

Temptation

September 21, 2025

Lesson Summary

Main Passages

Matthew 4:1-11

Session Outline

1. Provide for Yourself (Matthew 4:1-4)
2. Test God (Matthew 4:5-7)
3. Take Power (Matthew 4:8-11)

Theological Theme

Before Jesus began His earthly ministry, the Spirit led Him into the wilderness to be tempted. He answered each temptation of the enemy with the truth of God's Word. This is to be our response to temptation too.

Call to Action

Is your mindset regarding temptation defensive or offensive? Have you ever thought about going on the offensive against temptation? *"How do I do that?"* (1) Master the Word—Preach it on your own life against the schemes of the Evil One. (2) Find accountability—suggestion to push small groups here.



Leader Guide

Temptation

Introduction

Humankind is no stranger to temptation. Since the dawn of time, humans have been faced with temptation, and failed the test, time and time again.

In Genesis alone, we see many examples of temptation gone wrong. Adam and Eve gave into temptation and first introduced sin into the world when they ate the fruit from the tree God had warned them not to eat of (Genesis 3:1-6). In the days of Noah, humans gave into all kinds of temptation that were corrupt in the eyes of God, leaving none but Noah as righteous before the Lord (Genesis 6:9-13). Esau, tired from a day in the field, was tempted by Jacob's stew and sold his birthright to eat one meal (Genesis 25:29-34). Joseph's brothers were tempted by the solution of pawning him off to traders bound for Egypt, so they gave in and sold him for twenty shekels of silver (Genesis 37:23-28). This is not even an exhaustive list of where temptation led people in the first book of the Bible.

From there, generation upon generation of Israelites turned their back on God and worshiped idols, first during the period of the judges, then during the period of the kings (eventually landing the people in exile as punishment). Even David, a man after God's own heart (1 Samuel 13:14), gave into the temptation to gaze upon Bathsheba in the privacy of her own home, have her brought to him, and sleep with her, leading him on a slippery slide of sin that ended in the murder of a righteous man and David paying dearly in consequence (2 Samuel 11).

For countless generations, humans lost the battle to temptation . . . until Jesus. Where all before Him had failed, Jesus was led into temptation beyond what we can imagine and emerged on the other side faithful. We'll study Matthew's account of Jesus's temptation today and discuss what we can learn and apply in our own lives when we are tempted as all people are.



What are some other examples of temptations faced and given into that you can think of from the Bible?



What makes temptation so deceptive in our lives even when we can often identify the destruction that may await on the other side?

Session Summary

Once Jesus was baptized, the Spirit led Him into the wilderness to be tempted. In the wilderness, the devil sought to entice Jesus to sin three times by tempting Him to: provide for Himself instead of obediently relying on God, test God and His faithfulness, and to seize power on His own.

The enemy is still alive and well today, working against believers in similar ways. The backdrop and specific temptations may be different, but his strategy hasn't changed. And it often works. The enemy has had millennia to hone his strategy of temptation, and he is very good at it.

In the wilderness, Jesus countered the devil's temptation with Scripture, an example we can model when we are tempted to turn away from God today.

1. Provide for Yourself (Matthew 4:1-4)



Jesus's temptation happened right after His baptism, and ahead of His public ministry. Why might God have ordered these events this way?



Why would the temptation of bread be particularly enticing during this time? When was a time you felt prone to certain temptations?

Last week, in our study of Matthew, we read the story of Jesus's baptism by John the Baptist in the Jordan River. When Jesus was baptized, the Holy Spirit descended upon Him, and then, in our passage today, promptly led Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted.

It is important to recognize the Holy Spirit's presence in Jesus's life resulted in direct conflict with the enemy.¹ This truth has ramifications for us as well. When the Holy Spirit is present and actively working in our own lives (the Holy Spirit dwells in all believers), we can expect conflict with the enemy. Just as Satan has been tempting humans since the beginning of time, we can expect our own temptations, expertly crafted with the intention to pull us away from God and His purpose in our lives.

Jesus was led into the wilderness by the Spirit, and when He arrived there, He fasted for 40 days and 40 nights. Remember how the Israelites gave into temptation time and time again in the Old Testament. One such time was during their wandering in the wilderness. God tested the people in the wilderness for 40 years (Deuteronomy 8:2)², but where the Israelites failed, Jesus would not. When He was tested in His own wilderness for 40 days, He resisted every temptation, a fully morally fit king after generations of imperfect (and even bad) ones.³

The Three Temptations

The three temptations epitomize all major categories of human temptation, what the apostle John later would call the "lust of the flesh," "the lust of the eyes," and "the pride of life" (1 John 2:16). Where Adam, the nation of Israel, and indeed all humanity had previously failed, Jesus remained faithful. His ministry proceeded according to plan. As it did, He would continue to fulfill Scripture.

