy the Son of God.

The devil appears very brave as he faces Jesus with the first temptation. Jesus has been forty days without food. He is hungry. So, the devil uses something to attack Jesus’ vulnerable side. He encourages Him to change the stones that lay in front of Him into bread. Did Jesus have the ability to do this? He did, but nothing He did in His entire ministry was for Himself. Nothing He did was for His own comfort or to satisfy any physical want. Instead, Jesus pulled from His knowledge of Scripture and took control of the situation. He quotes from Deuteronomy 8:3, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone.’”

The passage in Deuteronomy is much more detailed, because here the people of Israel are called to remember how God fed them when they were hungry. He had humbled them to test them. This is exactly what the devil is doing to Jesus. He is tempting Jesus with the same temptation with which the Israelites were tempted. Jesus, however, rose to the occasion by rejecting the suggestion of the devil and relaying God’s Words to him.

The devil (according to Luke) then takes Jesus up to a high mountain. In just a moment of time, he shows Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and promises to give Him a chance to be in control of all world powers. All the devil wanted in return was for Jesus to fall down and worship him. This was Jesus’ chance to avoid the cross, serve the enemy of God, and be a ruler of all the world. His answer came again from Scripture. He quoted, “It is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve’”, quoted from Deuteronomy 6:16.

It is interesting that the King James Version says, “Get thee behind me, Satan.” This is the same phrase Jesus used with Peter when Peter rebuked Him for saying He would have to suffer, be killed, and be raised. Peter insisted that this would not happen; and Jesus said, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.”

Had Jesus agreed to the terms the devil had set forth, He would have been setting His mind on the physical (the world) and not on His ultimate goal—dying for our sins.

Finally, the devil brings Jesus to Jerusalem and sets Him on the pinnacle of the temple. This would have been the place from which Jesus could look at a most magnificent scene, one the devil hoped would tempt Him to succumb to his offer. Here the devil wants Jesus to throw Himself off with the promise that angels would rush to Him to keep Him from harm. Jesus is not persuaded by this offer and says, “It is said, ‘You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.’”

Psalm 91 is written to describe the safety of the man that trusts God with all His heart. It is a Scripture we need to read often to give us hope in obeying God and in staying faithful to His Word. It is assurance of the kind of protection the devil offered but was unable to fulfill.

Luke says that when the devil was unsuccessful in getting Jesus to do anything he had used to tempt Him, he “departed from him for a season” (Luke 4:13). This simply means that the devil did not give up. He continued to tempt the Son of God as long as He lived on this earth. When Jesus was with the disciples at the Passover just before His betrayal, He told them, “You are those who have stayed with me in my trials.” The disciples must have seen how Jesus was tempted. The writer of Hebrews tells us how our Savior is able to understand our trials. “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin” (Hebrews 4:15).

We can see that the devil often tempts us in ways that will fulfill our basic needs and the desires of our heart. Some needs and desires may be right within themselves, but the devil uses his tricks to offer them for the wrong reason or at an inappropriate time. Turning stones to bread would not have been beyond the Lord’s authority had it been for the right reason and at the right time. After all, He did multiply the loaves and the fishes. Casting Himself down from the temple to test God’s ability to save Him was not the right reason or the right time. Neither was bowing to worship the enemy. Only God was or is the object of our worship.

We learn some things about the nature of the devil from this event:

1. Satan knows Scripture. He can even quote it; however, he also misuses it. He has no respect for it.
2. Satan does not tempt us by chance but by design.

3. The devil can appear in a variety of ways. He uses what is available to trick us.
4. He has no power over the Christian except what the Christian gives him.

FOR DISCUSSION: WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THE LESSON?

1. How does the devil use Scripture today to be a temptation?
2. What are some circumstances today when knowing Scripture can be as important as it was to Jesus?
3. What can a Christian do to prepare for being tempted?
4. What sins fit into the three categories of sin found in First John 2:16--lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, and pride of life?

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