

Matthew 4:1-11

Introduction

In our last study in Matthew, we saw that at His initiation into His public ministry, Jesus was numbered with transgressors. Jesus was counted in the same group with sinners like us. Jesus didn't just die for sinners, He expressed His full identification *with* sinners by going so far as to even share in their baptism – which (for them) was a baptism of repentance and the confession of sins! This is scandalous! To think that a *sinner* should baptize his own Savior. To think that the Savior should go down to the Jordan River to be baptized along with sinners. So has Jesus gone too far? Is there not even the tiniest little hint in this baptism that Jesus Himself was in need of repentance? But, of course, if Jesus stands in need of repentance, then we know that all is lost. Because one sinner cannot save another sinner from God's wrath.

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

Did you notice the two phrases “by the Spirit” and “by the devil”? What a tension! We can obviously assume that the Spirit and the devil have two very different purposes. The purpose of the devil is to tempt Jesus to sin so that He might not only be the one who is counted in the same group *with* sinners, but that He might be a sinner Himself. But if this is *not* the purpose of the Spirit of God, then why is Jesus “led up by the Spirit into the wilderness *to be* tempted by the devil”? What is God's purpose in all of this?

Notice that Jesus was led up by the Spirit *into the wilderness*. This again reminds us of Israel's wandering in the wilderness. We also see in verse two that Jesus was in the wilderness for forty days and forty nights. And, of course, Israel was in the wilderness for forty years, corresponding to the forty days that they spied out the land of Canaan (Num. 14:39). It was not by chance that Jesus was forty days and nights in the wilderness, and it's not by chance that Mathew *tells* us how long Jesus was in the wilderness. Most importantly, we're going to see that every time Satan tempts Jesus, Jesus will respond by quoting from Deuteronomy chapter's six to eight where Moses looks back and reflects upon Israel's experiences during their *forty years in the wilderness*. In verse four, Jesus quotes from Deuteronomy 8:3.

- ✓ Deuteronomy 8:3 – And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna [in the wilderness], which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.

In verse seven, Jesus quotes from Deuteronomy 6:16.

- ✓ Deuteronomy 6:16 – You shall not put the LORD your God to the test, as you tested him at Massah [in the wilderness].

We see from these things that God is sovereignly orchestrating a very obvious and clear parallel between Jesus' time in the wilderness and Israel's time in the wilderness. But why? Is it just so

we can have an interesting, cool comparison? Or is it actually an essential *key* to our understanding of the plan and purpose of God in Jesus' temptation?

We've already seen in Matthew chapter two (2:13-15) and from the Old Testament prophets that as the Son of God, Jesus is to be the *true* Israel (Is. 49:1-5; Hos. 11:1-7). As a man, He is to be and do what Israel failed to be and do. As the new and true Israel He is to fulfill Israel's original calling (the calling Israel failed to fulfill) so that in Him, Israel might be saved. *And* so that in Christ, we too might be part of the new Israel, the true "Israel of God" (Gal. 6:16). And so we see that in various ways Jesus (the true Israel) "*reenacts*" the history of the nation. Just as God called His son Israel out of Egypt, so now He has also called His beloved Son, Jesus, out of Egypt (Mat. 2:13-15). We know why this was. God was showing that in Christ, the final and greater deliverance from "Egypt" was coming – deliverance from sin and death (Hos. 2:14-15; 11:1, 8-11; Is. 43:16-21; 51:9-11). But now there's more. Just as God led His son Israel into the wilderness for a period of forty years, so He also leads His beloved Son, Jesus, into the wilderness for a period of forty days and forty nights.

But why? What is the meaning of repeating *this* part of Israel's history in the life of Jesus? Well to answer that question, we have to ask a question: Why did God lead Israel in the wilderness for forty years? Jesus responded to Satan's first temptation by quoting Deuteronomy 8:3. But we read in verse two and verse five:

- ✓ Deuteronomy 8:2, 5 (cf. 8:16) – You shall remember the whole way that the LORD your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, ***that he might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not*** ... Know then in your heart that, as a man disciplines his *son*, the LORD your God disciplines [humbles and tests] you.