After the Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted, He fasted. In fasting, we dedicate intentional time to prayer and fellowship with God. We see this trend in the Old Testament too. When God's people were preparing for a big undertaking in which they especially recognized their need for the Lord's help, they would often fast. Jesus prepared Himself for the great temptation He would face by spending time with the Father. Likewise, we should take our time with the Lord in prayer and worship seriously. Fasting is one way we set aside specific time to do this.

"He was hungry" (v. 2) is an important addition here as it confirms again that Jesus was both fully man and fully divine. Paul would later write that we have a sympathetic high priest in Jesus (Hebrews 4:15)—He knows what it feels like to be tempted. Jesus was hungry and said no to the temptation of bread even though it was within His power to have it.

Note that the enemy picked a vulnerable moment to approach Jesus. He didn't approach Him when He was fresh from His baptism and newly arrived in the wilderness. He waited until Jesus had fasted 40 days and was hungry. The enemy often chooses similarly vulnerable moments to tempt us, moments when we are especially prone to give in to his temptation.

The tempter first tried to entice Jesus to satisfy His own hunger. Since it appears that the Spirit led Jesus to fast, breaking His fast before God's timing would have been disobedient. Jesus knew that when God wanted the fast to end, He would provide food (and He did, see verse 11).⁴ Note the parallel to the wilderness wanderings in the Old Testament here. God's people did not trust Him to provide food or water when they were in the wilderness, but Jesus fully trusted the Father to care for Him and meet His needs.

Jesus answered the enemy with Scripture, quoting Deuteronomy 8:3. Jesus showed it is more important to be obedient to God's will than, in His case, being promptly fed when He was hungry. Even more than daily bread, we need God's wisdom that comes from His Word. Being obedient to what God has called us to do is more important than meeting our needs the way we believe is best.



Application: Where are you tempted to provide for yourself, instead of relying on God's provision, today? How might you rely on Him by focusing on His Word instead?

2. Test God (Matthew 4:5-7)



How did the devil shift his approach in his second temptation? What would be tempting about this situation?



What can we learn from this about the ways Satan repeatedly and strategically tests us in daily life?

In his second temptation, the devil sought to tempt Jesus by taking Scripture out of context. It is important to recognize the enemy knows Scripture and can apply it incorrectly to his own advantage. This is still a tactic he uses today. We must know the truth in God's word to spot Satan's lies. This is one of the reasons it is so important to study the Word regularly.

The devil suggested that the Father would protect Jesus regardless of any situation He put Himself in. When we think back to the wilderness wandering, do you see the parallel? God's people in the wilderness often requested signs to trust that God was with them. They tested the Lord. Jesus did not, though He was in a similar situation. He, too, was in the wilderness, alone and hungry, but He refused to put God to the test.

Jesus was presented with a similar temptation at His crucifixion: "If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross!" (Matthew 27:40). He refused then too. Once again, Jesus knew obedience was more important than His own desire. Jesus modeled this repeatedly in His earthly ministry. We will be presented with temptation to take the easy way out or to test God, but obedience is always the better path.

In the wilderness, Jesus, again, spotted the lie in Satan's argument and responded by rightly interpreting Scripture. He knew the truth: God is faithful and trustworthy even when we are in hard situations. We know He is with us because we believe in the truth of His Word (and we have a record of His past faithfulness).⁵



Application: How has God shown that He is trustworthy and faithful in your life?

3. Take Power (Matthew 4:8-11)



What did the devil seek to entice Jesus with in his third temptation? Why is this important?



How was this a temptation to give Jesus "the right things in the wrong way"? How might Satan seek to entice us similarly?

The devil's last temptation is one that he still actively tempts believers with today: the promise of power. What is interesting here is that the devil did not have the authority to give Jesus these things. The kingdoms of the world and their splendor belonged to their Creator, God. Many times,

what the enemy offers us isn't even in his power to give! Have you ever been tempted by something, gone down that road, and found that things did not work out like you hope? The enemy and anything he might dangle before us with glittering promises offer no satisfaction, only God can satisfy.

