

Testing & Temptation

Luke 4:1-13

The Kick-Off

- ❑ Luke 3 presents the kick-off (i.e., the beginning) of Jesus' public ministry.¹ Luke provides the historical setting – about AD 28-29 (3:1-2).² The beginning of Jesus' public ministry was marked by his baptism by John and his confirmation by God the Father (3:21-22).³



“...heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: ‘You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.’ Now Jesus himself was about thirty years old when he began his ministry” (3:21c-23a, NIV).

The Test

- ❑ After the “kick-off” of his public ministry, Jesus was tested. Read Luke 4:1-13.
- ❑ Jesus went into the wilderness (uninhabited place) where for 40 days he was tempted by the devil.⁴ It was not wrong for Jesus to go there. He was “led by the Spirit” (4:1).⁵ During his days in the wilderness, Jesus fasted (went without food).⁶ Three temptations are presented.

First Temptation

- ❑ After 40 days of fasting, Jesus was hungry! So the devil tempted Jesus by saying, “If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread” (4:3). The devil tempted Jesus to doubt God’s care, and take care of himself.
 - 📖 Jesus responded, “It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone.’” (4:4).⁷
- ❑ Turning a stone into bread is not necessarily a bad thing. But the devil wanted Jesus to make satisfaction of his hunger more important than the will of God.⁸ Satan wanted Jesus to take a shortcut to satisfy his desire instead of trusting and obeying God.
- ❑ Our physical desires are not necessarily bad. They are part of God’s design. If we did not desire food, we would starve! But our physical desires must not overrule trusting and obeying God.⁹
- ❑ In general, the devil wants us to be controlled by our own self-centered desires, *not* God’s will. And he wants us to “take care of ourselves,” independent of God, instead of trusting in God.



¹ We skipped over Luke 1:5-2:52, which concerns the births of John the Baptist and Jesus, and the early life of Jesus.

² This date assumes the Julian calendar (used by the Romans) and Jesus’ baptism not long after John’s ministry began. In Harold Hoehner’s book *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Jesus*, he discusses five different dating methods resulting in dates ranging from AD 25-29. Jesus ‘was about thirty years old’ (3:23). Assuming his birth in 5-4 BC, Jesus would be around 31-32 years old, which probably fits within the limits of ‘*about (hōsei)* thirty years old.’

³ Since Jesus was ‘without sin’ (Hebrews 4:15), why did he need to be baptized by John? Answers vary. Perhaps the best answer is that Jesus was baptized to signify his identification with humanity and his role as the Suffering-Servant.

⁴ ‘devil’ (*diabolos*) – the chief fallen angel; leader of the demons and all that is opposed to God. The devil is also called ‘Satan.’ The devil tempted Jesus over a 40-day period, but only three specific temptations are presented in this passage.

⁵ The devil is the one who tests and tempts Jesus, but the testing falls within God’s plan.

⁶ Fasting is a Jewish religious practice, and is also practiced by Christians. Moses fasted 40 days when he received the Ten Commandments (Exod. 34:28). The number 40 is significant elsewhere (e.g., Israel’s 40 years in the wilderness).

⁷ Quotation of Deuteronomy 8:3c. The verse continues, ‘...but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD’ (8:3d) which Matthew quotes in his account (Matthew 4:4).

⁸ On another occasion, when Jesus’ disciples urged him to eat something, he replied, ‘My food...is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work’ (John 4:34, NIV).

⁹ Jesus said, ‘Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and [God will provide for your basic needs].’ (Matt. 6:33)

Second Temptation

- ❑ The devil led Jesus up to a high place and offered to give him all the kingdoms of the world.¹⁰ Satan claimed, “if you worship me, it will all be yours.” (4:5-7) He tempted Jesus to seize power by selling out and abandoning his allegiance (loyalty, devotion) to God the Father.¹¹
 - 📖 Jesus responded, “It is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God and serve him only’ (4:8).
- ? So far, what do you notice about the way Jesus responds to the devil’s temptations?¹²

Third Temptation

- ❑ The devil led Jesus to Jerusalem and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. Then the devil quoted (and misused) Psalm 91:11-12, which speaks of God’s care and protection. The devil tempted Jesus to put God to the test: “God will protect his own, so go ahead and jump!”
 - 📖 Jesus responded, “It is said, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test’ (4:12).

Test Results

- ❑ Whereas the first Adam failed the test and plunged the whole human race into sin (*Genesis 3*), Jesus remained faithful and demonstrated his qualification to be the Savior of humankind. Whereas the Israelites failed the test during their 40 years in the wilderness, Jesus showed himself to be the true Israelite who lives “on every word that comes from the mouth of God.”¹³
- ❑ The devil left Jesus, but he would try again to ruin Jesus and his disciples (*e.g., Luke 22:3, 31*).

Following Jesus’ Example

- ❑ Though the temptation of Jesus was a unique event in the life of Jesus, we can learn from his example. Each time Jesus was tempted, he responded with “the word of God.” The important thing is not just intellectual knowledge of God’s word, but commitment to trust and obey Him.
- ❑ As an exercise, consider each of the following temptations. If you were tempted in these ways, what “words of God” (Bible verses) could you use to help you resist each temptation?¹⁴
 1. You are tempted to negatively criticize another person, or gossip about someone.
 2. You are tempted to take all the credit for a success (to exalt yourself), though others helped.
 3. You are tempted to react in anger because someone has done something you don’t like.
 4. You are tempted to cheat, plagiarize, or lie (“just a little”) in order to achieve “success.”
 5. You are tempted to be selfish with your possessions instead of giving to others and to God.
 6. You are tempted to hide your faith around friends, and let them influence you to do wrong.
 7. You are tempted to look at pornography, or watch a movie showing sexual immorality.

Reflection/Application

- Are you equipped to resist temptation? First, you need to trust in Christ and be enabled by the Holy Spirit. Identify specific temptations you struggle with, and arm yourself by memorizing helpful Bible verses. Trust, obey, and rely on God. Read and reflect on 1 Corinthians 10:13.

¹⁰ The devil claimed that he owned the world, which is not really true. Only God owns the world. However, the devil’s influence is great enough that he is called ‘the prince of this world’ (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11), and ‘the god of this age’ (2 Corinthians 4:4). John writes, ‘the whole world is under the control of the evil one’ (1 John 5:19).

¹¹ Satan wants us to seek power and possessions in the world’s way, without regard for God. But ‘what good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?’ (Mark 8:36). “You cannot serve both God and Money” (Matt. 6:24).

¹² He responds with God’s word. In response to each temptation, he quotes from Deuteronomy: 1) 8:3; 2) 6:13; 3) 6:16.

¹³ The NIV Study Bible (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 1442.

¹⁴ e.g., Eph. 4:29; Prov. 16:28; James 4:6; 1:19-20; Prov. 15:1; Rom. 13:1; Eph. 4:28; Prov. 12:22; 1 John 3:17; 2 Cor. 9:6-7; Phil. 2:4; Matt. 6:19-20; 5:13-16; 5:28; 1Cor. 6:18-20; Phil. 4:8. Cautious use of a topical Bible can help.