

A. The Place.

From the Jordan (3:13), Jesus is led by the Spirit into the Judean wilderness (erēmos, as in 3:1) near (in the area northwest of) the Dead Sea. The language is again reminiscent of the Exodus. Jesus' 40 days and nights of fasting recall the Israelites' 40 years of wandering in the wilderness (cf. the reference to the 40 years in Deut 8:2, immediately before the v. quoted in Mt 4:4), and also Moses' fasting on Sinai when receiving the tablets - both the first time (Deut 9:9) and the second (Deut 9:18; Ex 34:28).

B. The Purpose.

Jesus is "to be tempted [peirazō] by [hypo, not dia] the devil" (4:1b) - who is called "the tempter" (ho peirazōn) in v. 3. But God has a purpose too, for Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness (cf. Gen 22:1, LXX, where peirazō is used of God's testing of Abraham.) The common purpose is to test Jesus' resolve to be God's servant-king (3:17). But God seeks to strengthen the resolve by testing, and Satan to weaken or destroy it.

C. The Reality of the Tests.

1. Temptation and sin. Heb 4:15 says that Jesus "has been tempted [peirazō] in every way, just as we are - yet was without sin." (Some suggest that the three temptations correspond to the three "ways" or "respects" in which the world appeals to believers according to 1 Jn 2:15-16.) We might express the relation of Jesus to sin, in three ways: (i) He was able to sin. But there is no evidence that he did sin; on the contrary, Heb 4:15 states that he did not. How can we say that he was able to sin when we lack evidence that he did? (ii) He was not able to sin. But in this case, does not temptation become powerless and meaningless? The affirmation of Heb 4:15 that Jesus did not sin, is significant precisely because of the reality and the power of the temptations. (iii) He was able not to sin. By constant reliance upon the heavenly Father, and upon the
Spirit of power that has anointed him (3:16-17), Jesus steadfastly resists the temptations of the devil.

2. Fact and manner. We know that Jesus was tempted. But we do not know precisely how. How did the tempter come to him (visibly? in human form?) and speak to him (audibly?). Were the experiences of vv. 5 and 8 literal (was Jesus actually transported?) or visionary? With T. W. Manson, we should regard this passage "as spiritual experience of Jesus thrown into parabolic narrative form for the instruction of his disciples" (The Servant-Messiah, 55). Yet the mystery of how it happened, must not obscure the stark reality of what happened.

II. THE FIRST TEMPTATION. 4:3-4.

A. The Devil's Purpose. 4:3.

1. Concerning sonship. The devil does not cast doubt upon Jesus' sonship. He begins, "Since [ei] you are the Son of God ...." Satan capitalizes on this fact, and seeks to draw the Son away from filial obedience and willing submission to the Father, and into an independent exercise of his status and power. In Gundry's words, the devil tempts him "to rely on that sonship in self-serving ways that would lead him disobediently from the path of the cross" (55).

2. Concerning mission. Satan tempts Jesus to choose the material over the spiritual, to satisfy his physical cravings, and perhaps (by extension) to opt for a mission as social reformer preoccupied with meeting human beings' physical and material needs, as distinct from their spiritual need to be rightly related to God (cf. 1:21).

B. Jesus' Response. 4:4.

1. Concerning sonship. Jesus first applies the Scripture to himself: he is to live on the Word of God. He thus affirms his dependence on the Father (who has not, thus far, commanded him to break his fast, v. 2). He shows his reliance on God's Word by quoting the Scriptures, as he shall do in response to each temptation. Moreover, in each case he quotes from Deuteronomy, one of the books of the Pentateuch associated with Israel's wandering in the wilderness.

2. Concerning mission. His mission is primarily spiritual in character; it is vital that all men (not just himself) live by the Word of God. It is a matter of establishing priorities. Observe that Jesus does not say, "Man does not live by bread [or, has no need of bread]." The word "alone" is critical. To become a
social reformer principally concerned about one's material and physical needs is to rob human beings of that which they most desperately need - to receive God's Word (by which to learn what to believe and how to behave) and to be rightly related to him. Cf. 1:21; 28:19. Yet by the same token, God's Word summons his people to be attentive to their neighbors' material and social needs (cf. Amos and Isaiah, e.g.). For Jesus' sensitivity to man's physical and material needs, cf. the following chapters of Mt.

