

The Temptation of Jesus in the Desert

Matthew 4:1-11



[Slide 1]

The Temptation of Jesus

- ¹ Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil.
- ² After fasting for forty days and forty nights, he was hungry.
- ³ The tempter came to him and said, If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.
- ⁴ Jesus answered, It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'
- ⁵ Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple.
- ⁶ If you are the Son of God, he said, throw yourself down. For it is written: 'He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'
- ⁷ Jesus answered him, It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'
- ⁸ Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour.
- ⁹ All this I will give you, he said, if you will bow down and worship me.
- ¹⁰ Jesus said to him, Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'
- ¹¹ Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.

Themes:

Introduction:

In a very real way the temptation of Jesus in the desert gives us a fascinating insight into the nature of Jesus - fully God and fully man. In verse 2 we see Jesus' humanity highlighted with the statement: "After fasting for forty days and forty nights, he was hungry."

However, notice he was not hungry during the 40 days but AFTER 40 days. I would have been hungry after just 1 day!

Context:

The temptation of Jesus in the desert is found in the Synoptic Gospels - Matthew, Mark, and Luke. This event comes just after Jesus' baptism in the river Jordan by John (where Jesus is proclaimed by a voice from Heaven to be the Son of God) and prior to the beginning of his public ministry.

The Desert:

[Slide 2]

Tradition has placed the scene of Christ's temptation in that part of the wilderness of Judea which lies between Jerusalem and the Dead Sea, and particularly in the mountain area called Quarantania.

What does the desert mean to us?

Negative:

- Barren
- Hardship
- Hunger
- Thirst

Positive:

- Peaceful
- Quiet
- Contemplative
- Close to God
- Wonders of nature

The Number 40:

[Slide 3]

Moses and Elijah each fasted for the same length of time – 40 days. It is of note that it is also Moses and Elijah who appear with Jesus towards the end of his ministry at the Transfiguration.

The number 40 appears in the Scriptures of often. Here are some examples:

1. Noah and the Ark

- a. God sent rain on the earth for forty days and forty nights, to wipe from the face of the earth every living creature he had made. God wiped out all creatures on earth because he was disappointed. Noah, his family, and the animals were saved on the ark.
- b. Forty days & nights was a period of renewal.
- c. Genesis 7:4

2. Israel's (Jacob's) Death

- a. Then Joseph directed the physicians in his service to embalm his father Israel. So the physicians embalmed him, taking a full forty days, for that was the time required for embalming.
- b. Forty days was a period of embalming.
- c. Genesis 50:2-3

3. Moses Raised by the Egyptians (first one-third of his life)

- a. "When Moses was forty years old, he decided to visit his fellow Israelites." After seeing an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, he kills the Egyptian. The next day he ran away to Midian.
- b. Forty years was a period of learning (leadership).
- c. Exodus 2 & Acts 7:23.

4. Moses Lives with Midianites (second one-third of his life)

- a. For forty years Moses lives as a shepherd with a family of Midianites, marries, and comes to know God. At the end of the forty years, God calls Moses, through the burning bush, to go and lead the people out of bondage in Egypt.
- b. Forty years was a period of learning to know God, and spiritual growth.
- c. Exodus 2-7. Exodus 7:7.

5. Moses Leads the Israelites in the Wilderness (last one-third of his life)

- a. For forty years Moses leads the Israelites in the wilderness. God teaches them and provides them with food and water. Moses leads them to the Jordan river, but does not cross into the promised land.
- b. Forty years was a period of learning to be a nation of God.
- c. Exodus. Exodus 16:35.

6. Moses on the Mountain 40 Days to Get the 10 Commandments
 - a. “So he was there with the Lord [on the mountain] forty days and forty nights; he neither ate bread nor drank water. And He wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments.”
 - b. Forty days was a period of receiving.
 - c. Exodus 34:28

7. 40 Lashes
 - a. One of the laws God gave the people through Moses was that when a person was being judged and they were guilty they “must not give him more than forty lashes. If he is flogged more than that, your brother will be degraded in your eyes.”
 - b. Forty lashes was a period of pain and punishment.
 - c. Deuteronomy 25:3.

