

Bible Study July 9, 2025

MATTHEW 4 (ENGLISH STANDARD VERSION)

The Temptation of Jesus

¹ Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

The devil, also called Satan, tempted Eve in the Garden of Eden, and here he tempted Jesus in the wilderness. Satan is a fallen angelic being. He is real, not symbolic, and is constantly fighting against those who follow and obey God. Satan's temptations are real, and he is always trying to get us to live his way or our own way rather than God's way. Jesus will one day reign over all creation, but Satan tried to force his hand and get him to declare his kingship prematurely. If Jesus had given in, his mission on earth—to die for our sins and give us the opportunity to have eternal life—would have been lost. When temptations seem especially strong, or when you find yourself wanting to rationalize giving in, consider whether Satan may be trying to block God's purposes for your life.

² And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. ³ And the tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." ⁴ But he answered, "It is written,

***"Man shall not live by bread alone,
but by every word that comes from the mouth of God."***

Jesus was hungry and weak after fasting for 40 days, but he chose not to use his divine power to satisfy his heightened desire for food. Food and eating are good, but the timing was wrong. Jesus was in the wilderness to fast. And because Jesus had given up the unlimited, independent use of his divine power in order to experience humanity fully (Philippians 2:6-8), he wouldn't use his power to change the stones to bread as the devil suggested. Jesus waited on God to provide for his needs, and he didn't take matters into his own hands. We also may be tempted to satisfy a perfectly normal desire in a wrong way or at the wrong time. If we indulge in sex before marriage or if we steal to get food, we are trying to satisfy God-given desires in wrong ways. Remember, many of our desires are normal and good, but God wants us to satisfy them in the right way and at the right time.

The devil tried to get Jesus to doubt his Father's love, protection, and provision. Jesus was able to resist all of the devil's temptations because he not only knew Scripture but also obeyed it. Ephesians 6:17 says that God's Word is a sword to use in spiritual combat. Knowing Bible verses is an important step in helping us resist the devil's attacks, but we must also obey what the Bible teaches. Satan knew Scripture, too, but he purposely misquoted it, disregarded its real meaning, and had no intention of obeying it. Continuing to study and know what the Bible says and what it really means helps us follow God's desires rather than the devil's.

⁵ Then the devil took him to the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple ⁶ and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written,

"He will command his angels concerning you,"

and

***“On their hands they will bear you up,
lest you strike your foot against a stone.”***

The devil urged Jesus to claim his full power immediately rather than in the transforming work he would do on the cross. The Temple was the religious center of the Jewish nation and the place where the people expected the Messiah to arrive (Malachi 3:1). Herod the Great had renovated the Temple in hopes of gaining the Jews' confidence. The Temple was the tallest building in the area, and this highest point was probably the corner wall that jutted out of the hillside, overlooking the valley below. From this spot, Jesus could see all of Jerusalem behind him and the country for miles in front of him.

The devil used Scripture to try to convince Jesus to sin! Sometimes friends or associates will present attractive and convincing reasons why you should try something you know is wrong. They may even find Bible verses that seem to support their viewpoint. Study the Bible carefully, learn the broader contexts of specific verses, and hang on every word so that you understand God's principles for living and what he wants for your life. By understanding what the whole Bible says, you will be able to recognize errors of interpretation when people take verses out of context and twist them to say what they want them to say.

⁷ Jesus said to him, “Again it is written, ‘You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.’”

We should not use God as our magician in the sky or on-call service provider, ready to perform on request. In response to Satan's temptations, Jesus said not to put God to the test (Deuteronomy 6:16). You may want to ask God to do something to prove his existence or his love for you, but Jesus once taught through a parable that people who don't believe what is written in the Bible wouldn't believe even if someone were to come back from the dead to warn them (Luke 16:31)! God wants us to live by faith in Jesus, not by supernatural power moves. Don't try to manipulate God by asking for signs. Trust in his goodness, not just in what he can do for you.

⁸ Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. ⁹ And he said to him, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.”