III. THE SECOND TEMPTATION. 4:5-7.

A. The Devil's Purpose. 4:5-6.

1. Concerning sonship. The temptation is to put God's promise (that of Ps 91:11-12) to the test. Again the reality of Jesus' sonship is not called into question; as before, the devil begins, "Since [eil]..." (v. 6a). Satan says in effect: Since you are God's son, the object of his special love (3:17), give that love opportunity to prove itself.

2. Concerning mission. "The highest point of the temple" is the pinnacle of the royal porch, 450 feet above the Kidron Valley. "Since the wilderness would have provided many precipices for private capitalization on divine providence, the selection of the Temple implies the public display of a messianic sign" (Gundry, 56). Again Satan suggests a shift in the basic direction of Jesus' mission. He tempts him to yield to the lure of the spectacular, to use the divine power at his disposal to gain popular acclaim - which would merge easily with the common notions about the coming Davidic king as a political revolutionary. Again Jesus is being urged to leave the path of the servant who endures suffering, and to become instead a political messiah who inflicts suffering on Israel's enemies.

B. Jesus' Response. 4:7.

1. Concerning sonship. "The Lord your God" is not Jesus but God the Father. The one who really trusts God (a trust especially strong in the beloved Son) does not need to put his word to the test. He already knows that word is true, because of the intimate relationship that he has with the One who speaks (Mt 11:25-27). God is trusted, so His word is trusted.

2. Concerning mission. By refusing to test God in the way Satan suggests, Jesus reaffirms his commitment to be a Servant-King, the path marked for him at the Jordan. That kind of ministry calls for claiming the very promise that Satan quotes. But everything depends on how the promise is used. "The
deliberate throwing of oneself from a high perch does not correspond to accidental stumbling over a stone on one's path (as in the psalm)” (Gundry, 57). It is one thing to trust God when someone pushes you out of a window; it is quite another to throw yourself out of one just to see whether the promise of Ps 91 is true (such an act would show that one did not really believe the promise). There are two ways to handle snakes: see Mk 16:18; Acts 28:3.

IV. THE THIRD TEMPTATION. 4:8-10.

A. The Devil's Purpose. 4:8-9.

1. Concerning sonship. The devil represents himself as a king with a vast domain ("all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor"). He claims to own them all, for he claims the power to give them away ("All this I will give you"). In this last temptation, the devil is quite audacious (a sign of his weakening under Jesus’ assault?): "All this I will give you, if you will bow down and worship [proskyneō] me" (v. 9). He asks that Jesus depart from total allegiance and complete submission to the Father, and divide his worship between God and Satan.

2. Concerning mission. Jesus has come to establish the Kingdom of God (3:2; 4:17), which means rule over "all the kingdoms of the world" (4:8). At the Jordan he has been given a clear idea of the personal costliness for achieving this goal. Satan thus offers Jesus a short cut, a way to achieve the end without the costly means.

B. Jesus' Response. 4:10.

1. Concerning sonship. Jesus recognizes that worship should not be divided between God and Satan (only God is worthy of worship, and among creatures Satan least of all), and indeed cannot (how could one's ultimate allegiance be divided between two objects? cf. 6:24). Jesus' undivided loyalty is given to his heavenly Father.

2. Concerning mission. Jesus' loyal service to God means carrying out his appointed mission - inaugurating the Kingdom of God. Doing this entails assaulting and overcoming the kingdom of Satan (Mt 12:22-29). Winning the kingdoms of the world requires that Jesus wrest them from Satan's grip. Quite apart from the sin of worshipping Satan, could "the father of lies" (Jn 8:44b) really be expected to keep the promise of 4:9a ("All this I will give you").
V. THE AFTERMATH. 4:11.

A. Jesus and Satan. 4:11a.

Jesus is shown to be Satan's sovereign. The devil departs in obedience to Jesus' command, "Away from me, Satan!" (v. 10). Jesus has not merely resisted Satan's threefold assault; he has counterattacked and conquered the tempter. Yet we must not imagine that Satan departs for good. The following chapters provide strong evidence that Satan mounts further attacks (cf. e.g. 12:22-29; 13:19; 16:23, a statement very close to, if not identical with, 4:10a), in anticipation of the final assault resulting in the crucifixion.

