

# The Test

Matthew 4:1-11

Matthew 3 records John's baptism of Jesus, which marks the beginning of Jesus' public earthly ministry. However, Jesus must first face a test.

## Temptation → Test

Read Matthew 4:1. Jesus would be tempted by the devil (Satan)<sup>1</sup> in the wilderness. Though Satan was wrong, this time of temptation (testing) was God's plan.<sup>2</sup> Three temptations are presented.

### First Temptation

Read Matthew 4:2-4. After forty days of fasting<sup>3</sup> (going without food), Jesus was hungry! So Satan tempts Jesus to turn stones into bread to satisfy his hunger.<sup>4</sup>

1. In what way does Jesus respond to this temptation? What is Jesus' point?<sup>5</sup>

In response to each temptation, Jesus responds with "God's word" (Scripture).<sup>6</sup>



### Second Temptation

Read Matthew 4:5-7. For his second temptation, Satan takes Jesus to the holy city (Jerusalem).

2. In what way does Satan try to tempt Jesus? (4:6)<sup>7</sup>

Jesus again responds with Scripture: "Do not put the Lord your God to the test." (4:7; Deut. 6:16)

### Third Temptation

Read Matthew 4:8-11. For his third temptation, Satan takes Jesus to a very high mountain and offers him all the kingdoms of the world.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 'devil' (*diabolos*) – the chief fallen angel; leader of the demons and all that is opposed to God. The devil is also called 'Satan' (4:10), which means 'adversary, opponent, enemy.'

<sup>2</sup> Jesus was 'led by the Spirit' into this situation. The Greek word *peirazō*, translated 'tempt,' can also mean 'test.' While the devil tempted Jesus, the main point of the passage is the test Jesus faced and passed.

<sup>3</sup> 'fasting' is a religious practice in both Judaism and Christianity, but fasting may also occur because food is lacking. 'forty days' – the number 40 is significant elsewhere in the Bible (e.g., Israel's 40 years in the wilderness).

<sup>4</sup> Jesus was recently announced as God's 'Son' when he was baptized (*Matthew 3:17*). So the devil challenges Jesus, 'If you are the Son of God...' (4:3). Turning stones into bread is not necessarily a bad thing. But the devil wants Jesus to make satisfaction of his hunger more important than God's will. 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*).

<sup>5</sup> Jesus responded with Scripture, particularly Deuteronomy 8:3 which instructed Israel to trust God to provide in *his* way (as he had done with the manna). 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.

<sup>6</sup> Each quotation comes from Deuteronomy and reflects on Israel's testing during their 40 years in the wilderness.

<sup>7</sup> The devil quotes (and misuses) Psalm 91:11-12, which speaks of God's care and protection. The devil tempts Jesus to put God to the test. The devil basically says, 'God will protect his own, so go ahead and jump!'

<sup>8</sup> Of course, there is no mountain high enough to see *all* the kingdoms of the world. The devil does not necessarily 'physically take' Jesus to a particular physical mountain top. It could be in the form of a vision.

3. By offering Jesus all the kingdoms of the world, Satan implies he owns and controls them. Is this true? What power, if any, does Satan have over these kingdoms?<sup>9</sup>
4. What are Satan's conditions for giving Jesus all the kingdoms of the world? How may this temptation apply to us today?<sup>10</sup>



Jesus commands Satan, "Away from me!", and again responds with Scripture: "Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only." (4:10; Deut. 6:13) "Then the devil left [Jesus], and angels came and attended to him" (4:11).

### Test Results

Whereas the first Adam failed the test and plunged the whole human race into sin (*Genesis 3*), Jesus was 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 Israel who lives "on every word that comes from the mouth of God."<sup>11</sup>

### Following Jesus' Example

Though "the test" 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," trusting and obeying God the Father. 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?<sup>12</sup>

- ✧ You're tempted to negatively criticize another person, or gossip about someone.
- ✧ You're tempted to take all the credit for a success, though you were helped by others.
- ✧ You're tempted to react in anger because someone has done something you don't like.
- ✧ You're tempted to cheat, plagiarize, or lie ("just a little") to achieve "success."
- ✧ You're tempted to be selfish with your possessions instead of giving to others and God.
- ✧ You're tempted to hide your faith, and let your friends influence you to do wrong.
- ✧ You're tempted to look at pornography, or watch a movie showing sexual immorality.

### Reflection/Application

- Are you equipped to resist temptation? First of all, if you haven't already done so, you need to trust in Jesus as Savior and receive the Holy Spirit's help. Do you need to talk about this?
- Brothers and sisters, identify specific temptations you struggle with, and equip yourself by memorizing helpful Bible verses. Trust, obey and rely on God. Reflect on 1 Corinthians 10:13.

<sup>9</sup> Only God owns the world. However, Satan'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*). Of course, God is ultimately in control, and Satan will eventually be destroyed.

<sup>10</sup> Satan tempts Jesus to seize power by selling out and abandoning his allegiance (loyalty, devotion) to God the Father. Likewise, Satan wants *us* to seek power and possessions in the world's way, without regard for God. But Jesus said, 'What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit (lose) their soul?' (*Mark 8:36*)

<sup>11</sup> *The NIV Study Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 1442.

<sup>12</sup> 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. 2:3-4; Matt. 6:19-20; 5:13-16; 5:28; 1Cor. 6:18-20; Phil. 4:8. Searching "what does the Bible say about..." may help.