8. Spies in Canaan
 - a. Moses sent spies to explore the land of Canaan to see if they could take it over. The Israelites waited on the other side (east) of the Jordan River. At the end of forty days the spies returned from exploring the land to make their report.
 - b. Forty days was a period of exploring.
 - c. Numbers 13:25.

9. Israelites Lose to Philistines
 - a. After entering Canaan, the Promised Land, and battling the inhabitants and taking over most of the land... “the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord so the Lord delivered them into the hands of the Philistines for 40 years.”
 - b. Forty years was a period of punishment.
 - c. Judges 13:1.

10. Eli Judges Israel
 - a. Eli, a righteous man, judged Israel for forty years. (Samuel lived with and learned under Eli. Samuel selected David as King.)
 - b. Forty years was a period of leadership.
 - c. 1 Samuel 4:18.

11. Goliath Threatens Israelites
 - a. Goliath, the giant Philistine, threatens the Israelites for forty days. Then David, as a boy, slays Goliath with a sling and stones.
 - b. Forty days was a period of intimidation.
 - c. 1 Samuel 17:16.

12. First King: Saul is the first King of Israel
 - a. Saul united Israel as their first King, following the period of the Judges.
 - b. Forty years was a period of uniting.
 - c. Acts 13:21, 1 Samuel.

13. Second King: David Reigns

- a. David reigned as Israel's second King for 40 years. Israel grew and prospered under David's leadership.
- b. Forty years was a period of greatness and power.
- c. 2 Samuel 5:4.

14. Third King: Solomon Reigns

- a. Solomon, David's son, reigned as Israel's third King for 40 years. Israel continued to grow and prosper under Solomon's leadership.
- b. Forty years was a period of greatness and building up.
- c. 1 Kings 11:42.

15. Elijah in the Wilderness

- a. Elijah, the prophet, took a 40 day journey to the mount of Horeb. There, God taught him that God was not in the fire, or earthquake, or wind, but a "still small voice" that was with Elijah.
- b. Forty days was a period of learning about the nature of God.
- c. 1 Kings 19:8.

16. Jonah at Niveveh

- a. Jonah entered the city and cried out, "In forty days Nineveh will be destroyed." The city had forty days to repent and mend their wicked ways, or be destroyed." They did repent.
- b. Forty days was a period of warning.
- c. Jonah 3:4.

17. Jesus Fasts in the Desert

- a. Following his baptism, and prior to his formal ministry, Jesus spends 40 days and nights in the wilderness, fasting. During this time, the devil comes and tempts Jesus.
- b. Forty days was a period of preparation for Jesus' ministry.
- c. Matthew 4:1-3.

18. Jesus Appears to his Disciples

- a. "For 40 days after his death Jesus appeared to his disciples many times in ways that proved beyond a doubt that he was alive." The tomb was empty. The disciples could see and touch the holes in his hands. Then he ascended to Heaven.
- b. Forty days was a period of believing and verifying the resurrection.
- c. Acts 1:3.

19. Paul Beaten

- a. "From the Jews five times I [the apostle Paul] received forty stripes minus one." Paul preached the gospel of Jesus Christ, but the Jews were against his teachings. (39 were given to ensure that the limit of 40 was not exceeded.) Before knowing Christ Paul (then "Saul") persecuted Christians.
- b. Forty lashes was a period of pain and punishment.
- c. 2 Corinthians 11:24.

The Devil:

(Latin Diábolus, Diaboli, from Greek Διάβολος Diábolos, meaning slanderer)

Mention is made of the Devil in many passages of the Old and New Testaments.

The authoritative teaching of the Church on this topic is set forth in the decrees of the Fourth Lateran Council (1215).