As God tested His son Israel for forty years in the wilderness (Deut. 8:5), so now God tests His beloved Son, Jesus, after forty days in the wilderness "so that He might humble Him, testing Him to know what was in His heart, whether He would keep His commandments or not". Never mind that God knew the outcome from the beginning. Even in *our* testing, God already knows the outcome from the beginning. But in the Bible, a test is something designed to prove something – to expose, or to demonstrate, or to manifest what's *already there* (Rom. 12:2). But it does more than this. A test also serves to confirm, or strengthen, or establish what is *already there* (James 1:2-4; Rom. 5:3-5). And so the writer of Hebrews can say of Jesus:

- ✓ Hebrews 5:8-9 – Although he was a son, *he learned obedience* through what he suffered. And *being made perfect*, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him.

So we see that this test is not some empty "going through the motions". This test is necessary to our salvation. As we saw in our last study, in everything that Jesus did and in everything that Jesus said, it was *all* for us and for our salvation. So we can't read this with complacency. What will this testing of God's Son reveal about His qualifications to be our Savior?

Verses 2-3 – And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. And the tempter came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.”

God has just said in the “voice from heaven”, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased” (3:17). But Satan is not doubting whether Jesus is the Son of God. The meaning of Satan is probably this: “*Since you are the Son of God...*” Since you are the Son of God, then this hunger need not be your lot in life. You don’t need to put up with this. If you’re the Son of God, then why do you wander around in the desert without food, weak and hungry? But you *are* the Son of God, so command these stones to become bread! And why not? No temptation ever made more sense!

Verse 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 knows that His Father is completely capable of providing Him with food to meet His need for sustenance. In fact, we can assume that that’s exactly what God does when the test is finished and the angels come and minister to Jesus (verse 11). But for right now, Jesus has been led out into the wilderness *by the Spirit* and His Father has chosen *not* to provide Him with food. The Israelites were once in a very similar situation.

- ✓ Exodus 16:1-4 – The congregation of the people of Israel came to the wilderness of Sin... And the whole congregation of the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness, and the people of Israel said to them, “Would that we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the meat pots and ate bread to the full, for ***you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.***” Then the LORD said to Moses, “Behold, I am about to rain bread from heaven for you...”

If the Israelites could have commanded the stones to become bread, they would have. But since they couldn’t, they grumbled and complained, and lamented that they would soon die of hunger. The Israelites could think of no good reason why God should allow them to experience the feeling of hunger. And so in their grumbling they completely and utterly failed the test. They demonstrated that more important to them than the will and word of God was the satisfaction of their bodily appetites.

- ✓ Deuteronomy 8:3 – [The Lord] humbled you and ***let you hunger*** and fed you with manna... that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.

Now Jesus is hungry. No doubt He is hungrier than Israel ever was. And as the Son of God, Jesus does have the power to turn the stones into bread. But when Satan tempts Jesus to do just that, He answers with Moses’ words to Israel: “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God’”. And so as the result of this test, Jesus proves beyond any shadow of a doubt that His words in John chapter four are certainly no empty words!

- ✓ John 4:31-34 – Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, saying, “Rabbi, eat.” But he said to them, “I have food to eat that you do not know about... my food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work.”

Jesus has an appetite that is greater than His appetite for physical bread. Believe it or not, His greatest and strongest and most compelling hunger is for His Father’s will to be done in His life. This test has *proven* that the only food that truly satisfies Jesus is doing the will of His Father and accomplishing His work. And so at exactly the same point where Israel completely and utterly failed the test, the true Israel has passed the test with flying colors.

Verses 5-6 – Then the devil took him to the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple 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.’”

Satan quotes from Psalm 91:11-12. This is a Psalm written for the one who “dwells in the shelter of the Most High” (91:1). So it must certainly apply to Jesus as God’s beloved Son! In this chapter, there are many dangers and perils that God’s people might face. But as *God’s people* they can be confident that God will deliver them out of them all. So Satan says to Jesus: “You are the Son of God. So prove your confidence in God’s promises by putting them to the test.” Now if we’re honest with ourselves, this may very well sound like the spiritual thing to do. Not to do so would seem to cast doubt upon Jesus’ trust in God and/or God’s ability to keep His promises! In other words, it would seem that it’s going to look really bad if Jesus doesn’t throw Himself down from the pinnacle of the temple.