In Jesus's case, God would eventually give Him these things (Psalm 2:8). Satan's lie was that Jesus could have the things God promised outside of God's way (the cross). God's will for us does not always lead to the exact thing the enemy attempts to tempt us with, but we can be sure that, every time, no matter the temptation, following God's will leads to something so much better. Anything the enemy can tempt us with only stands in the way of that.

The devil's last request was particularly offensive because he told Jesus to worship him. Jesus, of course, refused, telling him to go away and once again countered with the power of God's Word. We can be tempted to think of "worshiping" something other than God in a literal sense, like in the Old Testament when the people built golden idols to bow before and sacrifice to, but don't be fooled. We worship things other than God anytime we place them before God as a priority in our lives.

Our passage ends with Jesus being cared for by angels. He was faithful throughout His temptation, and God took care of Him. When we faithfully follow God, He takes care of us. It doesn't always happen on our preferred timing, or the exact way we might prefer, but God will not fail us. He is with us and can be trusted, even in hard times.



Application: Where might Satan be tempting you to pursue the right things in the wrong ways now? How should you respond?

Conclusion

After Jesus was baptized in the Jordan River, the Spirit led Him into the wilderness to be tempted. Repeatedly, Jesus countered the enemy's temptation with God's Word. This is a model we can follow when faced with temptation (but is only available to us when we actively study and memorize God's Word).



Where are you currently facing temptation? What can you learn from Jesus's response to help you respond similarly?



How can we, as a group, support one another as we face temptation in life? Why is it important that we not operate in isolation?



How does living according to God's Word not only keep us from temptation, but also help us point others to the truth of God's Word?

Prayer of Response

Thank God for providing for us. Praise Him for having a good plan for our lives even when the path He wants us to walk on isn't one that we would choose on our own. Ask Him to help you to study and memorize His Word so you can recall it and trust in Him in your time of need.

Memory Verse

He answered, "It is written: Man must not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God." —Matthew 4:4

Additional Resources

- *Exalting Jesus in Matthew* by David Platt
- *The Gospel of Matthew* by R. T. France
- *Be Loyal* by Warren Wiersbe

Disciples Multiplying Disciples



Historical Context of Matthew

Purpose

Matthew probably wrote his Gospel in order to preserve written eyewitness testimony about the ministry of Jesus. Matthew's Gospel emphasizes certain theological truths. First, Jesus is the Messiah, the long-awaited King of God's people. Second, Jesus is the new Abraham, the founder of a new spiritual Israel consisting of all people who choose to follow him. This new Israel will consist of both Jews and Gentiles. Third, Jesus is the new Moses, the deliverer and instructor of God's people. Fourth, Jesus is the Immanuel, the virgin-born Son of God who fulfills the promises of the OT.

Author

The author did not identify himself in the text. However, the title that ascribes this Gospel to Matthew appears in the earliest manuscripts and is possibly original. Titles became necessary to distinguish one Gospel from another when the four Gospels began to circulate as a single collection. Many early church fathers (Papias, Irenaeus, Pantaenus, and Origen) acknowledged Matthew as the author. Papias also contended that Matthew first wrote in Hebrew, implying that this Gospel was later translated into Greek.

Setting

Determining the date of composition of Matthew's Gospel depends largely on the relationship of the Gospels to one another. Most scholars believe that Matthew utilized Mark's Gospel in writing his own gospel. If this is correct, Matthew's Gospel must postdate Mark's. However, the date of Mark's Gospel is also shrouded in mystery. Irenaeus (ca AD 180) seems to claim that Mark wrote his Gospel after Peter's death in the mid-60s. However, Clement of Alexandria, who wrote only twenty years after Irenaeus, claimed that Mark wrote his Gospel while Peter was still alive. Given the ambiguity of the historical evidence, a decision must be based on other factors.

Special Features

This Gospel was written from a strong Jewish perspective to show that Jesus is the Messiah promised in the Old Testament.

Extended Commentary

Matthew 4:1-11

4:1–2 The temptation of Christ highlights numerous parallels between Jesus and OT Israel. Deuteronomy 8:2–3 says that the Lord led Israel into the wilderness to be tested for forty years. Similarly, Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tested for forty days. The three temptations Jesus faced parallel the tests Israel faced in the wilderness, and every Scripture that Jesus quoted in response to his temptations was drawn from God’s message to the Israelites about their wilderness test (Dt 6–8). Israel failed its tests, but Jesus passed his and in doing so “fulfilled all righteousness” (see Mt 3:15). Thus he is qualified to create a new spiritual Israel. Several features of Matthew confirm Jesus’s intention to gather a new people for God. He chose twelve disciples to parallel Israel’s twelve tribes. This was a conscious effort to identify his followers as the new Israel. The fact that Jesus was hungry shows that he was truly human as well as divine.