B. Jesus and the Father. 4:11b.

1. Provision from God. The verb (diakoneō) is used elsewhere of the serving of food (Acts 6:2; Mt 25:44; cf. 1 Kings 19:6-8, of an angel's providing Elijah with food and drink - in the strength of which he travels 40 days and 40 nights). Jesus had fasted 40 days and 40 nights, and had grown hungry (v. 2). Yet he refused to yield to Satan by commanding stones to become bread, and waited upon God. Now, through his angels, the Father meets the Son's physical needs.

2. Communion with God. The presence of angels "is a symbol of the restored communion between man and God" (Joachim Jeremias, New Testament Theology, vol. 1: the Proclamation of Jesus, 70). Jesus steadfastly resists Satan's attempts to weaken or sever the Son's bond with the Father. V. 11 shows that the Father too seeks actively (in response to the Son's obedience) to maintain this bond.


I. THE PLACE OF MINISTRY. 4:12-16.

A. From Judea to Galilee.

Jesus travels from the Judean wilderness (4:1) to Galilee. The verb anachōreō (v. 12b) can mean "return" (BAGD 2.a.; thus NIV), but here it is better translated "withdraw" (BAGD 2.b., "withdraw, retire, take refuge"; thus RSV). NB that Jesus departs in light of John's imprisonment (v. 12a). Judea is represented as hostile territory for God's servants, and Galilee as a haven (as was the case during Jesus' infancy, 2:22, where anachōreō is again used).
B. From Nazareth to Capernaum.

Once in Galilee, Jesus left Nazareth and "went and lived in Capernaum" (v. 13). Matthew tells us the reason: Capernaum is on the Sea of Galilee, Nazareth is not. This move is a piece of enacted fulfillment of prophecy - that of Isa 9:1-2. The whole region is "Galilee of the Gentiles" (v. 15b). But the prophecy speaks more precisely of "the way of the sea, along the Jordan." Accordingly, Jesus moves to Capernaum beside the sea, as a strong way of saying that he has come to save the Gentiles. Upon these benighted Gentiles the light has dawned (v. 16). Just what form that light shall take is indicated in the following verses of Isa 9, which speak of the coming King in whom the promises to David shall be realized (vv. 6-7). This prepares us for the declaration of Jesus in 4:17.

II. THE CALLING OF FOUR DISCIPLES. 4:18-22.

A. Disciples and Apostles.

Matthew first uses the word "disciple" (mathētēs) in 5:1, and frequently thereafter. At some point not recorded by Matthew, Jesus chooses 12 from among the larger circle of disciples and appoints them to be apostles (10:1-2). The calling of these four men is especially significant, because (1) all four are later numbered among the Twelve, (2) three of the four - Peter, James and John - come to enjoy a special closeness to Jesus within the circle of the Twelve (cf. 17:1; 26:37), and (3) Simon surnamed Peter figures prominently in the crucial episode at Caesarea Philippi (16:13-20).

B. The Lordship of Jesus.

In the case of both pairs of brothers, the initiative belongs to Jesus. They do not volunteer their services; he calls them. Moreover, as God's appointed king, he issues a sovereign command: "Come, follow me." He calls them into discipleship. The noun mathētēs ("disciple") is related to the verb manthanō ("to learn"). But while "learning" is integral to being a disciple of Jesus (cf. 11:29, where manthanō is used; and chs. 5-7), the most fundamental feature is that of following. Jesus calls first for a commitment to his person, which will in turn entail obedience to his teaching.

C. The Nature of Discipleship.

1. "Fishers of men" (4:19). Jesus obviously chooses this language because he is addressing fishermen (a term expressly used of Simon and Andrew,
v. 18b). Jesus says in effect, "You have been catching fish; henceforth you shall catch men instead." What makes this call intelligible is the preceding announcement of the dawning Kingdom of God (4:17). Some think the persons in question are to be "hooked" by the coming wrath (cf. 3:7; Jer 16:16). But the preaching is good news (4:23); men are being snatched instead out of darkness into light, and drawn out of death into life (4:16); cf. 13:47-50, where the righteous are likened to good fish. Cf. Knox Chamblin, Following Jesus according to the NT, 63-65.

2. Unquestioning obedience.

   a. The positive side. Corresponding to Jesus' simple, straightforward summons, "Follow me" (explicitly in 4:19, and implicitly in 4:21), the men's response in each case is immediately (eutheòs appears in 4:20 and 22) to do just that - follow him. The use in each case of the aorist of akolouthéō is noteworthy as expressive of the decisiveness of their action.

   b. The negative side. Simon and Andrew "left their nets" (v. 20); and James and John "left the boat and their father" (v. 22). The verb is very strong, aphièmi, describing not merely departure but abandonment. Such is the total commitment that Jesus calls for. Cf. 10:37.