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

Jesus knows that what looks to be the spiritual thing to do is actually the most wicked. Psalm 91 does not suggest that God’s people should go out looking for danger – no matter how supposedly noble their motives might be. To look for danger is never to demonstrate a humble trust and confidence in God’s promises. In the words of one man, it is to try and compel (or force) God to act through the power of our supposed “faith”. Or as someone else pointed out, it is simply to act as if God is there to serve us, rather than us being here to serve God. And Israel, in the wilderness, tried to do this very thing.

- ✓ Exodus 17:1-2, 7 – The congregation of the people of Israel... camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. Therefore the people quarreled with Moses and said, “Give us water to drink.” And Moses said to them, “Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the LORD?” ... And he called the name of the place Massah and Meribah, because of the quarreling of the people of Israel, and because they tested the LORD by saying, “Is the LORD among us or not?”

In this story, we’re not even told that Israel was thirsty – at least not yet! In this story, the people aren’t grumbling and complaining and lamenting that they will soon die in the wilderness. Instead, they are demanding that God provide. They are calling upon God to prove to them that

He is in their midst. They are presuming upon God's "obligation" to work a miracle for them instead of quietly and humbly trusting in God's undeserved mercy and grace. They are acting as though God is there to serve them and not the other way around. And now Jesus is tempted under the guise of true spirituality to act in the very same way. But Jesus said to Satan, "Again it is written, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'" And in the verse that Jesus quotes from, it actually goes on to say: "as you tested him at Massah" (Deut. 6:16). Jesus knows that putting God to the test is not demonstrating trust in His promises. In fact, it only reveals the weakness and the smallness of our faith. It is to arrogantly say that I can believe only so long as God keeps giving me signs when I ask for them. But Jesus, by refusing to throw Himself down from the pinnacle of the temple, proves that His trust in His Father's care and provision doesn't demand any kind of proof or sign, and it doesn't presume on God's "obligation" to do something for Him. Instead, Jesus will quietly and humbly trust His Father to care and provide, and protect and deliver according to His own sovereign purpose and plan – even as He hangs on a cross.

✓ Matthew 27:39-40 (cf. 26:53) – And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads and saying, "If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross."

And so once again, where Israel completely and utterly failed the test, the true Israel has passed the test with a perfect score – 100%. Jesus will not test the Lord. Instead, He will humbly trust in Him at all times.

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

Satan's temptations are less and less subtle as we go along, but they aren't necessarily any less alluring. Satan offers to Jesus what God has already promised Him, but what Jesus will nevertheless not inherit until after His death on the cross and even then not *fully* for at least another 2000 years. It's as though Satan says to Jesus: "Imagine the world if You were ruling over it *now* in perfect justice and righteousness! And imagine inheriting what is rightfully yours without the horrors and terrors of the cross." Now fast-forward to when Jesus, in agony and with his sweat like great drops of blood falling to the ground, is praying in the garden: "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me" (Luke 22:44; Mat. 26:39). Who could turn down an offer like this? Who *would*? No human being can even imagine, because no human being has ever had this much at stake. "It's rightfully yours anyway. And think of all the good that you would accomplish. And don't forget about the cross. Just fall down and worship me."

Verse 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.'"

Jesus is quoting here from Deuteronomy 6:13 and God's command to the people of Israel. Indeed, the very first of the Ten Commandments was "You shall have no other gods before me" (Exodus 20:3). And yet it was this very command that Israel broke more often than any other. It was the breaking of this command that always lay at the root of the rest of Israel's sin and rebellion.

