

SIN OR GOD?

Matthew 4:1-11

Online Sermon: http://www.mckeefamily.com/?page_id=3567

Ever since creation Satan has been tempting humanity to sin against God. With names such as the Enemy (Matthew 13:39), Evil One (John 17:15), Father of Lies (John 8:44), Lawless One (2 Thessalonians 2:8-10), and ruler of Darkness (Ephesians 6:12) and Demons (Luke 11:15); one would think that no person would ever listen to such a being! If he clearly showed off any of these titles, then yes most people would reject him. As it is, this master of lies chooses to hide his true identity by transforming himself into an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14). This original seal of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty (Ezekiel 28:12) has masterfully been devouring (1 Peter 5:8) and deceiving humanity ever since the beginning of time!

Having been created with free will presents each person with the challenge of figuring out what to do with all of those life decisions. Humans have the right to do anything they want



but as Paul points out, not all decisions that we make are beneficial to our wellbeing. We have not been given free will to do as we please but instead so that we might be able to choose to obey God. One merely needs to turn a scant few pages in the Bible to find out that when free will is restricted in any way, “do not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil” (Genesis 2:16), humans can be easily tempted to use their free will to disobey God. The first Adam’s temptation led to disobedience and death. The following sermon is going to examine

how the second Adam, Jesus Christ, was able to overcome His wilderness temptations by keeping His focus solely on the will of God.

Jesus’ Victories over Wilderness Temptations

Before we look at Matthew 4:1-11, I would like to first review a hermeneutical link between this passage and that of 1 John 2:15-18.

¹⁵ Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. ¹⁶ For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world. ¹⁷ The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever.

1 John 2:15-17, NIV



The renowned English open air preacher and evangelist George Whitefield masterfully draws a link between this passage and that of Jesus' temptation. As stated earlier, free will has been given to humanity so that we can make choices that please God. Each person has the choice to either obey God and be righteous in or disobey Him and sin. John states that humans choose the later because they lust after the things of this world. Since Jesus is both human and God (Matthew 1:18), Satan tempted Jesus by appealing to the same human lusts as listed by John: (1) lust of the flesh "tell the stones to become bread," (2)

pride of life "throw yourself down" and (3) lust of the eyes "all this I will give you." In each instance Jesus is victorious because He chose to use his free will to obey God. Let's look at each of these in more detail.

Temptation 1: Jesus' Victory Over the Lust of the Flesh

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

Matthew 4:1-4, NIV

Verse number one begins by stating that Jesus was led by the Holy Spirit. This passage does not say that Jesus was forced but instead made a conscious decision to follow the Spirit of God.¹ Time and time again in Scripture we find that



Jesus sought the will of God the Father in Heaven before making any major decisions. For example, before Jesus chose the twelve disciples (Luke 6:12) and before He went to the cross (Matthew 26:36), He prayed to God for advice and comfort. In each of these instances Jesus had the choice to either obey or reject His Father's advice. Even though Jesus had the authority to lay down His life or take it back up (John 10:18), He willfully chose to be a sacrifice for our sins because of His desire to always do the will

of His Father (John 6:38). The word "led" in verse one is significant because if Jesus was forced

¹ D. A. Carson, "The Gospels and Acts," in *NIV Zondervan Study Bible: Built on the Truth of Scripture and Centered on the Gospel Message*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015), 1933.

to obey then He would not have been tempted and His victory over Satan would mean nothing to us who have free will!

Jesus was not just led anywhere but into some lonesome, wide and howling desert! The fact that Jesus was led to a “desert” or “wilderness” is significant for two reasons. First, I can



think of no place better to tempt Jesus than a place that was often associated with demonic activity (Isaiah 13:21; 34:14; Matt 12:43; Rev 18:2).² Satan was at home on this lifeless and barren landscape. And second, Jesus’ dialogue with Satan draws a parallel between His experience and that of the temptation of Israel in Deuteronomy 6-8. The forty days and nights that Jesus fasted before being tempted invites the reader to reflect on Israel who wandered forty years in the desert. Both Israel’s and Jesus’ hunger taught a lesson (Deuteronomy 8:3)

and both spent time in the desert to prepare them to fulfill God’s will in their lives.³

Jesus fasted forty days and forty nights is not only to be seen as a reference to Israel’s fast in the wilderness for forty years but also to accentuate the importance of His temptation. Some



of the most monumental events in the Bible lasted for forty days: the duration of the rain at the time of the flood (Genesis 7:4, 12), the length of time Moses stays on Mount Sinai (Exodus 24:18; 34:28) and the length of time Elijah spent running and hiding in the wilderness.⁴ Forty days is also significant because it sets the background for the first temptation. How long a human body can go without food is usually about 21 days but there has been an exceptional few that have survived for more than 40 days.⁵ So for Jesus to go forty days without food meant that His physical body was very near to

death. Matthew wants the reader to know this because turning the stones into bread was a temptation based on what appeared to be a life or death decision.

² D. A. Carson, “Matthew,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 111–112.

³ D. A. Carson, “Matthew,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 112.

⁴ Craig A. Evans, *The Bible Knowledge Background Commentary: Matthew–Luke*, ed. Craig A. Evans and Craig A. Bubeck, First Edition. (Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2003), 83.