4:3 The stones that littered the wilderness floor resembled small round loaves of bread in shape, size, and color. Interpreters disagree as to why it would have been wrong for Jesus to transform and eat the stones. Most suggest that he was tempted to exercise supernatural power rather than depend on God’s provision. Clues in the text suggest that the Spirit, who led Jesus into the wilderness, commanded this fast. Thus, breaking the fast prematurely would have been an act of disobedience, preventing Jesus from fulfilling every act of righteousness (3:15). Jesus aimed to end his fast when the test was over and no sooner. God would signal the end by providing food. Matthew 4:11 shows that at fast’s end, angels came and “began to serve” Jesus. The verb serve means “to serve as a table-waiter” and implies that the angels fed Jesus. During their wilderness wanderings, Israel failed to trust God to provide food and water. Jesus, the embodiment of the new Israel, had unwavering trust in God’s care. On Son of God, see 3:17.

4:4 Jesus quoted Dt 8:3. His reference to every word that comes from the mouth of God recalls the OT theme that God’s words are not idle but are to be received as commands. Deuteronomy 8:1, 6 emphasize the need to obey God’s commands, and Dt 8:1 teaches that man lives by following God’s commandments just as 8:3 says that man lives by what comes from God’s mouth (Dt 6:24). Thus the OT text that Jesus quoted teaches that obeying God is more important than being well-fed. Israel struggled to learn this truth (Ex 16:3; Nm 11:4–5). In contrast, Jesus hungered for righteousness more than bread and thirsted for obedience more than water. He urged his disciples to have the same priority (Mt 5:6).

4:5–7 Satan quoted Ps 91:11–12 out of context, trying to convince Jesus that the Father would supernaturally protect him even if he gambled with his life. Jesus responded by quoting Dt 6:16 which refers to the time when Israel, angry and thirsty, questioned God’s presence until he miraculously produced a stream of water from a rock: “They tested the Lord, saying, ‘Is the Lord among us or not?’ ” (Ex 17:7). Had Jesus succumbed to Satan’s temptation, it would indicate that his faith was frail and depended on God’s miraculous action. Jumping from the pinnacle of the temple would test God by attempting to force him to perform a miracle.

Satan implied that God is trustworthy only when he rescues us from suffering and danger. Jesus knew better. God is trustworthy even when he allows us or even causes us to suffer. True faith recognizes this and perseveres through hard times. When Jesus suffered on the cross (27:41–44), those who tormented him used arguments similar to that of the devil: “If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross.” They even quoted Ps 22:8 to argue that Jesus would be rescued if God really loved him, much as Satan quoted Ps 91:11–12 to argue that God would rescue Jesus from a deadly fall if he were really God’s Son. Again, Jesus knew better. He trusted God even through a brutal scourging, even when nails were driven through his limbs, and even when God let him suffer a horrible death.

4:8–9 Although Satan exercises some authority over the world (Lk 4:6; Jn 12:31), the kingdoms of the world belong to God, and he promised to give them to his Son (Ps 2:8).

4:10–11 Jesus responded to Satan by quoting from Dt 6:14 and 10:20. If Jesus had worshiped Satan in order to gain worldly power, it would have indicated that he valued creation more than the Creator and the kingdoms of the earth more than the kingdom of God. Jesus insisted that only God is worthy of worship. After citing Dt 6:13, Jesus’s reception of worship later in this Gospel (8:2; 9:18; 14:33; 15:25; 20:20; 28:9, 17) without rebuking the worshiper (cp. Ac 10:25–26; 14:11–15) strongly implies his deity. That the angels came to serve Jesus further implies his superior status.⁶

References

1. Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 789–792.
2. Charles L. Quarles, “Matthew,” in *CSB Study Bible: Notes*, ed. Edwin A. Blum and Trevin Wax (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017), 1503.
3. <https://soniclight.com/tcon/notes/html/matthew/matthew.htm>
4. Charles L. Quarles, “Matthew,” in *CSB Study Bible: Notes*, ed. Edwin A. Blum and Trevin Wax (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017), 1503.
5. Charles L. Quarles, “Matthew,” in *CSB Study Bible: Notes*, ed. Edwin A. Blum and Trevin Wax (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017), 1504.
6. *CSB Study Bible: Christian Standard Bible*. Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017.