   A. His Speaking.

"Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom" (v. 23a).

   1. Preaching and teaching. The two are distinguishable but inseparable. Jesus preaches, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near" (v. 17); he preaches the good news [euangelion] of the Kingdom (v. 23). He teaches those who have received that proclamation. Cf. 5:2, "he began to teach them [the disciples, i.e. those who have received the gospel]." Teaching gives understanding (see 13:1-23) and direction to members of the new community established around Jesus' person (cf. 28:20, "teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you").
2. The coming of the Kingdom of God. On the meaning of 4:17, see the comments on 3:2. With the beginning of Jesus' own ministry, the coming of the kingdom has drawn considerably nearer (cf. 12:28).

B. His Healing.

Mt 4:23b-24 lays great stress on this aspect of Jesus' ministry: note the wording of v. 23b, "healing every disease and sickness," and the various maladies listed in v. 24. With this summary of preaching/teaching and healing, cf. the structure of the following chapters: 5-7, (preaching and) teaching; 8-9, where nine specific acts of healing are recorded (+ the summary of 8:16-17).

C. The Breadth of His Outreach.

1. Geographical breadth. "Jesus went throughout Galilee" (v. 23a). "News about him spread all over Syria" (v. 24a), geographically north of Galilee and politically "a Roman province embracing all Palestine..., Galilee excepted" (Carson, 121). "Large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea the region across the Jordan followed him" (4:25).

2. Ethnic breadth. On either reading of "Syria," v. 24 shows that the good news about Jesus as herald of the kingdom and mighty healer, has spread beyond Jewish into Gentile territory (see the remarks on 4:15-16). "The Decapolis," v. 25, a region of ten cities southeast of the Sea of Galilee, "had a largely Gentile population" (Gundry, 65). And even synagogues (v. 23) provided a place to reach certain Gentiles.

SUGGESTED TEACHING OUTLINE

MAIN IDEA: The temptations in the wilderness tested Jesus for the ministry he was to undertake. Having passed the tests, he was ready to begin his ministry.

I. Final preparation for ministry: the temptation of Jesus (4:1-11)
   A. Introduction (4:1-2)
      1. The place
      2. The purpose
      3. The reality of the tests
   B. The Temptations (4:3-10)
      1. The first temptation: bread from stones (4:3-4)
      2. The second temptation: testing God (4:5-7)
3. The third temptation: kingdoms of the world (4:8-10)

C. The aftermath (4:11)
   1. Jesus is Satan’s sovereign (4:11a)
   2. Father confirms Jesus’ victory and readiness through provision and communion (4:11b)

II. The beginning of the Galilean ministry (4:12-25)
   A. The place (4:12-17)
      1. From Judea to Galilee (4:12)
      2. From Nazareth to Capernaum (4:13-17)
   B. The calling of four disciples (4:18-22)
      1. Disciples and apostles
      2. The lordship of Jesus (4:19,21)
      3. The nature of discipleship
   C. Summary of Jesus ministry (4:23-25)
      1. Speaking (4:23)
      2. Healing (4:24)
      3. Breadth of outreach (4:24-25)

SUGGESTED STUDY OUTLINE

MAIN IDEA: The temptations in the wilderness tested Jesus for the ministry he was to undertake. Having passed the tests, he was ready to begin his ministry.