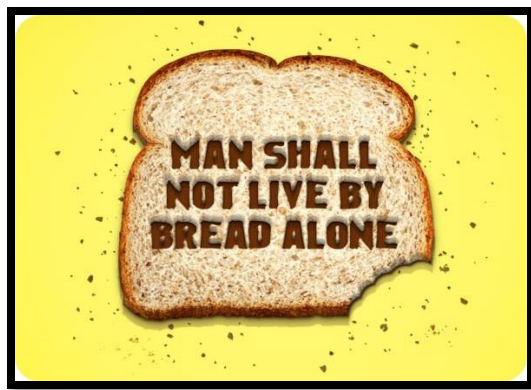
⁵ Source Found at: <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/how-long-can-a-person-sur/>

In verse three Satan tempts Jesus by saying: “if you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.” In the close of the foregoing chapter Jesus is inaugurated into His ministry



“by the opening of the heavens, by the Spirit of God descending on him like a dove, and by a voice from heaven saying “this is my Son whom I am well pleased.”⁶ The devil’s “if” is not an expression of doubt,⁷ for both the devil and Jesus knew that He truly was the Son of God. Instead the “if” in this passage should be interpreted as “since you are the Son of God use your privileged status to turn these stones to bread, eat and live.”⁸ The devil’s proposition is clear: If gods and sons of the Most High can die like men (Psalms 82:6-7) then so can you Jesus.⁹ What is the harm in exerting one’s privileged status as Son of God

by performing a miracle, especially when not doing so will mean Your physical death?



Like Adam and Job, being seen as righteous was an invite for the devil to attack and try to get Jesus to reject God’s will and choose another path.¹⁰ Instead of obeying God’s request to fast in the wilderness, the Devil wanted Jesus to turn the stones into bread. The devil was trying to get Jesus to sin by lusting after His own physical life, as being more important than obeying God! “Jesus saw through the disguised enmity of His antagonist”¹¹ and chose to

⁶ George Whitefield, *Selected Sermons of George Whitefield* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1999).

⁷ Craig A. Evans, *The Bible Knowledge Background Commentary: Matthew–Luke*, ed. Craig A. Evans and Craig A. Bubeck, First Edition. (Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2003), 84.

⁸ Nolland John, “Preface,” in *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 2005), 163.

⁹ Craig A. Evans, *The Bible Knowledge Background Commentary: Matthew–Luke*, ed. Craig A. Evans and Craig A. Bubeck, First Edition. (Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2003), 84.

¹⁰ John Chrysostom, “Homilies of St. John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople on the Gospel according to St. Matthew,” in *Saint Chrysostom: Homilies on the Gospel of Saint Matthew*, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. George Prevost and M. B. Riddle, vol. 10, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, First Series (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1888), 80.

¹¹ George Whitefield, *Selected Sermons of George Whitefield* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1999).

trust His righteous Father by continuing to fast as long as it was His will. Jesus rejected the devil's suggested path by quoting the following:

He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your ancestors had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.

Deuteronomy 8:3, NIV

Unlike Israel who demanded bread only to later die in the wilderness,¹² Jesus denied Himself bread and later was exalted to the Most High (Psalms 110). When tempted to use His Sonship in a self-serving manner,¹³ Jesus responds by saying His food is to always do the will of His Father in heaven (John 4:34).

Application

Jesus' victory over Satan in the wilderness has life applications for today's believers.



First, the most ferocious temptations come when people are by themselves. Eve was tempted only after she was found away from Adam. Jesus was led away from the crowds to the solitude of the wilderness before being tempted.¹⁴ It makes sense that Satan's preference would be to not tempt Christians while around other believers because (1) they have been instructed to use their gifts to build each other up in the faith (Ephesians 4:11-13) and (2) due to their reluctance to sin in the presence of their peers. It is precisely when no one is watching that temptations tend to be the fiercest. This is why Paul describes the mind the ultimate battlefield (2 Corinthians 10:5). While no person can reach into your mind and read your thoughts, do not forget there is no place that you can go where God is not (Psalms 139:7)! Since our goal is to please God, not people (Galatians 1:10), our food must be to do the will of the Father both in public and private settings.

¹² D. A. Carson, "Matthew," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 113.

¹³ D. A. Carson, "Matthew," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 113.

¹⁴ John Chrysostom, "Homilies of St. John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople on the Gospel according to St. Matthew," in *Saint Chrysostom: Homilies on the Gospel of Saint Matthew*, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. George Prevost and M. B. Riddle, vol. 10, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, First Series (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1888), 80.

And second, temptations often come in life's wilderness experiences. It was not until Jesus spent forty days and nights in the wilderness that Satan tempted Jesus Christ with the idea



of turning the stones into bread. It is precisely when a person is threatened by either physical or emotional death that one is to fear temptations the most.¹⁵ Rev. Cheryl Ann Beals, Director of Clergy Formation & Health at the Atlantic Baptist Convention, states it is when people are stressed over their physical or spiritual health that they are more apt to experience moral failures in their lives because of their preoccupation with self. Often such a person feels like they have been casted off by God

because He is not immediately meeting their needs.¹⁶ Like Jesus, instead of seeing trials as abandonment by God, one must see them as opportunities to persevere and mature in the faith (James 1:2-4). While no one likes to go through such wilderness experiences, remember God will never leave nor forsake those He calls His own! Instead of becoming over preoccupied with self, keep one's eyes fixed on the kingdom of God and all things will be given unto you (Matthew 6:25-33)!

Conclusion

Ever since creation Satan has been tempting humanity to sin against God. We have not been given free will to do as we please but instead so that we might be able to choose to obey God the Father in heaven. When going through the wilderness experiences of aloneness, physical or emotional pain, prepare oneself to be tempted by the Devil. Jesus overcame the lust of the flesh, "turn the stones to bread," by standing firm on every word that came from the mouth of God. Next week we are going to learn how Jesus got victory over (2) pride of life "throw yourself down" and (3) lust of the eyes "all this I will give you."

¹⁵ George Whitefield, *Selected Sermons of George Whitefield* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1999).

¹⁶ George Whitefield, *Selected Sermons of George Whitefield* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1999).