The Devil and the other demons are part of God's angelic creation. God created them in a state of innocence. They became evil by their own act. Their natural powers do not differ from those of the angels who remained faithful. Like the other angels, they are pure spiritual beings without any body.

For an account of the fall of the angels we must turn to the last book of the Bible. In the Book of Revelation the picture of the past is blended with prophecies of what shall be in the future:

Revelation 12:7-9:

And there was war in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him.

This was before the sin of our first parents, for as we know the sin of our first parents is ascribed to the instigation of the Devil.

Again, it was the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) that declared both the fact that the angels were created and that men were created after them. The First Vatican Council (1869 – 1870) in the document “*Dei Filius*” repeated this decree.

The Devil chooses his moments well. He comes to us often when we are weak or vulnerable physically, mentally, or spiritually, as Jesus was at this point.

The Devil's values and priorities (i.e. self always comes first, the strongest dominates the weakest), becomes very clear from what the Devil says when tempting Jesus.

The Devil is the epitome of.....

The Seven Cardinal / Capital / Deadly Sins:

Mnemonic = **PEG'S LAW**

Pride (Latin, superbia) [vanity, narcissism] –

A desire to be important or attractive to others, failing to give credit due others, or excessive love of self (especially holding self out of proper position toward God). Associated with the horse and the colour violet.

Envy (Latin, invidia) [jealousy, malice] -

Grieving spite and resentment of material objects, accomplishments, or character traits of others, or wishing others to fail or come to harm. Envy is the root of theft and self-loathing. Associated with the dog and the colour green.

Gluttony (Latin, gula) [waste, overindulgence] -

Thoughtless waste of everything, overindulgence, misplaced sensuality, uncleanliness, and maliciously depriving others. Marked by refusal to share and unreasonable consumption of more than is necessary, especially food or water. Substance abuse or binge drinking. Associated with pigs and the colour orange.

Sloth (Latin, acedia) [apathy, indifference] -

Apathy, idleness, and wastefulness of time. Laziness is particularly condemned because others must work harder to make up for it. Cowardice or irresponsibility. Abandonment, especially of God. Sloth is a state of equilibrium: one does not produce much, one does not consume much. Associated with goats and the colour light blue.

Lust (Latin, luxuria) [fornication, perversion] -

Depraved thought, unwholesome morality, desire for adrenaline, or need to be accepted or recognized by others. Obsessive, unlawful, or unnatural sexual desire, such as desiring sex with a person outside marriage or engaging in unnatural sexual appetites. Lust prevents clarity of thought and rational behaviour. Associated with the cow and the colour blue.

Avarice (Latin, avaritia) [treachery, greed] -

An uncontrollable, strong desire to gain, especially in money or power. Disloyalty, deliberate betrayal, or treason, especially for personal gain or when compensated. Scavenging and hoarding of materials or objects. Inability to let go of the past. Associated with the frog and the colour yellow.

Wrath (Latin, ira) [anger, hatred] -

Inappropriate (unrighteous) feelings of hatred and anger. Denial of the truth to others or self. Impatience or revenge outside of justice. Wishing to do evil or harm to others. Self-righteousness. Wrath is the root of murder and assault. Associated with the bear and the colour red.

Jesus counters the Devil's taunts on each occasion. His qualities here, as elsewhere, can be summed up by.....

The Seven Holy Virtues:

Humility (Latin, humilitas) [modesty, opposes Pride] -
Modest behaviour, selflessness, and the giving of respect.

Charity (Latin, humanitas) [satisfaction, opposes Envy] -
Charity, compassion, friendship, and sympathy without prejudice.

Moderation (Latin, frenum) [self-control, opposes Gluttony] -
Constant mindfulness of others and one's surroundings; practicing self-control, abstinence, and moderation.

Zeal (Latin, industria) [ethics, opposes Sloth] -
A zealous and careful nature in one's actions and work. Decisive work ethic.

