

## **Trusting in the Father's Words**

### **Matthew 4:1-11**

#### **Introduction**

This is a glorious passage that describes the beginning of Jesus' earthly ministry. After His baptism and the declaration of the Father's love over Him (Matt. 3:13-17), the Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness to do battle with the devil. Here we have an example of how to deal with temptation. Jesus again and again turns to Scripture to fight the tempter. However, while it is true that we learn much about fighting temptation in this passage, this is not Matthew's point. Jesus here is a new Israel, a new Adam, the true Son of God. Israel was sent into the wilderness for forty years because they did not believe the words of Yahweh, that He would give them the land. Jesus enters into the wilderness to do what Israel failed to do, foreshadowing His greater victories to come.

#### **Does God Tempt?**

First, it is worth considering the question, does God tempt? On the one hand, He does not because there is no evil in Him (James 1:13). But we are sinners living in a world full of sin, and so wherever we go (directed by God – Prov. 20:24) there are temptations. Sometimes, God does lead us into temptation to test, prove, try, and grow our faith. Jesus Himself was led by the Spirit into the wilderness so that He could be tempted by the devil. Shortly after this encounter with the devil, Jesus teaches us to pray, "do not lead us into temptation." This does not imply, though, that we never encounter temptation. Rather, we pray that He does not lead us into temptation and leave us there: "but deliver us from the evil one." So, God does not tempt, in that He does not put evil into our hearts. Yet, He does lead us in such a way that our faith is often tested and refined (Gen. 22, Job 23:10, 1 Pet. 1:6-9).

#### **First Temptation: Prove Yourself**

Matthew notes that Jesus is hungry after His forty day and forty night fast. And it is as He is hungry that the devil comes to Him with the first temptation recorded here. The tempter asks, "If You are the Son of God..." The temptation is two pronged. Satan begins by questioning the words of God, as he has done since the beginning. Then, he tempts Jesus to prove the words of God by doing a simple miracle, thereby justifying the Father's words and saving Himself. Jesus responds by saying, "It is written...", quoting from Deut. 8:3. By quoting from the Scriptures, Jesus shows His reliance and trust in the Father's words. Jesus knows the context of Deut. 8. Moses is preaching to the people after they have finished their forty-year excursion in the wilderness. They are about to go into the promised land. And Moses emphasizes to them that God is the sustainer of life, the One on whom we depend (Deut. 8:1-9). God said that Jesus was His Son, and God chastens and disciplines His sons by testing and proving them (Deut. 8:2, 5; Heb. 12:7). Being hungry in the wilderness does not cause Jesus to doubt God's words at all. Instead of doubting and giving in like Adam and Eve (Gen. 3), instead of complaining about God's provision like Israel (e.g., Num. 11, 21:4-9), Jesus trusted the Father's words that He was His beloved Son.

#### **Second Temptation: Let God Prove Himself**

Satan tries another angle, again saying, "If You are the Son of God..." This time, instead of tempting Jesus to prove His divine Sonship, the devil tempts Jesus to force God's hand, to make the Father prove His love and care for His Son. Satan quotes from Psalm 91:11-12, but he is very selective in his choice. Psalm 91 is about God as the refuge and deliverer of

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those who dwell with Him, who walk in His ways, who love Him, and thus, obey Him. But Satan picks out and twists God's word in an attempt to turn the Son against the Father.

God is not a machine to be cycle-tested, or a man to be provoked to see what His reaction is. So Jesus again responds by boldly trusting in the words of God, saying, "It is written...", quoting from Deut. 6:16. This verse refers to the episode recorded in Ex. 17:1-7. Moses records that the Israelites tempted God by asking, "Is the Lord among us or not?" God had sent Moses, destroyed Egypt through the plagues while preserving Israel, opened the Red Sea, lead them by a pillar of cloud and a pillar of fire, and given them miracle bread from heaven in the desert. And Israel complained and asked if God was with them. In contrast, Jesus is the new Israel. When given the opportunity to tempt or test God, He instead turns back to God's words and rests in them. There is a way to test God faithfully (Mal. 3:10). There is a way to cry out to God, asking where He is, faithfully (Ps. 22, Jesus on the cross). The key is obedience. We don't test God by seeing how far He will go, by grasping for assurance like that. We test God by walking in obedience, looking expectantly for Him to fulfill His promises. In other words, we test Him rightly by trusting His words.

### **Third Temptation: Take What Is Yours**

Satan then takes Jesus to a high mountain and displays the kingdoms of the world to Him with their glory. He offers them all to Jesus if He bows down and worships the devil. The Father had promised Him the nations (Ps. 2:7-8). Yet, Jesus knew He had a hard road ahead of Him. Here was an opportunity to receive authority over all the earth without having to undergo the pain, shame, weight, and anguish of the cross. After all, Satan was in some way the ruler of the world (e.g., John 12:30, 14:30). Why not take the kingdoms this way? Satan is again tempting Jesus to question both the declaration of the Father ("This is My beloved Son") and His promises to His Son. Did God really say...? If you are the Son, why would You have to die to get these kingdoms? What kind of a Father gives gifts like that? He's holding back from You, just like He did with Adam and Eve. But Jesus is the new Adam, and He trusts in His Father. Jesus' response is emphatic: Away with you! A third time, He turns to God's words to fight the temptations of the devil, appealing to Deut. 6:13. To worship Satan would not result in His receiving the kingdoms. Quite the opposite. Instead, Jesus trusts the promise of the Father. God is the true Ruler, the One who can truly bestow all authority and power (Ps. 24:1-2, Dan. 2:21). At this, the devil leaves (James 4:7).

### **Conclusion**

The Spirit leads Jesus into the wilderness. If you have been saved and baptized, if you have been given new life, then God has declared to you that you are His beloved son or daughter (Rom. 8:12-18). You have been adopted and made heirs with Christ. The Spirit leads you too, and He will lead you into wildernesses of various kinds. What wilderness do you find yourself in? Jesus has gone before you (Heb. 2:18, 4:15). Through Jesus' perfect trust in the Father, He obtained victory over the devil in the wilderness and ultimately over the devil and death and all principalities and powers in His death, resurrection, and ascension. He did this so that you might be sons and daughters with Him, so that you might walk through the wilderness, that you might take up your cross, and obtain the victory through Him (1 Cor. 15:57).