- ✓ 2 Kings 21:10-12, 15 – And the LORD said by his servants the prophets, “Because Manasseh king of Judah has committed these abominations... and has made Judah also to sin with his idols, therefore thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: Behold, I am bringing upon Jerusalem and Judah such disaster that the ears of everyone who hears of it will tingle... because they have done what is evil in my sight and have provoked me to anger, since the day their fathers came out of Egypt, even to this day.”
- ✓ 1 Samuel 8:8 (cf. Ezek. 23:8) – According to all the deeds that they have done, from the day I brought them up out of Egypt even to this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so they are also doing to you.

To borrow the words of Calvin, the heart of Israel was a factory of idols. It seemed that the people of Israel simply couldn't restrain themselves from rushing to give worship and service to false gods and idols made in their own image – from the day Israel came out of Egypt to the day Israel went into exile and Jerusalem was destroyed. What a stark contrast this is to Jesus! By refusing to worship Satan to escape the cross and even to obtain a good and “noble” end, Jesus proved that His allegiance was to His Father *alone*. Earlier in the same chapter of Deuteronomy that Jesus quotes from, we read:

- ✓ Deuteronomy 6:4-5 – Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.

This test has proven that Jesus loves and worships not God's gifts, but God Himself. And so now for the third time, where Israel completely and utterly failed the test time after time after time, the true Israel has passed the test – the only one in the history of the world to ever do so. Jesus will never, for any reason, worship anything or anyone other than the one true God.

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

“Then the devil left him.” That is to say, the devil *failed*. The goal that he had so easily and successfully achieved with Israel, he has utterly and completely failed to achieve with Jesus – the true Israel.

“And behold, angels came and were ministering to him.” Behold! The triumphant and victorious Son of God! He was tempted in every respect as we are, “yet without sin” (Hebrews 4:15).

Conclusion

Where we failed, Jesus succeeded. Where we were defeated, Jesus was triumphant. Where we sinned, Jesus obeyed. What we couldn't do, Jesus did. And all that Jesus did, He did as our representative. Jesus submitted to the test and passed the test, not for Himself, but *for us*. And now we can be clothed in His perfect obedience and righteousness. We can be clothed in the righteousness of one who always hungered more for the will and word of God than he ever did for His next meal. We can be clothed in the righteousness of one who always trusted His Father – no matter what – no strings attached. We can be clothed in the righteousness of one who never, for any reason, worshipped anything or anyone other than the *one true God*.

- ✓ 2 Corinthians 5:21 – For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Let us have *faith* in Jesus Christ alone.

- ✓ Philippians 3:8-9 – For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith.

Let us *boast* in Jesus Christ alone

- ✓ 1 Corinthians 1:30-31 – And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, as it is written, “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.”

Let us *live* for Jesus Christ alone!

- ✓ Colossians 1:9-12 – [May you] be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God. May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy, giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.

Teaching our Children

Q. Jesus’ *forty* days in the *wilderness* reminds us of something in the Old Testament. What is it?

A. Jesus’ forty days in the wilderness reminds us of Israel’s forty years in the wilderness.

Q. Why did God let Israel wander in the wilderness for forty years? What was God doing?

A. See Deuteronomy 8:2, 5 (p. 2)

Q. Why did God lead Jesus into the wilderness for forty days?

A. Jesus is the true Israel. God led Jesus into the wilderness to see if Jesus would succeed where the nation of Israel had always failed.

Q. For each of the three temptations, ask the following questions:

~ What was Satan’s temptation? (Reflect on what made the temptations attractive, logical, sinful, etc.)

~ How did Israel fail the test when they were tempted in the same way? (See notes on verses 4, 7, &10)

~ When Jesus refused to do what Satan tempted Him to do and passed the test, what did it prove? What do we learn about Jesus? (See notes on verses 4, 7, & 10)

[Reflect with your children on Hebrews 4:15 (See notes on verse 11). Where we failed, Jesus succeeded. Where we were defeated, Jesus was triumphant! Where we sinned, Jesus obeyed! What we couldn’t do, Jesus did!!!]

Q. Why was Jesus willing to come and be tested like this? For *whom* did Jesus pass this test?

A. For *us* and for our salvation!!! (Read 2 Corinthians 5:21 in the Conclusion)

[Joyfully *exhort* your children using the points and Scriptures in the Conclusion.]