Chastity (Latin, virtus) [courage, opposes Lust] -
Courage and boldness. Embracing of moral wholesomeness and achieving purity of thought through education and betterment.

Generosity (Latin, liberalis) [will, opposes Avarice] -
Willingness to give. A nobility of thought or actions.

Meekness (Latin, patientia) [peace, opposes Wrath] -
Forbearance and endurance through moderation.

Point of Interest:

Advocatus Diaboli ("Advocate of the Devil" or "Devil's Advocate").

A popular title given to one of the most important officers of the Sacred Congregation of Rites, established in 1587, by Sixtus V, to deal juridically with processes of beatification and canonization. His official title is Promoter of the Faith (Promotor Fidei). His duty requires him to prepare in writing all possible arguments, even at times seemingly slight, against the raising of any one to the honours of the altar. The interest and honour of the Church are concerned in preventing any one from receiving those honours whose death is not juridically proved to have been "precious in the sight of God".

Commentary:

With these themes in mind, let us examine this passage again in a little more detail:

The First Temptation [Appetite] - verses 1-4:

[Slide 5]

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

² After fasting for forty days and forty nights, he was hungry.

³ The tempter came to him and said, If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.

⁴ Jesus answered, It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'

The first temptation centres around self-fulfilment; using powers for self; appeasing your own appetite.

In the first scenario, Satan challenged Jesus with his baptismal title:

Matthew 3:17:

And a voice came from the heavens, saying, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."

If Jesus was truly God's Son, Satan declared, then he could provide food for himself and all the people. He could become the Saviour of material needs. But, Jesus responded with Scripture (Deuteronomy 8:3). Salvation can not be found in material goods (food, clothing, shelter); it can only be found in a faith relationship with God. [4:3-4] The Messiah would not provide a social "safety net."

It would not be right for Jesus to use his powers for himself. In the Gospels Jesus only uses them for the good of others. He never uses his powers to impress. In fact, Jesus is very conscious of this and many times he urges his disciples and those he heals / cures, etc to be discreet.

Matthew 8:1-4:

¹When he came down from the mountainside, large crowds followed him. ²A man with leprosy came and knelt before him and said, "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean."

³Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" Immediately he was cured of his leprosy. ⁴Then Jesus said to him, "See that you don't tell anyone. But go, show yourself to the priest and offer the gift Moses commanded, as a testimony to them."

The same idea should lie behind those in public office. The powers with which they have been bestowed should always be used for the good of others, and never for the betterment of self.

Jesus was not adverse to feeding people and quenching thirst, cf. Matt 14:15-21 – The Feeding of the 5000 and John 2:1-12 – The Wedding of Cana.

In all his rebuffs to Satan Jesus quotes from the Book of Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy is the fifth book of the Pentateuch, that is the first five books of the Old Testament. Deuteronomy consists primarily of a series of speeches by Moses on the plains of Moab, opposite Jericho, exhorting Israel to obey God and giving further instruction on the laws. At the end of the book (Deuteronomy 34) Moses is allowed to see the Promised Land from a mountain, but dies and is buried and mourned by the Israelites for thirty days before they begin the conquest of Canaan.

[The Second Temptation \[Vain Glory\] – verses 5-7:](#)

[Slide 6]

⁵ *Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple.*

⁶ *If you are the Son of God, he said, throw yourself down. For it is written: 'He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'*

⁷ *Jesus answered him, It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'*

The second temptation centres around self-power; using powers to convince others to follow; vain glory.

The only portion of the temple that seems to answer to the context here was the lofty porch overhanging the Kedron valley. The Jewish historian Josephus says that from the roof to the valley below at this point was 300 feet.

"Alright," the devil seemed to say, "prove your Father is worthy of trust. Throw yourself down from the highest point of the Temple. **If** you are truly God's Son, your Father should save you"

Satan not only challenged Jesus' title, he tested the trust relationship the title implied between Father and Son. Using the same mode of arguing Jesus employed in the first temptation, Satan even quotes Scripture to make his point (Psalm 91:11-12).