I. Final preparation for ministry: the temptation of Jesus (4:1-11)
   A. Introduction (4:1-2)
      1. The place
      2. The purpose
      3. The reality of the tests
   B. The Temptations (4:3-10)
      1. The first temptation: bread from stones (4:3-4)
         a. The devil’s purpose (4:3)
            i. Sonship: to get Jesus to exercise independent authority
            ii. Mission: to get Jesus to focus on the material rather than on the spiritual
         b. Jesus’ response (4:4)
            i. Sonship: affirms his dependence on the Father
            ii. Mission
               (a) affirms the priority of the spiritual over the physical
               (b) does not deny the importance of ministering to physical needs
      2. The second temptation: testing God (4:5-7)
         a. The devil’s purpose (4:5-6)
i. Sonship: to get Jesus to test God
ii. Mission
   (a) to get Jesus to shift away from being the suffering servant
   (b) to get Jesus to embrace the role of politically victorious messiah
b. Jesus’ response (4:7)
   i. Sonship: Jesus’ trust in God and his word negates any desire to test God
   ii. Mission: reaffirms commitment to being servant-king
3. The third temptation: kingdoms of the world (4:8-10)
a. The devil’s purpose (4:8-9)
   i. Sonship
      (a) to get Jesus to depart from total allegiance to his Father
      (b) to get Jesus to worship the devil
   ii. Mission: to get Jesus to pursue the ends of his mission without the appointed means
b. Jesus response (4:10)
   i. Sonship: Jesus remains perfectly loyal to the Father
   ii. Mission: Jesus will follow the Father’s appointed means
C. The aftermath (4:11)
   1. Jesus is Satan’s sovereign (4:11a)
   2. Jesus and the Father (4:11b)
      a. Provision from the Father
      b. Communion with the Father
II. The beginning of the Galilean ministry (4:12-25)
   A. The place (4:12-17)
      1. From Judea to Galilee (4:12)
      2. From Nazareth to Capernaum (4:13-17)
         a. Fulfills prophecy (14:14-16)
         b. The proclamation (14:17)
            i. Repentance
            ii. Kingdom of heaven
   B. The calling of four disciples (4:18-22)
      1. Disciples and apostles
      2. The lordship of Jesus (4:19,21)
      3. The nature of discipleship
         a. Fishers of men (4:19)
         b. Unquestioning obedience (4:20,22)
   C. Summary of Jesus ministry (4:23-25)
      1. Speaking (4:23)
         a. Preaching and teaching
         b. Kingdom of God
1. Healing (4:24)
2. Breadth of outreach (4:24-25)
   a. Geographical
   b. Ethnic

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Who led Jesus into the wilderness, and why? For how long was Jesus in the wilderness? What Old Testament events does this echo?
2. Why was the first temptation a “temptation”? Would it have been wrong for Jesus to have turned stones into bread? Why or why not?
3. Jesus responded to his first temptation by quoting Deuteronomy 8:3. What is the context of this Old Testament reference? To what other Old Testament events does Deuteronomy 8:3 refer? How does this particular quote strengthen the allusion to Israel’s wilderness wanderings? How did Jesus’ response to his situation differ from Israel’s response?
4. In tempting Jesus the second time, Satan quoted from Psalm 91:11-12. How was Satan’s application of this Scripture inappropriate?
5. Jesus responded to his second temptation by quoting Deuteronomy 6:16. What is the context of this Old Testament reference? How does this particular quote strengthen the allusion to Israel’s wilderness wanderings? How did Jesus’ response to his situation differ from Israel’s actions in the wilderness?
6. Jesus responded to his third temptation by quoting Deuteronomy 6:13. Why did he quote this verse rather than quoting from the Ten Commandments? How does this particular quote strengthen the allusion to Israel’s wilderness wanderings? How did Jesus’ response to his situation differ from Israel’s activities in the wilderness?
7. With what does God provide Jesus in Matthew 4:11? How do the gift and the means compare to those things with which Satan tempted Jesus? What thing with which Satan tempted Jesus did Jesus not receive in Matthew 4:11? How does this thing relate to the content of Matthew 4:12-25?
8. Why do you suppose Jesus began his ministry in an area in which he was able to minister both to Jews and Gentiles? What evidence does Matthew provide in this chapter to demonstrate that Jesus actually did minister to Gentiles?
9. Why did Jesus not begin preaching repentance and the kingdom of heaven until after John had been arrested? Why was repentance such an integral part of Jesus’ message?
10. What is the difference between a disciple and an apostle? What is the nature of discipleship? What is a “fisher” of men?
11. Of what basic features did Jesus’ ministry consist? How is teaching distinguishable from preaching?
12. What was usual about Jesus’ message? What was unusual about the acts which accompanied his message?

**QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY**

1. Did Jesus set a standard pattern for the way the kingdom of God should be proclaimed and/or for the acts ministers of the kingdom should perform? If so, what was the pattern and/or what were the acts? If not, how should modern proclamations and/or actions differ from Jesus’? How can one determine the normativity of Jesus’ actions and proclamation?
2. What is the symbolic significance of the contrast between the wilderness (where Jesus was tempted) and the cities (where Jesus ministered)?