Did the devil have the power to give Jesus the kingdoms of the world? Didn't God, the creator of the world, have control over these nations? The devil was exaggerating his implied power, or he may have based his offer on his temporary control and free rein over the earth because of humanity's sinfulness (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11; 2 Corinthians 4:4; 1 John 5:19; Revelation 12:9-17). He tempted Jesus to take over the whole world as a political ruler right then, without carrying out his plan to save the world from sin by dying on the cross for us. For all Jerusalem to see Jesus gliding down with angels all around him would have been spectacular. And to do so would have seemed to fulfill what the prophets predicted and what the people wanted. But Jesus knew this was not God's plan. It could never be God's plan for Jesus to fulfill a prophecy at Satan's bidding. Satan was tempting Jesus to take over his earthly kingdom in an act of power instead of going humbly to the cross for us.

¹⁰ Then Jesus said to him, “Be gone, Satan! For it is written,

***“You shall worship the Lord your God
and him only shall you serve.”***

The devil offered the whole world to Jesus if Jesus would only kneel down and worship him. Today, the devil offers us the world by trying to entice us with pleasure, possessions, and power. We can resist temptations the same way Jesus did. If you find yourself craving something that the world offers, quote the words Jesus spoke to the devil: “You must worship the LORD your God and serve only him.” Jesus’ authority over Satan was fully established, and Satan left. (See 10:1, 8 for more on Jesus’ authority over Satan.)

11 Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and were ministering to him.

This time of testing showed that Jesus really was the Son of God, able to overcome the devil and his temptations. A person has not shown true obedience if he or she has never had an opportunity to disobey. We read in Deuteronomy 8:2 that God led Israel into the wilderness to humble and test his people. God wanted to see whether they would really obey him. We, too, will be tested. Because we know that testing will come, we should be alert and ready for it. Remember, your convictions are only strong if they hold up under pressure!

This temptation by the devil shows us that Jesus was human, and it gave Jesus the opportunity to reaffirm God’s plan for his ministry. It also gives us an important example to follow when we are tempted. Jesus’ temptation was an important demonstration of his sinlessness. He would face temptation and not give in.

Temptation may take us by surprise and may even make us feel ashamed, but remember that temptation itself is not sin and that God never tempts us (James 1:13-15). Sin begins when we give in to a temptation and disobey God. Remembering this will help us turn to God and resist temptation.

Jesus wasn’t tempted inside the Temple or at his baptism but in the wilderness, where he was tired, alone, and hungry, and therefore most vulnerable. The devil often tempts us when we are vulnerable—when we are under physical or emotional stress (for example, when we are lonely, weary, confused by big decisions, or faced with uncertainty). But he also likes to tempt us through our strengths, where we are most susceptible to pride (see the note on Luke 4:3-13). We must guard at all times against his attacks.

The devil’s temptations focused on three crucial areas: (1) physical needs and desires, (2) possessions and their accompanying power, and (3) pride (see 1 John 2:15-16 for a similar list). But Jesus did not give in. Hebrews 4:15 says that Jesus “faced all of the same testings we do, yet he did not sin.” He knows firsthand what we are experiencing, and he will help us in our struggles (Hebrews 2:14-18). When you are tempted, turn to him for strength.

Angels, like these who waited on Jesus, have a significant role as God’s messengers. These spiritual beings were involved in Jesus’ life on earth by (1) announcing Jesus’ birth to Mary, (2) reassuring Joseph, (3) naming Jesus, (4) announcing Jesus’ birth to the shepherds, (5) protecting Jesus by sending his family to Egypt, and (6) ministering to Jesus in Gethsemane. (For more on angels, see the note on 1:20.)

Jesus Begins His Ministry

¹² Now when he heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew into Galilee. ¹³ And leaving Nazareth he went and lived in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali,

Jesus moved from Nazareth, his hometown, to Capernaum, on the Sea of Galilee, about 20 miles farther north. Capernaum became Jesus' home base during his ministry in Galilee. Jesus probably moved (1) to get away from the intense opposition in Nazareth, (2) to be in the area where he would call most of his 12 disciples, (3) to have an impact on a greater number of people (Capernaum was a busy city, and Jesus' message could spread more quickly from there), and (4) to utilize extra resources and support for his ministry.

Jesus' move fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah 9:1-2, which states that the Messiah would be a light to the land of Zebulun and Naphtali, the region of Galilee where Capernaum was located. Zebulun and Naphtali were two of the original 12 tribes of Israel.