Jesus would prove his trust of the Father in public, not in an extraordinary vain glorious act, which might cause those who saw it to believe in him all for the wrong reasons.

Jesus' straightforward reply demonstrates his supreme confidence in his relationship with his Father. He does not need to put his Father to the test.

Jesus easily saw through the Devil's ruse and using Deuteronomy 6:16 states an obvious fact.

It is of note that Satan actually misquotes Psalm 91:11-12:

'He will command his angels concerning you, to guard you wherever you go, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'

The promise in this Psalm actually applies to all men who walk in the way of the Lord.

A good lesson here is that Scripture quotes wrongly and out of context can be used for ill. This is something we have to guard against.

The Third Temptation [Ambition] – verses 8-10:

[Slide 7]

⁸ *Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour.*

⁹ *All this I will give you, he said, if you will bow down and worship me.*

¹⁰ *Jesus said to him, Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'*

Finally, Satan tempted Jesus on the top of a mountain, a symbol of close contact with God. This final temptation centres around self-advancement; world domination; ambition. It is interesting Satan regards the world as being his to give away.

The devil had the audacity to tempt Jesus in the presence of his Father not by pointing up (to God) but by pointing down (to the world). Even within the so close a proximity to God, Satan tried to usurp His place. "Worship me," the devil seemed to say, "and be the source of all worldly power. Be my son, not His."

In verse 10 Jesus calls the Devil by name: "Away from me, Satan!" There are echoes here of Jesus' rebuke to Peter when at the end of his ministry Jesus' tells his disciples he must suffer and die:

Matthew 16:23:

²³ *Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men."*

Again, Jesus rejects Satan's advance by quoting Scripture (Deuteronomy 6:13).

Satan Departs [Succour] – verses 11:

[Slide 8]

¹¹ *Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.*

An angel is a pure spirit created by God. As in the Psalm quoted by Satan:

Psalm 91:11-12:

'He will command his angels concerning you, to guard you wherever you go, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'

The doctrine of angels is part of the Church's tradition. The role of the guardian angel is both to guide us to good thoughts, works and words, and to preserve us from evil. Since the 17th century the Church has celebrated a feast honouring them in October throughout the Universal Church. Since the last calendar revision this feast falls on October 2nd.

Conclusion:

Sympathy and Empathy:

So we have entered into the Forty Days of Lent. We enter the desert with Jesus, not only knowing we will be tested, but also assured he has gone before us, he walks with us, and he has guaranteed the outcome. At the end of Lent comes Resurrection and with it victory over evil!

Final Word:

The first assault was made through the door of appetite, "the lust of the flesh;" the second through vain glory, "the lust of the eyes;" the third through ambition, "the pride of life." Satan tried to tempt Jesus to turn away from the pathway of self-denial and suffering marked out for him. All had been met by the shield of faith, and the tempter beaten back by the word of the Spirit.

If anybody has any doubts that Jesus is the Son of God, this passage should dispel their reservations. It is clear the Devil knows exactly who Jesus is. He does not even attempt to argue with Jesus as to whether he is the Son of God or not!

In the first temptation the Devil's approach is to unsuccessfully try and get Jesus to doubt himself.

In the second temptation he then unsuccessfully tries to introduce a wedge, an element of doubt, between Jesus and his father.

Then finally the Devil, almost laughably, tries to suggest he is more powerful than both of them.

By this time Jesus has had enough and dismisses the Devil from his sight.

By the very fact the Devil asks Jesus to submit to him, therein lies an admission by him that he knows full well who Jesus is.

The Devil knows Jesus can perform miracles. Rather, what he wants to do is to corrupt Jesus, for him to use his powers for himself, and for his own purposes, rather than for others.

Prayer to our Guardian Angel and Blessing:

Angel of God
My guardian dear
To Whom His love
Commits me here
Ever this day
Be at my side
To light and guard
To rule and guide. Amen

[Slide 9]