¹⁴ so that what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:

***¹⁵ “The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali,
the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—***

***¹⁶ the people dwelling in darkness
have seen a great light,
and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death,
on them a light has dawned.”***

By quoting from the book of Isaiah, Matthew continued to tie Jesus' ministry to the Old Testament. This was helpful for his Jewish readers, who were familiar with these Scriptures. For us, it shows the unity of God's purposes as he works with his people throughout all ages.

¹⁷ From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

The Kingdom of Heaven has the same meaning as the phrase Kingdom of God in Mark and Luke. Matthew uses heaven and not God because the Jews, out of their intense reverence and respect, did not speak God's name. The Kingdom of Heaven is near—it will live in the heart of every person who comes to believe in Jesus (Luke 17:21). (See the note on Matthew 3:2 for more on the Kingdom of Heaven.)

Jesus started his ministry with the same message people had heard from John the Baptist: “Repent of your sins.” The message is the same today as when Jesus and John gave it. Becoming a follower of Christ means turning away from our self-centeredness and from having control and turning our lives over to Jesus' direction and control.

Jesus Calls the First Disciples

¹⁸ While walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon (who is called Peter) and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen.

The Sea of Galilee is really a large lake. About 30 fishing towns surrounded it in Jesus' day, and Capernaum was the largest. Jesus lived in a beautiful area with a wonderful climate. The area had abundant fish and farm produce.

¹⁹ And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." ²⁰ Immediately they left their nets and followed him.

These men already knew Jesus. He had talked to Peter and Andrew previously (John 1:35-42) and had been preaching in the area. When Jesus called them, they knew what kind of man he was and were willing to follow him. Jesus told Peter and Andrew to leave their fishing business and begin fishing "for people," helping others find God. Jesus was calling them away from their productive trade to be productive spiritually. We, too, need to encourage people to follow Jesus. If we show his love and share the Good News with others, we will be able to draw those around us to him like fishermen who pull fish into their boats with nets.

²¹ And going on from there he saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets, and he called them. ²² Immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.

James and his brother, John, along with Peter and Andrew, were the first disciples that Jesus called to work with him. Jesus' call motivated these men to get up and leave their jobs—immediately. They didn't make excuses about why it wasn't a good time. They left at once and followed. Jesus calls each of us to follow him, though he doesn't call everyone to quit a job to serve him. This was a special call for these disciples. The apostle Paul said that we should continue to live in whatever situation the Lord has placed us (1 Corinthians 7:17). When Jesus calls us to serve him, we must be like the disciples and do what he tells us at once, being willing to leave everything else behind if this is what it takes to follow him.

Jesus Ministers to Great Crowds

²³ And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people.

Jesus was teaching, preaching, and healing. These were the three main aspects of his ministry. Teaching shows Jesus' concern for communicating who God is; preaching shows his concern for motivating people to act on this knowledge by making a commitment to God; and healing shows his concern for wholeness. Jesus' miracles of healing authenticated his teaching and preaching, proving that he truly was from God.

Jesus soon developed a powerful preaching ministry and often spoke in the synagogues. Most towns that had ten or more Jewish families had a synagogue. The building served as a religious gathering place on the Sabbath and as a school during the week. The leader of the synagogue was not a preacher as much as an administrator. His job was to find and invite rabbis to teach and preach. It was customary to invite visiting rabbis like Jesus to speak.

²⁴ So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought him all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, those oppressed by demons, those having seizures, and paralytics, and he healed them.

Jesus preached the gospel—the Good News—to everyone who wanted to hear it. The Good News is that the Messiah has come to usher in the Kingdom of Heaven, that God is with us, and that he cares for us and wants to rescue us from the deadly consequences of sin. Jesus can heal us, not just of physical sickness, but of spiritual sickness as well. No sin or problem is too great or too small for him to handle. Jesus' words were good news because they offered freedom, hope, peace of heart, and eternal life with God.

²⁵ And great crowds followed him from Galilee and the Decapolis, and from Jerusalem and Judea, and from beyond the Jordan.

The Ten Towns was a league of ten Gentile cities east of the Sea of Galilee, joined together for better trade and mutual defense. The word about Jesus was out, and Jews and Gentiles were coming long distances to hear him.